Sir Gawaine the Son of Lot, King of Orkney:

pendragon

XXXV No 2 • **Gawain** • Narratives • Harry Potter • film music

editorial

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Winter 2007-8 *Gawain*

Themes

The theme of this issue is **Gawain**, a topic that first appeared in *Pendragon* late in 1978 (*XII No 2*), just before the sad death of the Society's founder, Jess Foster, in early 1979. The cover by Trevor McGrath was based on the Green Knight, and there were items on severed heads and on Gawain's horse (which re-appears in this issue). Tim Porter's account of the birth of his Arthurian folk-opera *Gawain*, plus Irish music and John Forest's searching for Celtic knotwork in a 7th-century Byzantine church in the midst of the Iranian Revolution.

Thirty years on and King Arthur's nephew is re-visited with an equally varied array of papers: John Matthews looks at his possible pagan role, Alison Skinner examines a Gawain story in the Hebrides, there are poems and a glance at sources of the Gawain legend, a detailed study of the hero myth and news of a new Arthurian film, not to mention reviews of two major new "translations" of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. By the end you may never think of Gawain in the same way again. And I nearly forgot to mention that Devon-based artist Graham Griffiths, author of *Behold Jerusalem!* (which suggests that the British Isles are a gigantic natural landscape zodiac), believes himself to be the reincarnation of Gawain.

Next issue is planned as a **literary** and **fiction**-based edition, to include original stories, poetry and studies of Arthurian works, while **Guinevere** will feature in the summer issue: deadlines for these are May 31st and mid-August, respectively. The autumn edition could be based around **Castles** (a theme suggested by Ian Brown); we are always open to suggestions.

People

Huge congratulations are due to Pendragon member **Chris Barber** [Richard Jonothan Barber] who was awarded the MBE in the New Year Honours list for services to the community and to the tourist industry in South Wales. Chris, who lives near Abergavenny in Monmouthshire, was "shocked and delighted" by his MBE. As well as being the author of twenty-five books about Wales (including several on the Arthurian legend, published under his own Blorenge imprint) he is also the editor of the quarterly magazine *Walking Wales* and a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, as well as regularly appearing on TV in Wales.

The South Wales Argus reminds us that "for 20 years he was the chief countryside officer for Gwent, and established the Gwent countryside service in 1974 which created walkways and picnic sites. In the 1960s he was a mountain rescue team leader for the Black Mountains, and has helped established a number of youth hostels in the area." (You may by now have gathered that this is not the jazz musician of the same name!) This indefatigable writer and photographer, who has presented to the Society on a few occasions, shows no sign of letting up.

Lydia L Ashton, who writes about a new Arthurian film, lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma where she writes music scores for independent films. Long-time member **Alison Skinner** is an information and research officer at Leicester's De Montfort University, and here discusses a Scots Gaelic Gawain ballad and its development, a topic earlier brought to our attention by **Eileen Buchanan**. Author **John Matthews**, who has been generous in his support of the Society over the years, has written numerous well-received books with an Arthurian theme; his Gawain article was first published for the Society's 40th anniversary. Finally, the second part of an extended review by the late **W M S Russell** appears this issue. Bill was Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Reading and the Society's President until his untimely death in 2006. ∝

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TREE-RINGS, CLIMATE ...

Jane Perr's letter and poem (and welcome to Jane as a *Pendragon* contributor!) about the possible climatic downturn around 540 AD in *XXXIV* No 4 (pp 4 & 6) brought back to mind some recent additional notes I've collected on this since it last featured in the journal. There has been a tendency to push whatever event the narrower tree-rings may show back to *c* 536 AD recently, from the earlier *c* 540 dating, but that is quite a minor point compared to a paper published in *Energy & Environment* in 2007 by Craig Loehle,[1] as Loehle questioned the reliability of tree-rings as a proxy for temperature records entirely! His study showed that tree-rings failed to demonstrate the Medieval Warm Period, a protracted period that peaked around the 10th-11th centuries AD, when global temperatures as recorded by other proxies were generally above the millennial-term average, including above those in the 20th century. He noted that narrower tree-rings could actually result from higher, not lower, than normal temperatures, and something of just how complex the pattern in tree-growth overall can be (for example, greater amounts of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere mean greater tree-growth, and that tree-growth is influenced long-term far more by rainfall than temperature).

This has reopened the debate about what the various narrow-tree-ring events may mean, and if his findings are correct, it may be that some past "climatic disasters" the tree-rings have suggested never happened at all. The statistical nature of his work does mean that individual events on annual to decadal levels cannot be usefully examined unfortunately, so the *c* 540 event still awaits a fuller re-evaluation.

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth,
Northumberland

[1] Vol 18, No 7+8, 1049-1058; Loehle's paper can be freely downloaded as a PDF file from: http://www.ncasi.org/publications/Detail.aspx?id=3025

... WASTELANDS ...

Thank you for including my article "The Wasteland" in the magazine. I find the articles interesting, but sometimes I am a bit out of my depth ... I like Shani Oates' articles – she does have a wide grasp of mythology and ancient history generally. I pride myself I do recognise some of it!

Pamela Harvey, Edmonton, London
• *We try to get a mix of items in the journal, to get that balance between the three arms of our aims: history and archaeology; myth, folklore and legend; and finally literature, the arts and popular culture. A bit like that selection box of chocolates – some with soft centres, others with hard...*

... AND THE MOON

Good to get Fisher King *Pendragon* – I likewise [Letters] immediately read it cover to cover, despite other things I should've been doing.

The Breton tale ["The Castle of Kerglas"] was an excellent read and the motifs / elements clearly long predate its writing down. Kerglas presumably generated as name, cognate with Caerglas, as death's "glass castle". Mentioning castles, in Shani Oates' fascinating piece ["The Fisher King"] the intriguing siting of the spinning or revolving castle on the Moon caused me to wonder, given that the Moon always shows the same face to Earth, how early it was realised that our satellite revolves like this planet. Doubtless Alistair McBeath will know!

Steve Sneyd, Huddersfield, W Yorks

MISCELLANEA

The novel that brings beer and Arthur together (Dave Burnham "What did Arthur drink?" in *XXXIV* No 4: 29ff) is *The Drawing of the Dark* by Tim Powers which involves the siege of Vienna, a brewery and the Arthurian mythos. Highly recommended.[2]

As a roleplayer of 25 years, I greatly enjoyed Alastair McBeath's final article on Arthurian Gaming ("Talking the Circle" *Pendragon XXXIV* No 3: 19-22). A long awaited supplement for the Pendragon roleplaying was issued

[2] Tim Powers (1979) *The Drawing of the Dark* (Del Rey paperback 1999; Gollancz Fantasy Masterworks 2002)

recently: *The Great Pendragon Campaign* (http://secrue1.white-wolf.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=807).
This allows the referee to run a campaign covering 80 years – from Uther to Camlan. It is epic in every sense (including weight). If Pendragon is the best ever roleplaying game, then the Great Campaign is the best ever supplement.

I don't know if anyone else has noticed this, but there is a sword called Excalibur in the basement of the BERR (formerly DTI) Conference Centre in Victoria Street, London. It's stuck in a case under a stairwell, so it's not in the most obvious position. It has a plaque which reads "Presented to the Department of Energy to commemorate the inauguration of the Camelot Field. 23 October 1989. By Mobil". It's a two-handed sword, but looks more like a prop in a Conan movie rather than a realistic Dark Age sword.

Kevin Mantle, Ladywell, London
• *The Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform (as Kevin notes, formerly the Department for Trade and Industry) has an update on gas and oil fields in the North Sea at this website:*
http://www.og.dti.gov.uk/information/bb_updates/appendices/fields_index.htm
Maps of the North Sea showing the Camelot fields (between East Anglia and the Netherlands) are at http://www.acorn-ps.com/web/page/oilgas/nsfields/snsmap.htm
The Merlin field is between Norway and the Shetland Isles at http://www.acorn-ps.com/web/page/oilgas/nsfields/nnsmap.htm
The very profligate use of mythical names on these maps for the North Sea fields is very noteworthy, and worth a further look!

I don't know if any of you caught the Channel 4 "Time Team Special", documenting the reasons behind the creation of Edward III's Round Table at Windsor Castle, but it was a pretty good programme, well put together for general viewing and interesting throughout (I particularly liked the way that the producers evidently assumed that the general public are familiar with the Arthurian legends, as nothing much about their background was explained – such an attitude hints that Arthur and

his knights are still alive and well in the public imagination).

Ian Brown, Ormesby, Middlesborough

OF CAVES AND AVALON REVISITED

A couple of Arthurian items caught my attention in an episode of Eric Robson's long-running ITV series, "Out Of Town", which I think will only have been shown in NE England, but is possibly available on DVD too, broadcast at 7:30 *pm* on July 4, 2007.

Item one concerned **Richmond Castle**, in North Yorkshire, where Robson recounted the tale regarding the cave system supposed to lie beneath it. He said that in the 19th century, a young apprentice called Thomas had entered the caves and had probably gone as far under the hill as the castle's keep above ground, where he found Arthur and his knights asleep, waiting for the call to return.

Item two concerned **Kiplin Hall**, near Catterick, also in North Yorkshire, on the way to Northallerton. He met with the curator there, and their discussion included that the hall had been built by George Calvert in the 1620s, who was then Secretary of State to King James I of England. His family founded the state of Maryland in America, which his sons colonised in 1633-34. George Calvert himself prepared Maryland's charter, but died two months before King Charles I signed the documents. Before all this, Calvert had first gone to Newfoundland, where he founded the colony of Avalon, before discovering that the climate was vile and the soil useless, and his subsequent travelling brought him south to where he eventually founded Maryland.

Appreciating these items may not be real news to *Pendragon* readers (the founding of Newfoundland's Avalon and Calvert's part in it were noted by W M S Russell in *XXXI* No 3: 33, for

instance; see also my additional notes in *XXXI* No 4: 8-9), it is nice to see the traditions being perpetuated by the popular media. By the description, this Avalon sounds more like the Fisher King's Wasteland, however.

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth,
Northumberland

• *The Richmond Castle tale famously features in William Mayne's 1966 children's story* Earthfasts, *though with a drummer boy instead of an apprentice. North Yorkshire also boasts an Arthurian place-name in the famous Harlow Car gardens in Harrogate, though its precise antiquity is unknown...*

ANOTHER PENDRAGON

I hadn't heard about the Pendragon Society, but I'm not surprised that it exists. The connection between my Pendragon ... and the Arthurian Pendragon exists only in that they share a name. My stories have nothing to do with that classic legend. I chose the name because, well, I liked it. And also because the dictionary definition of Pendragon is "supreme ruler" ... and since my character, Bobby, is the leader of a group of "Travelers", it sort of fits.

To be honest, if I had to do it over again, I probably would not use the name Pendragon. The reason is that if you Google Pendragon, you don't get MY books. Ha. I'd probably call it Bendragon or something.

D J MacHale, New York
djmac@thependragonadventure.com

• *D J MacHale kindly replied to my enquiry about his fantasy series called The Pendragon Adventure. Bobby Pendragon is "living the life of a normal 14 year old guy, until his Uncle Press came by one night to say: I need your help. From that moment on, nothing was the same. He and his uncle were swept off on a series of adventures that would take them through both time and space. Their mission? To protect the territories of Halla from a demon named Saint Dane, a cold-blooded villain who wants nothing less than the destruction of all humanity. The only force standing in Saint Dane's way is a mysterious group of people called ... Travelers." Writer, director, producer and creator of several popular US television series and movies, MacHale's ninth Bobby Pendragon title,* Raven Rise *(Aladdin Paperbacks), is available from May 2008.*

DAY-PROWLS (anag.)

I've noted before in these pages that Pendragon features a better class of typo, and I spotted what I hope were only two, not three, apparently anagrammatic slips in Steve Sneyd's word-play comments about Tolkien's Lord of the Rings (*XXXIV* No 4: 6), in relation to Ian Brown's "The Rotunda Code", where "...Gnadalf [was] clearly Merlin and Aragorn Arthur, and the Shire itself based on Tolkien's childhood home in the then hamlet of Sarehole...".

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth,
Northumberland

Thanks for latest *Pendragon* (*XXXIV* No 4); I am about half way through, but came across three mistakes in the first paragraph of *The Fisher King* (page 17) which make it nonsensical!
Line 7: BingEn – not BingIn – sounds rather like the RAF aerodrome in Surrey!
Line 9: "were" – not "where"!
Line 10: IN-creasing! – I was creased up with incomprehension for a few seconds!

Richard Carder, Bath

Many thanks, by the way, from Alistair McBeath and Steve Sneyd (and other friends who have kindly been in touch) to my tongue-in-cheek "Rotunda Code". That's most intriguing, Steve's comments regarding Tolkien and the Midlands. Funnily enough, whilst in Birmingham, I asked permission on a few occasions to sketch Sarehole Mill, which was closed at the time, but was refused entry as the building was deemed "unsafe". Hmm, one might wonder what was so dangerous about entering there, and what one was not permitted to see.

Ian Brown, Ormesby, Middlesborough

• *The editor wasn't wearing his proof-reader's hat at the time, only his clock-watcher's cap. Apologies are offered for any confusion over the unintentional word-plays (in Alistair's wonderful almost Grendel-like anagram). Sarehole, sadly, is genuine. According to Wikipedia, "Sarehole, a name no longer used in addresses, was a hamlet which gave its name to a farm (now built over) and a mill... J R R Tolkien lived there as a child in the 1890s, and the area influenced his description of the green and peaceful country of the Shire in his books."*

Compiled by Chris Lovegrove

WELL-PRESERVED ROMAN LONDON

Drapers Gardens, in the City of London, is the tallest building ever to be demolished in the UK. Designed by Richard Seifert (architect of the Natwest Tower) and completed in 1967 on land owned by the Drapers' Company, it was 100 metres tall with 30 stories. Before its construction the site, waterlogged by tributaries of the Walbrook river, had been undeveloped since Roman times.

After its demolition, and before development, archaeological excavations found Roman remains dating from 63 AD to 383 AD, including a wooden door, the only bear's skull found from Roman London and a well with 19 exceptionally "well"-preserved **metal vessels**. The excavations are claimed as "one of one of the most important to have been undertaken in the City of London ever".[1]

By the 4th century a series of timber piles provided the foundations of buildings and two square timber-lined wells. One of these wells hid a "quite exceptional finds assemblage": near its base was a **hoard** of nineteen metal vessels. Although none of these household items were made of precious metals they nevertheless represented an "extremely rare find" for Roman Britain. The hoard consisted of
   copper-alloy bucket
   wine bucket
   set of three nested bead-rim dishes
   two more similar dishes
   zoomorphic hanging bowl remains
   several cauldrons

[1] http://www.pre-construct.com/Sites/Highlights/Drapers.htm; Maev Kennedy "Day-to-day relics reveal Roman London" *Guardian* December 7 2007; Gary Cleland "Roman artifacts discovered in London well" *Telegraph* December 7 2007; Neil Hawkins, Gary Brown, Jon Butler "Drapers Gardens" *British Archaeology 98* (January February 2008) 14-17

bowls
an iron trivet
two shallow one-handled bowls
a lead-alloy small dish and flagon
and an iron ladle.

Cauldron, Drapers Gardens

Under the almost-uncorroded vessels were two coins, "confidently" dated to after AD 383, giving a *terminus post quem* for the hoard's deposition, perhaps as a "closing" ceremony for the well or to protect the vessels at a time of unrest. "Nothing remotely like them has ever been found in Britain," reported Museum of London curator Jenny Hall. Not quite grails, then, the deposition of these vessels might nevertheless symbolise the onset of the Dark Ages in London. ∞

BRITANNIA OR ENGLAND?

England's third-largest Anglo-Saxon cremation cemetery (with over 1200 urns) is helping to clarify the transition from Roman Britain to Early England.

It has taken nearly two decades to compile the final report after the total excavation of the cemetery at **Cleatham** in North Lincolnshire, but the results have been worth it. For the first time it was possible "to put decorated urns into a chronological sequence", important for understanding "the process by which the Roman Diocese of Britannia became Anglo-Saxon England".[2]

The Cleatham folk consistently buried urns containing created remains on top of each other by burying a new urn in a pit dug into earlier pits. Sometimes urns were buried in groups of up to five,

[2] Kevin Leahy "A warning to the curious: digging an Anglo-Saxon cemetery" *Current Archaeology 210* (July-August 2007) 26-31

which meant that it was possible to put urns in significant vertical (chronological) and horizontal (kinship) relationships. In addition, because urns contained grave goods – beads, brooches, combs, game counters and toilet implements – these too can be sequenced in a way that has often proved difficult, and also give hints of links to distant places: ivory from Africa, cowrie shells and coral from the Indian Ocean.

Continuity between sub-Roman and Anglo-Saxon use was made clear in two ways at Cleatham. Wheel-thrown Roman-style with Saxon-type combed decoration urns suggest that, although the Romano-British pottery industry collapsed in the early 5th century, the skills for making such pots survived locally to the end of the century.

Urns from Browne's Hydriotaphia *(1658)*

Finally, among the cremations were just over sixty inhumations, witness to a differing belief system. Among them, face-down prone burials (one with a spear) and a decapitated burial beside a bird skeleton echo practices from the Late Roman period. As Kevin Leahy, the author of the recently published *Lindsey: the archaeology of an Anglo-Saxon kingdom* (Tempus), puts it, "Roman Britain probably died, not with a bang, but a long drawn-out sigh." ⊘

"NEW" DARK AGE SCOTTISH FORT
Mither Tap, near Inverurie, at 518m is one of the highest peaks on Bennachie mountain in Aberdeenshire, with extensive views across the county. Remains of two walls ring the hill; traces of a parapet walk are visible in places on the main outer defence, and circular house foundations, presumed as Iron Age, were recorded near the inner wall. Though nearby flat ground is one of the

suggested locations for **Mons Graupius**, the site of a defeat in 83 or 84 by an invading Roman army, no firm evidence exists to support the claim.

However, unlike other nearby prehistoric hilltop forts, the stones show no signs of vitrification by fire, and the favoured theory was that the hillfort was "historic", that is, of Dark Age date. An archaeological watching brief in November 2006 on work to a footpath through the fort recovered two charcoal samples, dated to 340–540 and 640–780. Archaeologists at Aberdeenshire council, pleased to have the fort's early historic date confirmed, report it "a rare occurrence". They have still to understand the precise role in the early landscape that Mither Tap ("Mother Top") played, but the peak's "iconic significance was surely recognised from earliest times".

Unmentioned in contemporary texts, Mither Tap o' Bannachie is not only set in an area rich in Bronze Age stones but also **ogham-inscribed Pictish stones**. Aberdeenshire itself formed one of the heartlands of the northern Picts between the fourth and ninth centuries AD, and may have featured in battles between the Picts and the Scots.[3]

WHOSE DYKE WAS WAT'S DYKE?
Offa's Dyke famously marks the border between Wales and England, but less well-known is **Wat's Dyke**, which runs for about 40 miles parallel to Offa's Dyke, from Oswestry to the River Dee. Variously dated all the way from the Arthurian period to Aethelbald (Offa's 8th-century predecessor), new research now suggests it was built "after Offa's death, perhaps around the time of the death of king Coenwulf".

In 1999 excavations at **Maes-y-Clawdd** (near Oswestry) provided a radiocarbon date of 270–630, leading Steve Blake and Scott Lloyd to argue that Wat's Dyke was built in the mid-5th century and possibly associated with **Arthur**. However, a new housing development at **Gobowen**, north of Oswestry, set in train an excavation of a

[3] "Popular Scottish hillfort is probably Pictish" *British Archaeology* Jul-Aug 2007; http://www.britarch.ac.uk/ba/ba95/news.shtml#item2

length of Wat's Dyke in 2006. A series of *optically stimulated luminescence* dates provided for the excavators the "first substantive sequence of scientific dates, which at last give a solid chronological foundation for theories over [the dyke's] construction and use".[4]

One sample from the soil buried beneath the bank dated to the late 8th to 11th centuries, and samples from the lower ditch fill were more precisely dated to AD 792–852. Then in the 14th century the ditch was deliberately filled and put to cultivation.

What about the earlier date? This apparently "related to a hearth beneath the dyke, with Roman pottery nearby". Now it is suggested that the construction of Wat's Dyke may well be in the 820s "when the Mercian king Coenwulf (who died at **Basingwerk**, the northern termination for Wat's Dyke) and his successor, Ceolwulf, were campaigning against a resurgent Welsh threat under Cyngen in Powys and Rhodri Mawr in Gwynedd". So, should we now be calling it Coenwulf's Dyke? Or even Coelwulf's Dyke? ⊘

CROSS PURPOSES IN WEST WALES
When **Alan Wilson**, "a world expert on King Arthur",[5] states that the true cross of Christ is buried behind a rock wall, fuddy-duddy archaeologists and stick-in-the-mud historians better beware.[6] And so it is that an enthusiastic follower of Wilson and his colleagues is calling on Wales' First Minister to investigate the possibility that Christ's cross was left in a Pembrokeshire churchyard by Helen, mother of Constantine the Great.

Pandit Joshi, from Hampshire, is intrigued by what might lie behind the Pilgrims Cross carved into the rock

[4] Steve Blake and Scott Lloyd (2000) *The Keys to Avalon* (Element) 60-67 and "Stop Press!" 302; *British Archaeology* (Nov-Dec 2007); http://www.britarch.ac.uk/ba/ba97/news.shtml#item2; full details to be published in *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*
[5] Anwen Humfrey "Ancient cross thought to be hidden in landmark" *Western Telegraph* November 7 2007
[6] Adrian Gilbert *et al* (1998) *The Holy Kingdom* (Bantam Press) chapter 9 "The Cross of Christ" *passim*

above **Nevern church**. "It would be a great archaeological discovery, and I can't understand why nobody is doing anything about it," he says.

He bases his faith on Wilson's argument in *The Holy Kingdom*, that Helen ("who was of course a British queen") after discovering the cross in the Holy Land brought it specifically to Wales (Gilbert 1998: 141) – to a village called Constantinople in Dyfed and not the capital of the eastern Empire of the same name as most scholars think. Nearby is Nevern, the centre of a cross-shaped sign of Cygnus the Swan marked out on the ground by ancient sites in a gigantic terrestrial star-map. Here is the last resting-place of the True Cross, marked by the Pilgrims Cross, finally located by Wilson and his colleagues behind a "wall cunningly disguised to look like part of the cliff".

National Park archaeologist Polly Groom persists in the folly that there is nothing behind the Pilgrims Cross, insisting that "the natural bedrock has fragmented all along the area to give this effect". She is adamant that any investigation would damage the carved medieval cross, scheduled in 1949 under the Ancient Monuments Act. If only she would listen to "world expert" Wilson and ignore all the other accounts of the fate of the True Cross after Constantine's mother recovered it, then the world, and especially Wales, would be a better place. Or not. ⊘
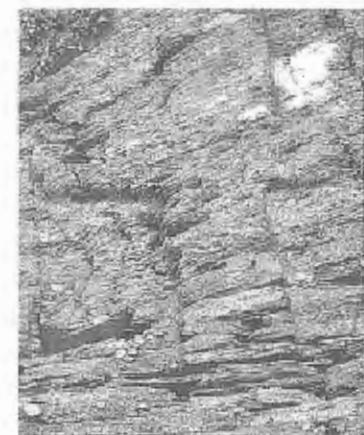
Pilgrims Cross, Nevern

Reappraising Gawain

Pagan Champion or Christian Knight? *John Matthews*

Gawain is without doubt one of the most popular figures in the Arthurian cycle. However, despite this popularity, a curious contradiction exists concerning the way in which he is portrayed.

In the Celtic texts which record his earliest exploits, Gawain is a hero of tremendous stature and abilities. He "never came home without the Quest he had gone to seek" it says in the Mabinogion story of *Culhwch and Olwen.* "He was the best of walkers and the best of riders. He was Arthur's nephew, his sister's son, and the first among his companions." Elsewhere, in that marvellous collection of Celtic story-themes known as the Triads, we are told that Gawain is among the "Three Fearless Men of the Island of Britain", and that he was "the most courteous to guests and strangers". In a later text, he very nearly becomes Emperor of Rome.

And yet, in the Middle Ages, from the 13th century onwards, with few exceptions a very different image is projected. Here, in texts like the *Prose Tristan* and the *Queste del Saint Graal,* Gawain is cowardly, discourteous, and a libertine. He is persistently criticised and unfavourably compared with other knights such as Lancelot and Perceval. Finally, in Malory's great book *Le Morte D'Arthur*, he is portrayed a murderer, capable of fanatical hatred which leads to a bloody vendetta.

How did this come about, and, more importantly, why did it happen at all? Of what crime, or association, was Gawain guilty in the eyes of the medieval clerks and romancers, which called for this systematic blackening of his character?

The usual answer, from those who have noticed the phenomenon, is to say that Gawain was displaced from his position of superiority by other heroes – most notably Lancelot, who became the best of the Round Table Fellowship at the expense of earlier figures. To a certain extent this is true, but I believe there is another reason.

Put simply, I believe that Gawain was a unique figure within the Arthurian corpus who represented the last dying strains of an ancient theme – one which dated back to the very earliest days of Celtic story-telling, and which incorporated even earlier religious beliefs. Gawain, I believe, was the Champion of the Goddess, and I had better say right away what precisely I mean by "goddess" in this context – as well as what the role of Champion entailed.

Goddess

It is difficult to say with any degree of certainty just what the Celts understood by the term Goddess, or what, for that matter, it meant to certain other people in the Middle Ages. Celtic religious beliefs are still little understood, though we do know that they worshipped deities of wood and water, sky and sea – indeed that each of the elements was of prime importance to them. So that when they spoke of Goddesses they were probably thinking of what we would call an abstract principle, represented in the form of a woman.

The best example of this is the Goddess of Sovereignty, with whom Gawain, as we shall see, had a particular relationship. For the Celts, particularly the Irish, the concept of Sovereignty, as of kingship, was of a unique kind of link with the earth itself. Thus the King was believed literally to mate with the Goddess of the Land the otherworldly representative of the particular area over which he reigned. Without the sanction of Sovereignty thus gained he could not rule wisely or honestly, or ensure that the Kingdom remained strong and virile. By the period of the Middle Ages much of this had been forgotten – or at least re-assimilated. It takes many hundreds of generations for a new set of religious beliefs to supersede an earlier strata, and that while the process is taking place a situation exists in which the shadowy

forms of earlier traditions mingle with those of the new.

Romano-Celtic goddess, Cirencester

This is the situation which existed during most of the time the Gawain romances were being composed, and reactions to it came in two distinct forms. There were those who took the stories that came to them, mostly from wandering singers and story-tellers, and who simply turned them into Medieval romances by dressing them in the fashions of the time. And there were those who saw these same stories as an opportunity to put forward the tenets of Christianity in a unique form, and who recognised the "pagan" origins of much of what they saw. It is to these writers that we owe the degraded view of Gawain, who saw in him a champion of the old ways and sought to discredit him in the eyes of the world.

In considering this view we must not allow ourselves to forget that the subject of belief, of faith and theological teaching, was much more to the fore in educated society than it is today. Yet it was among the so-called "ordinary" people that the stories that went into the making of the Matter of Britain originated. In the process of becoming literary creations, they underwent a considerable degree of change and adaptation to suit both the era and the audience.

Champion

Gawain thus began life as a simple Celtic hero and ended it as one of the best loved and most complex figures in the Arthurian cycle. Yet it seems that even then the authors who chose him for their hero – or who found him almost forced upon them – did not wholly understand him. Hence their often ambiguous attitude to his character, which resulted in what becomes, at times, an almost comic misinterpretation of the facts.

In several stories from the 13th century onwards the treatment of Gawain is almost burlesque – see for example the story of *Meraugis de la Portlegues,* where, among other things, Gawain is required to dress as a woman! However, in the same story there is another aspect of his characterisation which points to a very different understanding of his character. Here Gawain is discovered, having defeated an earlier incumbent, as Champion to the Lady of the Castle. And we are told that whoever becomes the champion must remain there until a better man appears.

This is a very ancient theme indeed. It is summarised conveniently in Fraser's *Golden Bough* under the heading "Rex Nemorensis" or King of the Wood. It dates back to a time before history when the idea of annual kingship was still practised. In this, the chosen candidate, having undergone various tests and trials – including his mating with the reigning Queen – became king for a year. At the end of that time he had to do battle with a new contender, a combat which he was not allowed to win. So a new King was appointed and the whole cycle began again.

Gradually, the period of rulership became extended. The Old King perhaps found substitutes who fought and died on his behalf. Only the Queen, the earthly representative of the Goddess,

continued her uninterrupted reign, watching the cycle of Champions come and go. Eventually, the role of the champion likewise became subtly altered, merging with that of the King himself and extending beyond the boundary of a single year. It is this role which I believe Gawain inherited from the many nameless heroes who had gone before. It was to ensure his continuing fame, and at the same time cause him to be steadily degraded into the unsympathetic figure we find in Malory and elsewhere.

Origins
So much for theory. What textual evidence can we find to support it? There is, in fact, a considerable amount, but before we look further at this we should pause for a moment to reflect on Gawain's origins.

As we have seen, the earliest references are in Celtic story and tradition. Here he is known as *Gwalchmai*, the Hawk of May, and earns a considerable reputation as a hero. However, it is his relationship to Arthur which is most often emphasised. He is generally described as being the son of Arthur's sister and King Lot of Orkney – the name of his mother being variously given as Anna, Gwyar, Morcades, and finally Morgause, which continues unchanged into the time of Malory.

Each of these ladies has an interesting history. Gwyar, whose name appears in several early texts, is believed to derive from an ancient Celtic word which has the meaning "to shed blood". The great Celtic scholar Sir John Rhys thought this probably meant that Gawain's mother had at one time been a Battle Goddess – and this is borne out by the identification of Morcades/Morgause. Both derive, by a complex series of mythic relationships, from the figure of the Irish War Goddess known as the Morrigan. She it was who became an implacable enemy of the hero Cuchulainn, eventually engineering his death where all others had failed. This in itself is significant because it can be proved that Gawain derives many of his heroic abilities from Cuchulainn; while the Morrigan also metamorphosed into an even more famous character from the Arthurian legends – Morgan le Fay.

So, we have, at the beginning of the Middle Ages, a character whose adventures were still only circulating orally, but who was soon to become a great literary hero, who derives many of his abilities from even earlier heroes, and whose mother may well be a Goddess of War.

With these elements in mind it is not really surprising that the first major appearance of Gawain in Arthurian literature show him as a brilliant soldier, and a valiant knight – for as such he is portrayed in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittaniae*, the *Bruts* of Wace and Layamon, and the various anonymous Welsh chronicles which derive from them. The first signs we have of the direction which Gawain's career is about to take come in a much neglected Latin romance known as *De Ortu Waluuanii nepotis Arthurii* or "The Rise of Gawain, Nephew of Arthur".

The Rise of Gawain
De Ortu Waluuanii tells a strange and extraordinary tale of Gawain's youthful exploits how he was abandoned by his mother after she bore him illegitimately to Lot. Given into the care of some rich merchants, he is taken to Europe where a fisherman steals him again – along with considerable treasure – and brings him up as his own son. After a few years the fisherman travels to Rome and sets himself up as a wealthy nobleman. He soon comes to the attention of the Emperor and becomes his close confidant. His son is enrolled in the Emperor's personal guard and rises quickly through the ranks, astonishing everyone with his grace, courtliness and bravery. Finally, the fisherman-turned-courtier falls ill and, near to death, confesses all, handing letters to the emperor which prove that Gawain is the rightful nephew of King Arthur.

More adventures follow, as Gawain goes from strength to strength, being adopted by the Emperor, leading his armies against various enemies, defeating a pirate Queen, and finally, on the death of the Emperor, being offered the throne of the Empire. At this moment news comes from Britain of the Saxon invasion, and Gawain decides to lead a relief force to help Arthur. In Britain of course his real identity is revealed, and he decides to remain there, already beginning to prove himself a worthy knight.

Service
This story shows to what extent writers at this point saw Gawain as an exemplary hero – and indeed there is a tradition which continues to see him in this light, despite an increasing number of texts which take a contrary view. It seems that the belief in Gawain as a representative of something important refused to die. In one version of the *Prose Tristan* – the most strongly anti-Gawain text of any – one reader or owner has systematically crossed out the hero's name and substituted that of his less popular brother Gaheries![1]

Three texts which present Gawain in a wholly positive light – and which incidentally carry our argument to something like a triumphal conclusion, are the Middle-English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight;* the less well-known *Marriage of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnall;* and a Middle High German poem by Heinrich von dem Tulin called *Diu Crone* or "The Crown".

Within the structure of the first two poems, both of which originated in a part of the country – the West Midlands – rich in ancient culture and Goddess lore, Gawain is rigorously tested by the earthly representative of a Goddess. A test which involves the question of sovereignty in *Gawain and Ragnall,* and of the yearly test of the Beheading Game in *Gawain and the Green Knight.* The combination of these two gives us a scenario in which Gawain is tested by the Goddess, passes her trial, and receives as his reward her favours – marrying or mating with her just as the ancient Year Kings once did in order to win their tenure as her Champion.

In the German poem, alone among the dozens of texts dealing with the quest for the Grail, Gawain is successful in achieving this highest of Christian spiritual goals. And, interestingly, he is enabled to do so through the help of another Goddess, the great medieval figure of Fortuna (Fortune), who brings her endlessly turning wheel of fate to a halt when Gawain enters the hall of her castle, and whose advice gives him the necessary understanding to complete his task.

Thus in all three texts Gawain is successful in his tasks because of his relationship or service to a Goddess. Just how clearly the medieval authors recognised these facts we cannot say with any degree of certainty. That they knew something of the truth is indicated by the manner of Gawain's gradual descent from hero to murderer and libertine. Yet even in the latter case, where he is constantly portrayed as light of love, as being unable to remain faithful to any one woman for more than a day, even here we can see a reflection *of* his original role. He who was the servant and champion of the Goddess of course loved all women as her earthly representatives. To the medieval, and especially the Christian interpreters of the story this could only be seen in the way it was, by making Gawain an opportunist who played upon his fame and good looks to enable him to bed as many women as possible. Only in a few romances, such as those examined here, did a distant echo of his original role remain, embedded in the marvellous adventures of the Round Table knights.[2]

Sources
For a full exploration of Gawain see my book: *Gawain, Knight of the Goddess* (Thorsons 1990).

For the main texts mentioned in this article see:
M L Day *ed transl* (1984) *De Ortu Waluuanii* (Garland, New York)
J W Thomas *ed transl* (1989) *Diu Crone* (University *of* Nebraska)
J R R Tolkien *transl* (1975) *Gawain and the Green Knight* (George Allen & Unwin)
F Madden *ed* (1971) *Syr Gawayne* (AMS Press) "Gawain and Ragnall"
L Thorpe *transl* (1966) *Geoffrey* of *Monmouth: History* of *the Kings of Britain* (Penguin)

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[1] An early form of censorship! *JM*

[2] First published in *Pendragon XXVIII* No 1 (1999) 9-12

Sir Gawain's Horse ౭ *Sid Birchby*

When Sir Gawain set out in search of the Green Knight, he needed all the help he could muster. The previous New Year's Day, at Camelot, he had chopped off the Green Knight's head, only to be told, as the strange visitor picked up his head and rode away:
"I charge you to come to the Green Chapel next year, and receive such a blow as you have dealt."

Now this is the whole point of the story, because Gawain does not have his head chopped off. His ordeal is really a test of his resistance to temptation by the Knight's lady, who is secretly Morgan la Fay.[1] She has set up the whole enchantment of the apparently headless knight in order to spite Guinevere and the court of Arthur. Gawain's virtue defeats her, for after her greatest efforts, his only lapse is to take from her a girdle of green silk which she says will protect the wearer from injury. He wears it at the duel, and receives a minor neck wound. But for the slight failure of virtue, he would have been unharmed, and this is what the original charge upon him fore-shadows:
"Receive such a blow as you have dealt, as you have deserved."

But, of course, when Gawain sets out on All Saints' Day to seek the Green Chapel, he does not know this, so he takes his red shield with a golden pentangle on it, not so much to repel spirits as to symbolise moral perfection. He also takes his horse, named Gryngolet, and in my opinion this name is given by the anonymous poet for a particular reason, because it is another moral weapon for Sir Gawain to take.

The poem of the Green Knight was written quite late to be an Arthurian source, probably by Hugh Massey, in the 14th century. The Masseys are an old

Cheshire family, and the poem is written in the local dialect. Also we read how Gawain rode north from Camelot, through Wales and over the Dee. The Green Chapel seems to have been somewhere in the hilly part of Cheshire near Wild Boar Clough. Not far away is the rocky cleft called Lud's Church, which ends in a cavern by the statue of a woman, probably now vandalised, alas. It may well have been Morgan la Fay.

In such a remote landscape, it seems, a late-medieval poet restated the legends believed by his countryfolk in the fashionable Arthurian mode, and so Sir *Gawain and the Green Knight*, although not an original Arthurian source, becomes an unique treasure of Arthur for those who enquire into the Matter of Britain.

The name of Gawain's horse has a curious history. It first appears in 12th century French as a kind of horse. But Chaucer, in *The Merchant's Tale* (circa 1386 and contemporary with Hugh Massey), makes a passing reference to something being "as tricky as the Boat of Wade", and an edition of Chaucer dated 1598 says that this boat has a name: Gryngolet. This is the same as Gawain's horse.

Wade was the hero of tales that flourished in England for about a thousand years. He was the father of Wayland the Smith, both giants of the Northern myths. He is also mentioned in Caxton's edition of Malory, where someone is said to be "as wyghte (active) as ever Wade or Launcelot". He bestrides all myths that ever came to Albion, and may well be the Giant Albion himself.

Gryngolet as a word probably comes from the Celtic, via Normans and Bretons. In the modern Breton dialect, *gwenn* = white, or pure, and *gallout* = power or capability. Sir Gawain rides a white horse, a symbol of the power of purity akin to that of the unicorn, because moral purity will help him best against the wiles of Morgan la Fay.

[1] This is incorrect; Morgan is the identity of the old lady at the Green Knight's court, not his wife. *Ed*

This is not surmise, but one of the traditional meeting-points with folk-lore that Hugh Massey must have encountered, because there is a very definite association in Celtic myth between the white horse and virginity. The region of Cheshire in which he lived remains to this day a march-land between Celtic Wales and Anglian Mercia: a land where two traditions meet.

The Celtic goddess Rhiannon is named from the Welsh word for a virgin, *rhianedd*. She rides a white horse and comes to show mortals the way to another world. In the other tradition, she is Hela, queen of the Norse underworld. The two met on the Welsh Marches, in the legend, recorded by Walter Map, the 13th century courtier of King Henry II, of King Herla, who visited the world of Faery and now rides the horse, not daring to dismount from his horse, because he would crumble to dust. In Welsh, *hela* means "to hunt or collect". Walter Map says that King Herla was seen in his day (1154) "plunging into the River Wye, near Hereford" by many Welshmen. He was leading many persons "who were known to be dead..."

There is little doubt that Gryngolet was a white horse, although an entire book has been written suggesting that Arthur's knights rode black horses: S G Wildman (*The Black Horsemen*, London, 1971) writes: "The thesis of this book is that the name 'Black Horse', given to an inn, is originally connected with the stories of King Arthur and his knights."

Well, perhaps they were. If the historical Arthur had mounted followers, as some think, and if his Twelve Battles were more like commando raids, as may well be, then white horses would be far too visible to the enemy. However, the persistent white horse / purity tales arise on the level of allegory, and are too widespread to be dismissed: Gawain, Rhiannon, Lady Godiva, the White Lady of Banbury, and others.

The explanation is simple. White horses would be too visible on a raid, but Lady Godiva and the others ride them because they are meant to be seen by onlookers. There is something more than the colour about them, almost a spectral quality, that seems to come

across at the right time and place.

I can show this best by an example. On the evening of Oak Apple Day, 1976, I watched the procession in Castleton, Derbyshire: dancing, a maypole, and a great garland of flowers shaped like a dome. This is carried round the village and then hauled onto the church tower by a rope. Crowds of visitors fill the streets, whether from curiosity, or to commemorate the restoration of Good King Charles, or from a lingering folk-memory of the earlier Maytime festival, one cannot say. Perhaps the last. In a field near the car park there was a white horse cropping the grass. As dusk fell, it seemed almost to glow, and many of the departing visitors looked at it with a curious expression, as if it meant more to them than just a horse.

The other-world feeling about a white horse is very strong at dusk, of course, but it also exists in the daytime. There is nothing very pure about a horse, white or otherwise, but there is a sense of rarity and magic, as if it were the next best thing to a unicorn. This, I suggest, goes a long way to explaining its importance in legend. It is a swift and unearthly steed that carries its rider to a place where passions and emotions no longer exist. Perhaps it is the other-world of Rhiannon, at the end of life's journey, or the world that the White Lady brings down to earth every May time.

At all events, Gawain's horse was no ordinary one. It had a magical name, and it was meant to remind him of his knightly vows, and to help him keep them. On the whole, he didn't do too badly with it. We are not told if the pentangle on his shield was of any use, but Gryngolet took him safely to the Green Chapel and home again.[2] ౭

[2] This article first appeared in *Pendragon IX* No 4 (1976) and again in *XII* No 2 (1978) 5-7

Am Bron Binn
The Hebridean Gawain connection
᠙ *Alison Skinner*

Women at the Quern, and at the Luagh

Last August 2nd 2007 I was driven by friends to the village of Witham-on-the-Hill in Lincolnshire in the early evening. It was during that very short period when it stopped raining long enough for a precarious late summer to take hold, and we were attending a performance by the Bardos Band, an early music group, in the church of St Andrews. The concert, part of a series held in village churches, had caught my attention as the group were promising us a range of music drawing on northern folk music and legends in their performance.

It was a miraculously warm summer's evening and the swifts were calling overhead as the audience gathered in the church. The group came out and very soon were playing and singing exquisitely. Half way through the first half they announced that they would be singing a song in Gaelic from the Hebrides – one of the series of ballads that the women sang to entertain themselves while making cloth which had been collected by the 19th-century folklorists. As a folk music enthusiast with Scottish family connections, I was aware of these kinds of songs and had heard them sung by various Scottish groups and individuals. I had even visited Lewis and Harris and seen the kind of places where they had been originally sung. What then followed however knocked me back in my seat as the soloist described the plot of an Arthurian story featuring Gawain which was quite unknown to me and then proceeded to sing an edited version in the original Gaelic. This was the first time I had ever experienced a live performance of an Arthurian story apparently drawn from oral musical tradition. The nearest equivalent was an

LP by Alan Taylor owned by me which included a version of the ballad of "The Boy and the Mantle", but this involved one of the minor Arthurian characters – not a key figure in the story. I was able to talk to the singer during the interval and got some details of where they had found the song. Regrettably it didn't feature on their only CD to date. In the days that followed I checked out the references on the internet and found that the song was well known in Gaelic music circles, but as these don't always coincide with Arthurian literary and archaeological ones it seemed a good idea to make its provenance better known. With the help and encouragement of an indulgent editor, this is what I will proceed to do.

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A key work on the origins of *Am Bron Binn* ("The Sweet or Melodious Sorrow") was written by Linda Gowans in 1992, who compared all the existing versions collected of the song, listed manuscripts and recordings, gave biographical notes on the singers, explored the Arthurian background and published two hitherto unpublished tunes. This was self-published by the author.

What follows is a summary of her judgement on the song based on her original research and reported in her book. There is a considerable amount of detail in the original work so readers interested in knowing more should refer to this. This article will aim just to present the thread of the argument.

Gowans (1992) claims that there is a very respectable quantity of Arthurian material in both manuscript and published collections, which lives on in the repertoire of Highland and

Hebridean singers and story tellers. She says that some of this material has its origins in Ireland where both translations of Arthurian medieval texts and new stories were produced from at least the 15th century. The key Scottish influence however was supplied by the bards and historians of Clan Campbell who traced the lineage of their chiefs back to King Arthur whose court they located in Dumbarton.

This particular ballad has 31 texts and fragments still available in publication and can be divided into three principal groups originally classified by John Lorne Campbell and Francis Collinson. These versions are characterised as standard, short and extended. It was collected as both a ballad and a chorus song.

In the standard version No.1 the plot is as follows:
In two texts only Arthur goes out hunting and falls asleep. In other texts the hunt is not mentioned and the song opens straightaway with the king's dream. He sees in his sleep the most beautiful woman under the sun and when he awakes he longs for her to be found. Gawain volunteers to search for her, sets off on a voyage with his servant and dog and eventually arrives at the base of the castle. A black chain descends which he climbs fearlessly and he finds a girl who warns him that the lord 'the Big Man' will come, a pitiless giant who can only be killed by his own sword. The girl hides Gawain and when the giant arrives she lulls him to sleep with her harping. Gawain and the girl – or sometimes the girl on her own, steal the giant's sword and cut off his head. They sail away and in some texts we are told of a woman lamenting.

In the second short version the hunt opening is not featured and the song begins with the king's dream. Events happen in the same way as version 1 up to Gawain's meeting with the girl, but there is no mention of the arrival of the giant and it is Gawain who is lulled to sleep by the treacherous girl who beheads him.

In the third extended version Arthur is out hunting when a girl approached and lulls him to sleep with her harping. When he wakes he is anxious to see her again and the story is as in Version 1.

However when the second arrival at the castle takes place there are passages of boasting about a superlative woman, ship, horse and hound which the speaker anticipates that he will possess and about exploits against the sons of the King of Greece. It is not clear whether the speaker should be envisaged as the giant, Gawain or another character entirely. At the end of this version the girl tricks the hero into digging a grave, into which she leaps and expires, leaving him to mourn.

In terms of location, the three versions of the song follow a geographical pattern of distribution. Version 1 originates chiefly from island or mainland Argyll, all Version 2 texts come from the Outer Isles, which also appear to have had a lost Version 1 tale and Version 3 comes principally from North Uist and nearby islands, with one Skye and one mainland text. The 19th-century collectors were cautious in their views of the origins of the story even though they recognised the Arthurian context.

Certain singers provided a recited prologue to the song. One such with translation published by Angus Matheson (1900), in volume 5 of the *Carmina Gadelica*, provides the most explicit reference to Gawain with a story about a grudge holding witch.
"There was once a King called Arthur. He had many goodly Gaels at his court and in his following, everyone of them surpassing the other in hardihood, pride and valour. The King saw a dream about a beautiful young maiden and told his warriors what he had seen and the substance of his dream. One of the warriors Sir Gawain offered to set out in search of the woman and he departed and he was a long, long, time away before he discovered her; but he found her at last in a castle in the very middle of the sea. On a certain occasion Sir Gawain offended her and she slew him. Who should it be but a wicked witch sitting in a limpet shell. She had a grudge against Sir Gawain and she caused King Arthur to dream about herself ... so she might get the excuse to destroy the fine hero, Sir Gawain of the Horns. And the wicked woman without ruth or mercy got that. A wicked woman will get her wish, though her souls will get no mercy."

There is no tradition in the canonical Arthurian literary texts of Gawain being killed by a woman, rather he is usually helped and supported by them, but Matthews (1990) notes that Gawain's amours are all with otherworldly women or goddesses who each test him in some way. Perhaps this was one whom he failed to kiss or sleep with or marry in the approved fashion! While the beheading motif is familiar from the story of Gawain and the Green Knight it is also occurs in folk tales.

Gillies (1981) notes the presence within the stories of international folk tale motifs such as the quest for a girl seen in a dream, the beheading of the giant with his own sword, the help from an ogre's wife/captive and the marvellous island and stronghold.

Gowans notes that there exists in Irish literature a group of Arthurian texts which bridge the gap between the late Middle Ages and the orally collected Gaelic material of the past two centuries. She looks in particular at a prose tale called *Eachtra Mhacaoimh-an-Iolair* ("The Adventures of the Eagle Boy"). In this, King Arthur arranges the fostering of a boy who is dropped into his lap by an eagle. As an adult Eagle Boy goes to rescue a lady imprisoned on an island in a castle. He fights and beheads three pirates. Eagle Boy subsequently fights another knight and with the help of the knight's wife kills and beheads him and takes the woman back to Arthur who marries her.

Gowans compares the plots of version 3 of *Am Bron Binn* and the *Eagle Boy* and cautiously asserts that the song, with all its versions and variants which have developed over the years, originally came about because an author had heard or read the *Eagle Boy* story and retained some details in his or her memory. These surfaced when they embarked on the creation of a new Arthurian work drawing on material from their store of Arthurian, Fenian and international tradition. Hartnett (1973) points out that Gawain is the most widely known of Arthur's knights in Irish and Scottish Gaelic literature and features as the hero of the Middle Scots poem *Golagros and Gawaine* first published in 1508.

Gowans notes that it is unclear whether Irish Arthurian material arrived in the Outer Hebrides in manuscript or as oral tradition and she envisages a composition before the mid 1700s. The texts show that *Am Bron Binn* survived both as a ballad which was recorded in a public performance in Skye in the 19th century and as a waulking song in North Uist. Since this latter version possibly travelled to Barra where it was subsequently collected in the 20th century, its tune may have been the original one.

Fulling, milling, or waulking of home-made cloth for household use was carried out in Gaelic Scotland by pounding the material against a board or trampling it with the feet. The techniques are of great antiquity and were also used elsewhere, but they happened to survive in the Hebrides into the twentieth century. The process of waulking is called *luadh* ("loo-ugh") in Gaelic, and the songs of waulking are known as *orain luaidh* ("or-ine loo-ie").
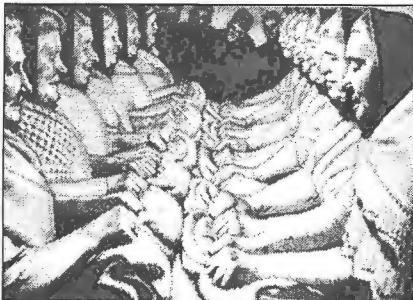
Wool Waulking by Keith Henderson, *c* 1927-8

Waulking songs are rhythmic songs that were made up to accompany the work and coordinate the beating. One person leads the group, like a shantyman on a ship, singing well-known verses or making up new ones on the fly. The rest then come in on the chorus while the leader takes a breath. A verse may be a single line or a couplet. The refrain often has no or few recognizable words among rhythmic nonsense syllables called *vocables*. The refrains are the most primitive part of the song and are the only relatively stable element in a very unstable body of texts, lines, and sections that were moved from one song to another during improvisation. Modern recordings and texts have tended to

stabilize the words, but different collected and printed versions of the same song are often found.

Songs to assist work and those sung for recreation were particularly important to women and thus it comes as no surprise that where Gowans has been able to identify a particular person as source for the song, there are 17 woman listed and 5 men. One of the collectors noted that when singers from different places came together they all tended to advocate the primacy of their own version of the song and to discount and reject other unfamiliar variants. This trait would have helped to preserve the different version of the ballad.

Gowans suggests that Version 3 of the song belonged to a generation of singers now beyond living memory with the death of Mary Maclellan of North Uist in 1900. Version 1 was unexpectedly collected from travellers by Hamish Henderson of the School of Scottish Studies in 1955. The travelling community in Scotland and England has been a rich source of traditional song over the years, preserving more complete or different versions of songs which had been forgotten by the settled community. Version 2 still survives orally in the Outer Isles. This version was sung by the redoubtable singer Kate MacCormick from Hacklett in Benbecula who learnt it from an old man called Alexander Morrison from Grimsay Benbecula. Kate died in 1965 but before then she decided she should hand on some of her songs. She summoned her niece by marriage Catriona Garbutt of Uachdar and made her repeat the song over and over again until she had learnt it. This is the version which has now been passed on to a modern generation of Gaelic singers.

<p style="text-align:center">ଓଷ</p>

Now, as then, the Outer Hebrides has been a byword for remoteness and few people outside the area paid any attention to their culture until the 19th century, or were more struck by their material poverty than anything else. The oral culture of these islands however is of extraordinary richness and provides a link back to the circumstances in which Arthurian tales were first told by bards and storytellers to appreciative audiences, with retentive memories, before the written versions were recorded. The names of Arthur and Gawain and their exploits as heroes to be admired and emulated were clearly known in Scotland and Ireland from early times and filtered into the Hebrides via both the Ireland to Western Isles sea route and from the Scottish mainland. Some unknown poet, familiar with a range of traditional lore and these Arthurian tales, fused together a new song which drew on familiar motifs, which proved attractive to the native singers. The folk process saw the song change and shape shift over the years until the folk collectors arrived and preserved it in writing. A whole century later it was one of these printed versions that found its way into a medieval music group's repertoire to entrance and entertain me that summer evening in Lincolnshire. ଓଷ

Discography
Bardos Band:
http://earlymusic.org.uk/Performer's%20Directory/A-Bot/bardosband.html#
Worth checking their website as their second CD when recorded might contain a version of the song
Docas Band
and CD with Julie M Fowlis SkyeCD 23
Available from Scottish folk mail order www.CODAMUSIC.co.uk
This is a version 2 which refers to the King of Scotland and has Fingal going to rescue the lady

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The Legend of Gawain *Chris Lovegrove*

Gwalchmai, Hawk of May Simon Rouse

Like most Arthurian characters Gawain appears to have a split personality. If you look at his *persona* in French, Dutch, English or Welsh contexts you find that we sometimes seem to be contemplating several people with the same name. Here is a short attempt to identify those elements that go towards his composite legend, remembering that the word "legend" originates from the Latin for something read (as opposed to myth or folklore, which were originally oral traditions).

His earliest portrait appears to be that on one of the archivolts at Modena Cathedral in Italy. Here he is labeled *GALVAGIN* and is seen fighting *CARRADO* (Carados in French texts, Caradoc in Welsh) who is emerging from a fortified gate. The carving is generally dated to the early 12th century, and represents the popular spread of the Arthurian legend to Western Europe at about the time Geoffrey of Monmouth was producing his novel treatment (1136). In Italy we find a wide variation in the form of the name, including not only *Galvagin* but also *Galvanus* and, famously, *Galgano* Guidotti, the saint

associated with an Italian legend of a sword in a stone (late 12th century).[1]
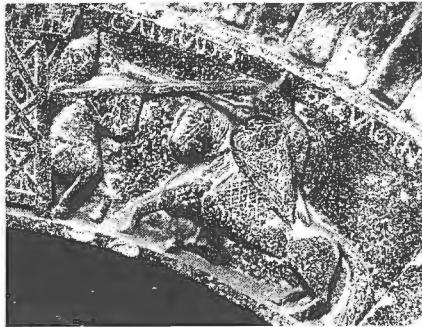
Carrado and Galvagin, Modena Cathedral

In French literature Gawain appears in the Arthurian works of Chrétien de Troyes, notably *Le Conte du Graal* (mid-1180s), where he is a foil to the Grail hero Perceval.[2] We do see Gawain as not only the knightly paragon of the twin medieval virtues of bravery and courtesy, but also as a model lover, though French writers increasingly suggest that he becomes more and more venal and reprehensible, with the result that Malory (whose acknowledged sources were "French books") later paints a rather black picture of Gawain. For example, the anonymous First Continuation of *Perceval* mentions Giglain, Gawain's illegitimate son, the so-called Fair Unknown (it also includes the tale of *Caradoc*, a knight who has to deal with a beheading episode such as we later find in *Gawain and the Green Knight*).

In *The Perilous Graveyard* – a long but highly-structured tale from around 1250 – Gawain, who is described as a fairy's son, not only has to rediscover his own identity but also has his martial strength wax and wane with the sun's progress. In *The Knight with the Sword* Gawain is comically subject to punishment by a magic sword when he yields to temptation in bed with an ogre lord's

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[1] Steve Sneyd "Another sword in another stone" *Pendragon XXVII* No 4 (1999) 20-1
[2] Nigel Bryant *transl* (2006) *Perceval: the Story of the Grail* (D S Brewer)

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daughter (the lord plays a role similar to the Green Knight in the English poem).[3]

In Dutch romances – in contrast to the French – Gawain has an unblemished reputation. The 13th-century *Walewein* may be typical: derived from the folk-tale type *The Golden Bird*, this romance describes Gawain's quest to obtain a magical floating chessboard for Arthur, and underlines his courtesy, bravery and prowess.[4] The later English view of Gawain is also more sympathetic. The 14th-century *Ywain and Gawain* makes use of Chrétien's *Le Chevalier au Lion* while *The Anturs of Arther* is actually a Gawain romance despite its title, and Gawain's role in both is honorable.[5]

While *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c 1385) is the most famous of the English Gawain romances,[6] Gawain appears too as protagonist in others which use his name as a byword for chivalry and courtesy. *Syre Gawene and the Carle of Carelyle* (c 1400) also includes a giant adversary, a temptation scene and a hunt but has many other touches that underline Gawain's good qualities (contrasting with a Bishop and Sir Kay, for example).[7] Another romance, *The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell for Helpyng of Kyng Arthoure* (c 1450) uses essentially the same story as Chaucer's 14th-century *Wife of Bath's Tale*, though

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[3] Ross G Arthur *transl* (1996) *Three Arthurian Romances: poems from medieval France* (Everyman Dent) 13-15. There is an echo in *The Knight with Two Swords* of the ancient joke I remember told about Mick Jagger, but here applied to Gawain: a groupie, who kept a tally of her pop star conquests, used to say, "He was good, but he was no Mick Jagger". Needless to say, after her eventual one-night stand with the Rolling Stone her assessment was the stock reply.
[4] W P Gerritsen and A G van Melle *ed* (1998) *A Dictionary of Medieval Heroes* (Boydell Press) 113
[5] Maldwyn Mills *ed* (1992) *Ywain and Gawain; Sir Percyvell of Gales; The Anturs of Arther* (Everyman Dent)
[6] J J Anderson *ed* (1996) *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience* (Everyman Dent)
[7] Donald B Sands *ed* (1966) *Middle English Verse Romances* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston) 348ff

for Chaucer the knight remains anonymous.[8] The story hinges on the theme *what do women most desire* – Gawain wisely leaves the choice to Dame Ragnell – and does so with wit and humour.

Though our tour of the Gawain legend in Western Europe has been swift and shallow, we must not neglect the original Gawain in his native culture – Gwalchmei, son of Gwyar (his mother, perhaps), from Welsh tradition. In the early 12th century Geoffrey of Monmouth hijacked some of Gwalchmei's attributes and fashioned a creature of his own: *Gualguinus* or *Walwanus*. In *Culhwch and Olwen* however (c 1100 or earlier) Gwalchmei's qualities include never returning home "without the quest he had gone to seek. He was the best of walkers, and the best of riders. He was Arthur's nephew, his sister's son, and his first cousin" – only vaguely reminiscent of the chivalrous figure of the romances.

Geoffrey's contemporary, William of Malmesbury, described how in William the Conqueror's time the tomb of Walwen (called "the not degenerate nephew of Arthur by his sister", which may suggest creeping chivalry) was found in Pembrokeshire. "A warrior renowned for his valour", Gawain was said to have been "wounded by his foes and cast out in a shipwreck, but according to others he was killed by his fellow-citizens at a public banquet." In the *Englynion Y Beddau* (Stanzas of the Graves, c 1000) Gwalchmei's grave is said to "lie in Peryddon", which could well be in the Sandy Haven Pill south of the suggestively named Walwyn's Castle. The length of the grave – fourteen feet – has led Green and others to suggest that Gawain (and Arthur of course, not to mention Arthur's son Amr) was regarded in folklore as a giant, not a mere human.[9] The name itself, *Gwalchmei*, could mean something like The Hawk of the Plain (*gwalch* is Welsh for hawk) or derived from a postulated early **Wolcos Magesos*, Wolf (*ie* rogue warrior) of the Plain – a far cry from the later medieval chevalier. ⚮

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[8] Stephen H A Shepherd *ed* (1995) *Middle English Romances* (Norton) 243ff
[9] http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~tomgreen/figures.htm

The Green Knight and Gawain

A knight came riding into Arthur's court,
Galloping up to his high seat.
'What ails you, sir?" enquired the king.
Said his queen, "You could have wiped
your horse's feet"
The knight, he was all over green.
His charger snorted, wreathed in steam.
A phantasm from some horrible dream,
He was the most fearsome giant ever
seen.
"I crave a boon," the knight announced,
Brandishing a massive axe.
"Calm down," replied the king, aghast.
"All you have to do is ask!"
"I've come to test your newest knight
And find the measure of his bravery.
I'll take no nonsense from any man,
Nor put up with mere knavery."
"The table's laid," the king observed.
"The people wait upon their king.
Come, put aside your weaponry,
Join us for a drink and sing."
"Not I!" the emerald giant cried.
"Not till answer am I given,
For I have travelled for many a mile,
Full weary and sore storm-driven.
Show me your newest knight, good king.
I'll not wait a moment more.
Bring him forth and let me see
If he is noble and wise as knights of
yore."
"Oh, very well." King Arthur sighed.
He called across the silent hall,
"Gawain, my lad, put down your cup.
Introduce yourself to one and all."
A knight stepped forth, in brand new
spurs.
He bowed to king and giant so gruff.
Handsome, he was, and graceful too,
Yet quite broad in the chest and tough.

"Is this your newest?" asked the Green
Knight.
"He looks fresh as a daisy.
I'd say he's never wielded sword.
If he challenges me, he's crazy."
"Challenge you?" replied Gawain.
'Whoever suggested such a thing?
You only mentioned a simple request
What challenge would you bring?"
"You see this axe?" the giant asked.
"How could I miss it?" young Gawain
said.
"If you keep on swinging it about like
that
You'll take off someone's head."
"My point exactly," spake the giant
"More of an edge, surely," observed
Gawain.
"Is anybody going to clean that floor?"
The queen continued to complain.
"My test is this," the Green Knight
announced,
Leaning upon his axe's shaft.
"Just cut off my head with one blow."
Saith Gawain, "Sir, are you daft?"
"Not so," the Green Knight replied.
"I offer you one blow, then I,
When thou hast finished, will, in turn,
Also have my try."
"Try what?" Gawain felt quite suspicious.
"A blow of the axe," said the Green
Knight.
Said Arthur, "This food is quite delicious.
Isn't it better to eat than fight?"
"I'll have my answer!" the giant roared.
Merlin spilled his beer across the board.
"Tush, that was clumsy," drawled
Lancelot,
Who was by one and all adored.
"Come, let me know," demanded the
giant.
'What will you do, Gawain?
I come to test your bravery and wisdom.
This waiting is such a pain."
"Very well," the brand new knight
replied.
"This answer I offer to you.
I speak from the heart, believe me, sir.
What I have to say is true.
It seems to me, my uncle here,
Dear Arthur, our king,
Has a true eye for good sense
In just about everything.
The table's heavy, the goblets full,
The fire's burning hot.
As to your sharpened axe's bite,
I fancy that not a jot.
So, if it offend thee not, good sir,

Your challenge I'll decline.
Rather would I have you sit with us,
To laugh and drink and dine."
The Green Knight smiled, his great head
nodded.
"Sir Gawain," he spoke with kindness.
"I am pleased to note that, for all your
courage,
You are not struck with foolhardy
blindness.
What kind of idiot, on seeing such
Obvious end1antment as I wear,
Would take the risk of the beheading
game
And accept my dreadful dare?

To eat and sup with friends is sense.
Gladly will I join you at table."
He laid down his axe, and, patting his
horse,
Sent it galloping to the stable.
"For crying out loud," quoth the queen.
"Just look at all the muck!"
But nobody heard, for all were cheering
Gawain's wisdom and good luck.
For, better it is, by far, to accept
Friendship in battle's stead.
Gawain gained honour for his sense
And no-one lost their head.

Ian Brown

Gawain rising
Spitting kitten could unhorse me easy as blinking
now in first cold faint hint of eastward light
but how you or you brighten
in your thoughts full woken
my body regrows grip
kills world by noon

Gawain setting
Shadow I cast extends far then farther columns
downs
dark giant any would think monolith
yet source me hid in armour
stiff-weight firm shrinks what age
takes years in hours goes
fish-weak dusk-food

Gawain ponders his epitaph
Green giant host-masked for human
Active torment randy offer-wife
Worrisome hag-bride puzzle expert
Agravaine boar-thick Modred slug-vile
I never get choice of siblings tasks
Nevertheless grace pays she-legs open

Gawain retired
You say you saw my skull trophy-topping pharos crowns
that fort-wreck watches over death-white cliffs
back home – so my fame lasts, good
news. You do not know me.
Good luck, whoever
dumb-dead played me.

Can't catch tale, truth –
how blow-stunned, my bright
armour stripped some fool thought
would save, just lured blows greeding
hero-killer fame, I rewoke all sides
Camlanned, over: stray, wineshipped south to last brother, Sun

Steve Sneyd

HARRY POTTER

and the Betrayal of the Hero Myth

Dave Burnham

The furore surrounding the publication of the final book *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (July 2007) was accompanied by a lot of snivelling from critics: J K Rowling's writing is clumsy and cliché-ridden apparently, her sentence and paragraph structure ropey, her characterisations wooden, her dialogue leaden and her ideas and plot lines derivative. Doubly, trebly amazing then that millions of children from across the world are enthralled by Harry and his pals and keep coming back for more. And you have to accept that Rowling's achievement is extraordinary. That a single brain can pull together so much myth, so many ideas and mould them round the believable development of a trio of child wizards from the age of eleven to early adulthood in a traditional boarding school setting, is remarkable. Rowling is a clever writer, struck a live nerve with children and their parents and managed the tidal wave of the developing franchise with aplomb. But at root the hook, the magic that grabs each individual is the echo of our own lives that Harry Potter offers. For underneath it all the Harry Potter heptalogy follows the path of the classic hero myth.

The key to all mythologies

We are all familiar, indeed have been brought up with, countless examples of the hero myth. Since the Second World War the patterned hero myth has been moulded and presented to children and adults alike as never before, certainly more effectively than before the war, because the mythic and the fantastical in literature and entertainment is a post war revival of a nineteenth century phenomenon. It took a while for people to notice what was happening. Charles Moorman, writing in 1960 about the Arthurian themes in the writings of Charles Williams, T S Eliot and C S Lewis, quotes several sneering references shortly after the war to the new fad for myth.[1] He quotes Philip Young who discerned a 'rush to get on the Myth bandwagon' and Stanley Edgar Hyman as identifying 'myth [as] the new intellectual fashion'. Moorman himself comments on some of the literary

criticism that has gone searching for mythical allusions, suggesting that recognising mythical patterns is a diverting party game but not much more. And of course picking over the bones of old tales for recognisable themes is of no merit unless something positive is done with those bones. George Eliot made that point in *Middlemarch*, with the Reverend Casaubon. The foil and oppressor of Eliot's heroine Dorothea, Casaubon had spent most of his adult life studying mythology. The end of his endeavours was to have been a grand work, *The Key to All Mythologies*. It was his attempt to reveal the basis of the original myth that determines the pattern of all myth. Eliot has Casaubon understand towards the end of his life that he has no talent for the work of creation and that all he will be left with are his piles of dusty papers. He thus dies disappointed and unfulfilled. And Eliot hints that a thoroughgoing 'explanation' of all myths would be useless anyway. All human stories reflect humanity so what's the point of revealing the obvious? People will draw what they will from myths

[1] Moorman, Charles (1960) *Arthurian Triptych: Mythic Materials in Charles Williams, C S Lewis, and T S Eliot* (Berkeley: University of California Press)

and legends; no more, no less. Break them down and you run the risk of just breaking them.

But that has never prevented academics producing theories explaining myth. It is not surprising that in the nineteenth century myths from other societies and from our own distant past were presented as savage forms of literature. European imperial expansion, rampantly racist attitudes to traditional societies and that 'modern' ideas and civilised people were a distinct improvement on our savage forbears explained this 'superior' approach to myth. So, wild and senseless aspects of myth were explained by the savagery of the people inventing it. E B Tylor in his *Primitive Culture* (1871) is a key exponent of these ideas. Later ethnologists, such as James Frazer (*The Golden Bough* 1890) and latterly people like Jessie Weston (*From Ritual to Romance* 1920) discerned the roots of myths in decayed rituals, survivals of real religious beliefs and ceremonies. As late as 1936 Lord Raglan (*The Hero*) claimed that all myths derived from actual ceremonies which took pace in the fertile crescent, a version of what Frazer had suggested two generations before. Interest in myth and fantasy was dulled by the horrors of the Great War, and fantasy literature was done for as effectively as notions of chivalry, including the popularity of King Arthur. Peter Hunt points out for instance that only four children's books with fantasy themes were published between 1918 and 1939; Masefield's *The Midnight Folk* (1927) and *Box of Delights* (1935), P L Travers' *Mary Poppins* (1934), and Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1938).[2]

So why then did myth make its reappearance after the Second World War? There are probably two primary causes. First of all, after the sullen shock of Great War blood letting, the Second war, more bestial still in terms of death and destruction, ended spectacularly well for the allies. Both major enemies were revealed as guilty of unimaginable horrors, and millions of people felt

genuinely to have contributed to a gallant cause. 'Everyman' was a hero: from Rosie the Riveter, the advertising representation of the 6 million American women who worked in war industry for the duration, to Shorty Blake, the plucky John Mills character in the Noel Coward film *In Which We Serve* (1942). It was a common theme of allied propaganda through and after the war. Post-war literary and entertainment output reflected this 'we were all heroes' feeling. At the same time some academics were using psychological insights to review the meaning of myth and legend. A key figure here was the American Joseph Campbell.

Campbell was born in 1904, and after attending Buffalo Bill's Wild West show in 1912 was convinced that he had Indian blood in him. This set him on his journey, starting off by steeping himself in the life and mythology of Native Americans. He was already writing articles on ethnology in his teens and grew fascinated by all myth. While at Columbia University Campbell, like T H White he produced a thesis on Arthur and the Grail legend. He travelled Europe where he absorbed the ideas of Freud and Jung and was fired up to carry on his studies of the Grail legend and to include psychological, religious and artistic perspectives as well. Academic conservatism and the depression foiled him, and Campbell spent the next few years in self-funded and self-directed study largely in Woodstock, New York State. Eventually Campbell secured a lecturing job at the radical Sarah Lawrence College, where he remained until he retired, marrying the dancer Jean Erdman and beginning his career as a revered teacher and prodigious writer on myth. Campbell published *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* in 1949. It was immediately influential because it combined overwhelmingly detailed evidence of myths from around the world with a simple analysis of the repetitive patterning of the hero myth – of which the Arthurian legend is a prime example.

Joseph Campbell's thesis is that there is an identifiable pattern in tales about heroes. He refers to this as the 'monomyth' and fills *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* with hundreds of

[2] Hunt does not mention T H White's *The Sword in the Stone* (1938) because even White himself was not sure it was for children. Nor is *Mary Poppins Comes Back* (1935)

comparisons in hero tales from around the world. He identifies a pattern of the hero's life, to which most hero tales bear an uncanny resemblance, and claims that the pattern of a hero's life journey is ubiquitous, repeated time and again across the centuries in culture after culture.

The hero of his own story

At first glance this might look like one of those earlier attempts to pack all myths into the same mould. Lord Raglan, after all, had only in 1936 identified 22 characteristics of the hero in hero tales. But his thesis rested on all heroes being mythic – with no historical basis for any of them. He suggested that all tales emerged from the fertile crescent and like Jessie Weston saw in the tales the remains of a ritual drama that had spread across all lands. Campbell didn't completely abandon the idea of diffusion of myth, but does not so much trace the cultural origins as point out the repetition in the various tales of challenges facing the hero and what has to be done to overcome them. Campbell saw in myth reflections of the universal struggles that all human beings face – to grow up, to establish an identity, to survive misfortune and to strive for humanity and success. Myth for Campbell was about the human condition and how we cope with it. Campbell's hero may have a thousand faces but all of them are our own.

The work of Mircea Eliade, almost contemporary with Campbell has a different emphasis – he is more concerned with how people have always used myth to establish a sense of permanence, against the constant threats to the sanctity of life by war, plague, disaster and so on – but he concurs about the life of heroes. He writes in *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1954),
Historical heroes are 'formed after an image' of the heroes of ancient myth. They always resemble one another in the fact of their miraculous birth: and just as in the Mahabharata and the Homeric poems, one at least of their parents is divine. As in the epic songs of the Tatars and in Polynesia these heroes undertake a journey to heaven or descend into hell.

P L Travers, the creator of *Mary Poppins* in the 1930s, wrote a great deal about myth in later life. Her view echoed Campbell:
In the long run, whatever it may be, every man must become the hero of his own story; his own fairy tale if you like, a real fairy tale.[3]

Although there is the danger in this approach in reducing all stories to a tight blueprint, it is liberating in that each of us can compare his or her own life path to that of the hero, recognising the universal nature of much experience. This is especially true of our formative years. Italo Calvino summed this up nicely when he wrote that folk stories identified the potential destinies of men and women:
… especially for that stage in life when destiny is formed, i.e. youth, beginning with birth, which itself often foreshadows the future; then departure from home, and finally through the trails of growing up, the attainment of maturity and the proof of one's humanity.[4]

Lastly this approach to literary themes has been dealt with at great length by Christopher Booker.[5] Booker's huge work is in the same tradition as Campbell, and if any readers are sufficiently interested, Booker's investigation is the proper starting place.

So, post war analysis of myth tended towards the same conclusion: that hero tales served a real purpose in offering each of us a reflection for our own experiences as aspiration, warning, comparison, or as an offer of hope. The list of life events outlined below is a simple attempt to set down stages I have identified in hero tales, ancient and modern. This is loosely based on Campbell's work, although Campbell did not write much about childhood. The point here is to demonstrate the universality of such stages in hero tales and place Harry Potter, like King Arthur, unequivocally in this category. These stages are not always followed, but the themes recur often enough for a distinct

[3] P L Travers (1987) *What the Bee Knows: Reflections on Myth, Symbol and Story* (Penguin)
[4] Italo Calvino (1980) *Italian Folk Tales* (trans George Martin, Pantheon Books: New York, first published 1956)
[5] Christopher Booker (2004) *The Seven Basic Plots: Why we tell Stories* (Continuum)

pattern to be discernable. The most regularly identified phases are:
1. Some sort of mystery surrounds the birth of the hero: either the child is fatherless or there is a secret about the birth – sometimes the child has no idea who his father is. The father is always an immensely powerful hero, even sometimes a god.
2. A corollary of the mysterious birth is that the hero as a child is brought up by his mother alone or more likely is fostered.
3. The child learns at some point that he is destined to be a hero. He has some sort of power far in excess of a normal child's but also manages to be an ordinary, playful child who likes normal things. He is ordinary and extraordinary at the same time.
4. The child has a mentor of some sort, sometimes the father himself but more often some other powerful, often magical figure.
5. The child has to consciously abandon the foster parents or his mother and enter the great world. This he does in a gauche way making something of a fool of himself. His mother or foster parents are often deeply hurt by the manner of the hero's departure.
6. Once his powers have been revealed and he is established in the adult world the hero gathers to himself an invariably strange and unlikely band of followers.
7. There is an offer to adventure made. The hero has to consciously choose to take on the life and death challenges implied. There is often reluctance to take on the quest.
8. The quest, often in the form of a journey, is the opportunity for many adventures on a perilous journey through a magical and hostile landscape, often into a metaphorical 'otherworld'.
9. The quest is achieved at the cost of the lives of some at least of the loyal band. More significantly the success of the quest is accompanied by a degree of disillusion, a dark or mundane return to earth. 'Is that all?' thinks the hero.
10. On the return the hero may be betrayed by someone close to him. His world is at least shaken and

sometimes collapses completely. This betrayal is occasionally by the hero who replaces him, but not often.
11. The hero dies, often accepting this fate, often not managing to return home.
12. There are rumours that the hero is not dead, but that he will return, or is waiting hidden to come back in times of peril.

Telemachus, Achilles, Christ and Arthur
If we consider several of the most enduring hero tales of west, *The Odyssey, The Iliad*, the life of Christ and the Arthurian cycle in the light of these stages, we can see where each matches the pattern and where they diverge.

At first sight the *Odyssey* seems not to fit. But if you put to one side Odysseus as the hero and concentrate on the early actions of his son Telemachus, it makes sense. In the *Odyssey* the tales we all know of the Ithacan warrior's fantastical journey home (the Lotus Eaters, the enchantments of Calypso and then Circe, the besting of the Cyclops, the song of the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis and his visit to the house of Hades) take up a short central portion of the saga, being told second hand by Odysseus himself. They in fact have all the hallmarks of classic tall tales told by travellers – the tales of a practiced trickster. Odysseus, with his cleverness and cunning, has always been a favourite of mine, so when I found him condemned by Dante to the fifth circle of hell in his *Inferno* I was shocked. But on rereading the *Iliad* it's all too plain that Odysseus is too self-serving, too deceitful and too downright bad to be a hero. Consider his wickedness in manipulating Palamedes' execution for treachery because Odysseus was jealous of his rival's ability to find grain, his thoughtless dashing of Hector's child Astynyax' brains out and his trick (in feigning madness) in an attempt to avoid joining Agamemnon's expedition to Troy in the first place. Odysseus offers no pattern for young people, no life path. And of course he had ginger hair!

The first six books of *The Odyssey*, on the other hand, concentrate on Odysseus' son Telemachus' attempts to get his father back. In this sense Telemachus is the hero of the early books of the *Odyssey* and matches our pattern fairly closely. Telemachus is brought up by his mother Penelope alone. His father is a fabled hero of whom Telemachus has no memory. Telemachus has to watch his mother besieged by suitors and wrestles with his sense of powerlessness about what he can do. The goddess Pallas Athena advises him, and taking his courage in his hands Telemachus, collecting the best men of Ithaca, sets of on his own odyssey in search of his father. His mother is devastated by this desertion, his first independent action.

The hero of the Iliad is of course Achilles. Born of a Goddess, Thetis, and a mortal king, he was fostered with the Cheiron, the Centaur, on Mount Pelion. As Jason and Heracles also shared this upbringing, the Centaur's famous cave must have resembled a kindergarten – though Fisher Price plastic would have been in lesser supply than boulders for the heroic babies to carry, and tiny bronze swords and shields to get them used to the needs of their chosen career path. Other fostered Greek heroes tended to have been exposed, miraculously suckled by animals, (wolves, bears, eagles) and then taken in by peasants, mostly shepherds. Examples of this type of upbringing are to be found with Oedipus, Paris, Romulus. Other ancient heroes were cast adrift in chests or tiny barges, such as Sargon and Moses, again to be brought up in ignorance of their noble heritage. Others similarly brought up include Karna, Telephus, Semiramis, Kraljevic Marko, Marsk Stig, Perseus, Gilgamesh and Cyrus. In the tenth century Persian Shahnameh (The Epic of Kings) alone Dara, Sohrab and Sekander (Alexander the Great) have similar births and ubringings.

Achilles does not so much reject his mother, as simply go his own way, falling in with those loyal Myrmidons, capable of any derring-do. Achilles is fantastically gifted in stamina, speed and fighting ability. He accepts then spurns the offer of the hero quest (the fight against Hector), but when he accepts it

he is victorious. His death, foretold, as are most heroes' deaths, is followed by his appearance as a shade in subsequent legends.

Christ too is born mysteriously and is fostered – in the sense that Joseph is not his father. He is an ordinary child, a carpenter's son, but is seen as extraordinary too in his ability to dispute in the synagogue with adults. He enters the great world as a simple preacher, by this time fully aware of his magical mentor (God) and gathers a most unlikely selection of followers. He is tested by another magical figure (Satan) before setting out on his ministry. His quest of course is redemption for humankind accomplished by his own death, after a particularly crudely engineered betrayal by one of his close friends. He achieves his quest – the rumours of his own survival being so strong that a mystery religion immediately forms around the idea of his triumphant return.

Arthur of course had a magical conception, in many versions was fostered, does not know who he is, had a grand hero father to emulate, had a magical mentor in Merlin, revealed his identity in a spectacular way and gathered to himself a motley following in the Round Table. The great quest for the Grail is of course undertaken by others, other young men, Percival and Galahad, brought up in the same hero mould. In this sense the Arthur of the middle sections of *Le Morte D'Arthur* is like Odysseus, the older character, grand and revered, but with all too distinct flaws. Camelot falls when the Grail is achieved; Arthur is betrayed both by his wife and his best knight and by his incestuous son/nephew/half sister. After his death there are rumours of his survival.

One aspect of the classic hero myth is that they tend not to appear in complete form straightaway, but develop over a number of decades if not centuries. We have little knowledge of how the Odyssey developed before Homer set it down, but Christ's life and Arthur's were moulded and developed before comprehensive versions of their lives – the received versions - were set down. Thus with Christ there is only one Gospel (Luke) that mentions his magical

birth, only one (Matthew) that tells of the magi, but popular sentiment includes these key aspects rather than setting them aside because they are not common to all Gospels. Similarly aspects of Jesus' powers as a child are slim in the four Gospels. They are stronger in the apocryphal gospels, unfamiliar to most of us today. These were those books about Jesus eventually left out when the Church in the fourth century decided what writings about Jesus should be included in the Bible and which left out. In the apocryphal gospels there are vicious stories about Jesus causing overweening teachers to drop dead for daring to question him – like a young Superman unfamiliar with the strength of his powers.

So too Arthur's death, or rather, non-death, is mentioned in one phrase by Geoffrey of Monmouth (1136) but came to be viewed as one of the key aspects of his myth later on. Merlin is more a seer for Arthur's father than the boy in Geoffrey of Monmouth, never appearing in the narrative after Arthur's conception. Also in Geoffrey of Monmouth Arthur's quest is for the base aim of aggrandising his empire. The introduction of the Grail theme half a century later, gives a life enhancing element to the grand quest of the saga, while the establishment of Arthur's Empire becomes little more than an introductory opportunity to establish Arthur's prowess. Mircea Eliade points out that other figures credited with grand deeds (El Cid for instance, Vladimir of Kiev and grandest of all Charlemagne) have become established 'heroes' over a century or two with tales accruing about them that conform to the pattern.

This patterning is obvious in modern as well as ancient material, especially the childhood aspects. Luke Skywalker, for instance, in the original *Star Wars* film (*Episode IV: A New Hope*, 1977) has little idea of his parents, has been fostered, rejects his foster mother abruptly, has a magical mentor in Obi Wan Kenobi, has extraordinary powers, falls in with a strange crew (a princess, a pirate, a camp robot, a squeaking dustbin and an eight foot teddy bear) and after initially faltering takes on his grand hero challenge, which he achieves.

Similarities across the centuries shout out. Look at the similarities between Moses' and Superman's upbringing for instance, or the fostering arrangements experienced by Jason before he found his Argonauts, Lyra in her parallel Oxford (in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*), Luke Skywalker on Tattooine, Hercules and Achilles with the Centaur, and Harry Potter with the Dursleys. The patterns have also been replayed in more mundane settings. Dickens, for instance, used the pattern at least three times with Pip, Oliver Twist and David Copperfield (and at a push, Martin Chuzzlewit). They were all born in mysterious circumstances – to themselves at least - were all fostered, all had 'magical' benefactors and so on.

It has been suggested that all these tales derive from each other – that Arthur is modelled on Christ and so on. One can understand an attempt by mediaeval 'innovators' (if that phrase is not a contradiction) to model their new hero on Christ. But why would twentieth-century film makers feel the need to do the same thing? Also many of the heroes whose lives have similar characteristics have extremely limited cultural links. Sohrab and Rostam (tenth-century Persian tale with Zoroastrian roots), Digines Acrites (eleventh-century Byzantine Christian, but with Muslim sympathies) and Aladdin (ninth-century Abbasid Caliphate) all share elements with Telemachus, Moses, King Arthur and Luke Skywalker.

Ordinary and Extraordinary
Why all these similarities? What is all this about? Following Campbell, I believe that this is because the hero myth offers each one of us some solace. The key emotional and psychological power of this pattern is that we all identify with some aspects of it. We have all faced some of these trials, gone through, them or avoided them. The way the hero experiences life also makes emotional sense. The classic mysterious beginning of the hero tale, for instance, needs little psychological explanation. There are two distinct psychological conundrums facing each of us when we first become conscious of our beginnings. First is the sheer mystery of conception and birth. For each of us our own beginning is a

mystery and the hero tale gives conception and birth their rightful magical status. Secondly and more importantly the best adjusted of us wonder at some stage where it is we come from. I am not referring here to the common anxiety that many children have that they were adopted. I am talking about the eternal mystery of the emergence of our own 'I' from nowhere. There is also the sometimes abrupt realisation that there is a fundamental severance between us and our parents. Those people may love us and nurture us, or if not that they are the reliable wallpaper of our lives. But slowly and irrevocably our self-awareness unfolds us from their arms. We become more separate from them and have to eventually break free. Seeing ourselves as separate from our parents is one of the key tasks across the whole of childhood, not just in late adolescence – although that final separation is the most obvious and most painful. In some hero tales that final severance is deliberate and painful. Percival, Telemachus and Jesus all reject their mothers cruelly. However the general device in the hero myth is that of fosterage, whereby the hero's task of establishing himself as separate is done for him. The hero myth by fostering heroes cleverly highlights the experience of oddness, alienation, and aloneness we all to at some stage share.

Similarly, to ourselves we are all ordinary and extraordinary. At its most fundamental we are extraordinary to ourselves because there is only ever one 'I' in our lives. In that sense fantasies about our own extraordinary powers are understandable. And inevitably there are skills we have or aptitudes that are more pronounced than our fellows. We are all extraordinary in one sense or another. At the same time most young people crave uniformity with their peers. During the teenage years in particular our hair must be dressed in a certain way, codes of behaviour must gel, clothes must have a particular imprint – this is more pronounced now adolescents have spending power, but is no new phenomenon. Each of us demands both mundane conformity and special status at the same time. This emotional oxymoron is common to us all – we all live in and crave both states.

So too is the idea of a magical mentor universal. God, Merlin, Pallas Athene and in modern tales Obi Wan Kenobi, Dumbledore and Gandalf offer their support to our exemplar heroes. As children we are all susceptible to the notion of a god. This is not mere gullibility, or the demand of a society to get us to conform to a given set of beliefs. We all need to feel safe and expect our parents and other carers to look after us. A god figure is at first an extension of that need. Transitional objects, comfort blankets, Guardian Angels, imaginary friends – there are a range of psychological devices ordinary children use to hang onto a sense of security – someone to talk to who can make it alright is one of simplest and most understandable.

In each set of hero tales there is the possibility of consolation, parallel experience, warning, guidance and confirmation of the humanity in of all us. That's why the pattern repeats itself and new tales are twisted to conform to it.

Death

There is one key difference between post-war myth-making and those older hero tales. And this aspect has been completely ignored. In no post-war recreation of the myth does the hero die. Superman, Skywalker, Frodo Baggins, Batman, Peter Parker, Lyra and so on – none of them die.

Even post-war representations of ancient heroes avoid often their deaths. Take Robin Hood for instance. No post-war film of Robin Hood has dealt with his death – even though his death scene is an important part of the cycle. And the film that dealt with his and Marion's old age *Robin and Marion* (1976) was a flop. And which was the last film treatment of King Arthur that dealt with his death?

Partly this avoidance of death is to do with the modes of delivery of tales these days. Commercial pressures demand that next instalment, the next film. Did this first start with Sherlock Holmes? So traumatised was Conan Doyle's public by his disappearance over the Reichenbach Falls that they demanded, and secured, his return. *Dr Who* carries on the BBC TV franchise in the cleverest of ways, by bodily transformation, every time the current actor wants to move on.

But modern entertainment media are by no means the whole story. There's something else. The pattern of the hero myth demands that the hero dies. There may, as with Christ, Arthur and Vladimir of Kiev, be rumours and later legends of the hero's survival, but the hero has to die. Think back, all the ancient and mediaeval heroes mentioned in this article die – it is part of the story. And this is so with Campbell's interpretation; the hero is each of us, so as we have to die, the hero has to die. But in the twenty-first century our view of death is different. Death is not treated as nobly as in previous societies. It is often something to be avoided, ignored, dealt with quickly, kept away from the children and whispered about in dark corners. Or else it is a mistake, caused by negligence, where a culprit has to be found and sued. In general we no longer fear the reality of death as it does not, as it did in all previous eras, stalk daily through everyone's life. As we can tidy it away and it becomes the business only of the old, we act as if we have 'conquered' it. As a result we prepare for death worse than any society on earth and fear it as a distant act of nature, rather than an ever present part of life – and in that way death becomes a greater horror for each of us as we have to deal with it individually rather than in socially sanctioned ways. So Superman, Frodo and Skywalker live on, and I would argue doing great harm in the process both to the pattern of the hero tale and those of us who follow them.

So what of J K Rowling and Harry? Did J K Rowling bottle out at the end? As there may be one or two of you out there who do not know the ending, I will not spoil it for you. But I can say that, true to form, Rowling's ending is a triumph, because in essence, the answer to the question 'does Harry die' is literally 'yes' and 'no'. But that is its ultimate failing, because Harry's survival is no mystery, no rumour, but literal. He, like Christ, defeats death, but only, impossibly, to return to the normal path of his life. So, triumphant as J K Rowling's adherence to the myth is, she chose, at the last turn, to follow the twentieth-century path of avoidance. Death is not so much defeated as sidelined – as so many of us try to do today. ∞

Appropriately enough for an edition touching so much upon matters of the Grail [the last] edition is something of a cornucopia of delights, from Simon Rouse's delightfully intricate cover (a fine blend of Simon's illustrative styles) right down to the very last sentence on the very last page: "...what more ... could one ask for?" It's interesting, though, how, in a journal of balanced argument, one man's meat can be another man's poison. That's such a shame that Charles Evans-Günther has decided to cancel his subscription. I feel that his input will be a loss, and it's so sad to think that he felt so badly about where Pendragon is apparently going. To me, it seems that the journal is going from strength to strength; if "The Rich Fisher" is anything to go by there's certainly a wealth of erudition and creativity out there.

Speaking of creativity, there's some excellent poetry in this edition. Steve Sneyd's "Reason Under Drizzle" and "Under the Iron Laws of Hospitality" are both thought-provoking. I like his succinct approach in "Reason under Drizzle", and "Under the Laws of Hospitality" sets the mood of frustration in an incomplete Grail quest so wonderfully well. Ruth Drobnak's "Aneirin's Lament" goes right to the heart and Jane Perr's "Le Morte d'Arthur" voices well the argument for a real dark age (whether or not one agrees with the idea). By the way, if Jane Perr is still researching theories behind climate change due to meteoritic impact or other causes during the dark ages, it might be worth her time seeking a copy of "Catastrophe" by David Keys (Random House 1999). Although the results of testing his hypothesis weren't entirely conclusive the author's arguments for climatic turmoil and its likely effects on civilisation at the time are pretty good in themselves and give substantial food for thought. Dave Burnham's "Pendragon Jubilee" is wonderful. Even though I couldn't be there myself, I feel as if I was watching through sleepy Merlin's eyes, being distant and yet not distant, recognising everyone and sharing the magical fascination and friendship that is the Pendragon Society.

Ian Brown, Ormesby, Middlesbrough

An Epic Preview

Scoring the *Pendragon: Sword of His Father* theatrical trailer

Lydia L Ashton

The story of Arthur is one of the richest, most diverse legends in history. His was a time of changing fortunes, of the collision between Christianity and the old gods, of starvation, and of invasion. From this rich soil many stories spring, including the upcoming feature film *Pendragon: Sword of His Father* by the Burns Family Studios. This film has been in production since 2005, but I was not a part of production until the spring of 2007.

My husband, Nathan, and I are involved with audio postproduction for independent films. Postproduction encompasses any work not done on the actual movie set during filming. Nathan fixes problems with the live audio (sweetening), replaces dialog where necessary (ADR), inserts sound effects (SFX cutting), re-creates sounds to match actor's movements (foley), records original hyper-real sound elements (sound design), and combines all the audio tracks into their final form (remix). I do real work. I write the music.

The Burns Family Studio first approached us for advice on sound and music for *Pendragon*. After screening some of their film footage and discussing with them on what we could bring to the table, Nathan was offered the position of Foley Sound Engineer. They had already chosen an in-house composer Aaron Burns, who also plays Artos on screen, to write the film score. Since I have composed for several features and many short films, I had some advice to offer Aaron and we had a couple of pleasant phone conversations.

Distance was one of our first obstacles. The Burns studio is located in Illinois just east of St Louis. We are in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Much of the filming was taking place in Michigan and central Indiana. Eventually we decided to meet and talk about the film. In July of 2007, Nathan and I took an extended trip and visited Aaron in Michigan. On our way home we saw Chad (Director) and Nick Burns (Art Director and Lead Editor) in St Louis. In the film industry it is important to build rapport between key people so that there is a level of trust present during deadline crunch time. This proved vital in October.

In early October, the studio decided to make a trailer to show at the San Antonio Independent Christian Film Festival the last week of October. Aaron did not have time to score the trailer so they contacted me to see if I would write the score. I eagerly agreed and we discussed possible styles of music and preferred instrumentation.

The legends of Arthur involve such larger-than-life events and people at the Burns Family Studio wanted music reflecting the legend's scope to amplify what was happening on the screen. The music needed to be "epic" and "grand." Chad asked for full orchestration with lots of percussion, soaring vocals, and a choir similar to those used for *Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings*. I spent the following week listening to the music from those films to get ready for scoring the trailer.

Once the locked picture arrived I had five days to compose and record the score. Nathan was doing the foley and sound sweetening in addition to helping me with the mixing of the music. We worked as a tag-team. I started composing at about 8pm in the evening and went to bed early the next morning. At that point Nathan woke up and worked on his part of the project. We sent regular draft renditions to Chad Burns so that he could provide feedback and direction along the way. And we couldn't forget our three children.

Hengest

I attached a specific music motif to each event or person. In the beginning of the trailer, you see the enemy approaching and realize that war is at hand. This growing visual threat is described musically by low strings and rumbling percussion. The sounds are dark, threatening, and foreboding. When Artos decides to fight for his people, I wrote a "heroic theme" by introducing horns accompanied by energetic percussion and arpeggio strings. This new sound contrasts drastically with the threatening sound in the beginning of the trailer and suggests hope.

With the outbreak of war, the opening low strings and heavy percussion return with a fast, aggressive, "in your face" sound rather than lurking in the background like it did in the beginning. I also added a choir. As Arthur enters the war, a voice sings the "epic hero theme" on top of the aggressive strings and percussion. In this way, the two themes are combined. The voice indicates time passing and clarifies the action by telling us that it will not be easy for Arthur to win this fight. The voice also tells us that the war can only be won through great sacrifice.

For most of the trailer, the choirs do not actually sing words, but toward the end of the first half they sing "Cost everything, cost you dearly. Count the price, carry your burden." The lyrics underline what is being said on screen at that point.

This film hinges on the words of the monk Lailoken of the Arthurian legend, "Artos, the One who gave the vision still calls." The conclusion of the plot is this: The Pendragon must rise, defend his people, and drive away the evil. One of my favorite moments in the score occurs right here as the choir slides upward into the final, climatic breakneck race through the war and death. Even the musical elements are in conflict with the percussion, string arpeggios, soaring voice, rumbling bass colliding with each other and fighting for supremacy. In the end, the voice is the last remaining sound. Since the voice has represented Artos in conflict we are left with a sense of grim hope.

Friday night, the day before we had to be finished, the music production nearly imploded. The Director called with several modest suggestions and one major problem; he didn't like the middle third of the trailer. We held a flurry of phone calls with Chad, Aaron, and Nick Burns. There were some solid reasons for the objections. Essentially the directors felt music following the line "Ambition stands in his way" didn't fit the subtext of that section. The conflict on screen was not being adequately reflected in the

score. The music was too grand. We agreed, talked through options, scrapped everything from "ambition" through Lailoken's speech, and went back to work.

The result of the re-write was worth the effort. It is darker, moodier, and carries a much higher level of intensity. In the end, Nathan and I spent over 40 hours creating and mixing music for 2.5 minutes of film. This does not include the time Nathan spent working on foley and dialogue. Sometimes sleep is optional.

All of the music except the solo voice is computer generated using MIDI and sound libraries played back on a Macintosh. I use a sequencing program called Digital Performer that allows me to mix MIDI with live audio and makes it easy to line up music with the picture. I used primarily three sound libraries, EWQL (EastWest/QuantumLeap) Symphonic Orchestra Platinum XP, EWQL Symphonic Choirs, and Stylus RMX from Spectrasonics. Both the EWQL libraries use sampled recordings of real performers and use the Kontakt playback engine to give me considerable control over volume, attack, decay, and blend on each individual instrument. Symphonic Choirs is a particularly impressive software package with a steep learning curve that can be programmed to sing actual words. Since this was one of our first real works using this software, the choir words in the trailer are a bit hard to understand. Stylus RMX from Spectrasonics is a powerful percussion generator favored by many contemporary TV composers.

The solo voice was Laura Glatfelter. Ms Glatfelter is a senior vocal performance major at a local university. She was amazing. Since the vocal part had no lyrics, much of the phrasing was open to interpretation. The disjointed nature of the vocal part made it very difficult to perform smoothly. Finally, the rushed time frame of the project meant that there was no time for re-takes. Ms Glatfelter had an hour to sight-read a strange part, interpret it, and nail it on cue. Every time I work with trained musicians I am reminded of the strength and versatility of a structured classical music foundation.

The trailer premiered at the San Antonio Independent Christian Film Festival on October 25, 2007. It was very well received and generated abundant interest in the Burns Family Studio and in the Arthurian legend. I am very happy that I had the opportunity to score this piece, because I have a special interest in the legends of Arthur. The Burns Family Studio was great to work with and I hope to work with them again in the future. ∞

You can watch the trailer on my web site www.LydiaLAshton.tv
Pendragon: Sword of His Father will be released Fall of 2008. You can read more about Burns Family Studio, the film, and its production at
www.PendragonMovie.com

The Narrative Literature of Medieval Europe Part 2   W M S Russell

In the first part of this feature review, I began to review Tony Davenport's magnificent book *Medieval Narrative*, covering first his preliminary discussions of classification and analysis, genres, prologues and narrators. The bulk of the book consists of his accounts of all the genres in turn, and in my first part I dealt with his accounts of *exempla*, fables and chronicles. In this second part I will deal with the remaining genres.

Epics

Davenport quotes the entertaining definition of epic in the first Canto of Byron's *Don Juan*, and distinguishes the primary epics of Homer (heroic poetry) from the literary epic of Virgil. Most of the medieval epics considered are primary, heroic. Davenport begins with the *Hildebrandslied* (AD *c* 800), of which only 68 lines survive. In this epic the hero kills his own son in combat, like the Irish hero Cuchulainn and the Persian hero Rustum. Similarly only 48 lines survive of *The Fight at Finnsburg*, but references in other works show this was about a feud and the defence of a hall. *Waldere*, which survives only in fragments, was the basis of the 10th-century Latin literary epic *Waltharius*, set in the time of Attila. Davenport gives outlines of these three narratives.

Though of course Grendel, his mother and the Fire-drake are fantastic, *Beowulf* contains a number of references to real history, which Davenport details. He considers it has become a rather literary production, but at least in outline it seems to fit the character of heroic poetry.

Davenport then makes a very interesting contrast between the Anglo-Saxon poems about *The Battle of Brunanburh* (fought AD 937) and *The Battle of Maldon* (fought 991). The former poem he classifies as a chronicle, celebrating a victory, the latter poem as an epic, commemorating the heroism of the losing general, Byrhtnoth.

Davenport gives a detailed account of the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*, written about 1200, a sizeable poem of about 9000 lines. He sees it as transitional between epic and romance, but it does contain a lot about clothes and dressing, which Bowra shows to be characteristic of heroic poetry.[1] However, Bowra agrees with Davenport about the poem's transitional status between heroic and romantic.[2]

Davenport gives a detailed account of the *Chanson de Roland*, and describes its relation to, and distortion of, history. On 15 August AD 778, Charlemagne was retreating across the Pyrenees after a not very successful foray into Moorish Spain.[3] In the gorge of Roncevaux, his rear-guard was treacherously attacked and wiped out by a band of Christian Basques.[4] At first the chroniclers quietly omitted to mention this humiliating episode.[5] But between 829 and 836 Einhard wrote in Latin his *Life of Charlemagne*,[6] in which he reported the disaster, and noted that among the slain was *Hruodlandus Britannici limitis praefectus*,[7] correctly translated by Davenport as 'Roland, prefect of the Breton march' (116). The name

[1] Bowra, C M (1964) *Heroic Poetry* (London: Macmillan) 188-91
[2] *Ibid* 546-7
[3] Gentil, P de (1968) *La Littérature Française du Moyen Age* (Paris: Armand Colin) 34
[4] Halphen, L (1968) *Charlemagne et l'Empire Carolingien* (Paris: Albin Michel) 83
[5] *Ibid*
[6] Thorpe, L *transl* (1969) *Einhard and Notker the Stammerer: Two Lives of Charlemagne* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books) 15
[7] Bowra (ref 1) 517

Roncevaux appears for the first time in about 1070, in a Spanish monk's note on the massacre.[8] Since Roland had such a high post as warden of an important march, he must have been one of Charlemagne's leading nobles; the Bretons were not in the Empire, so as Warden of the March Roland must have been responsible for the defence of the frontier against them. But nothing whatever more is head of him in history. However, like Arthur, he became a great hero, probably in the 11th century, and was the protagonist of the *Chanson de Roland* in the 12th.

Davenport notes that in the *Chanson* the Christian Basques have been replaced by Saracens, and the relatively minor massacre expanded to a major battle. He shows how natural this was in an age when Christians were in conflict with Moslems not only in Spain but in the Levant and all over the Mediterranean, following the First Crusade. But this necessitated the invention of Ganelon to plot treachery with the Saracens. Other inventions were Roland's friend Oliver and the presence of the historic Archbishop Turpin in the battle, which is unhistorical. Also, twelve Saracen leaders were invented to match Charlemagne's famous twelve paladins.[9] In the course of his detailed outline of the *Chanson*, with several quotations, Davenport makes a most interesting comparison of Ganelon's motivation with that of Iago. On the other hand, Davenport shows in detail that the Spanish epic *Cantar de mio Cid* includes a great deal of historical detail, though this epic, too, mixes in some fiction.

Davenport analyses Layamon's Arthurian *Brut* as intermediate between chronicle and epic, and interestingly contrasts two Middle English Arthurian poems, the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, epic, and the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, romance, though they appeared at about the same time in the 14th century. Continuing this theme of epic and romance, he notes the influence fo Virgil on Walter of Chatillon's *Alexandreis* romance, Benoit de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, and Petrarch's unsuccessful literary epic *Africa*. And he ends this section with Boccacio's *Teseida*, a mixture of epic and romance, which became pure romance in Chaucer's shortened version, *The Knight's Tale*.

Romances

[Arthurian] romances are obviously the narratives of greatest interest to Arthurians, but these are only a fraction of the large number of romances. In the first part of this review I counted over sixty romances in French, and there are said to be 'one hundred or more' Middle English romances, though these are extremely varied in content.[10] This section of Davenport's book is a splendid introduction to the subject.

Since he includes both short and long poems here, Davenport begins with short romances, the *Lais* of Marie de France, and he does a great service by providing outlines of all but one very short one of her twelve *lais*. I am particularly grateful, since I always thought they would be very interesting – and his outlines confirm this – but Marie's 12th-century French is quite beyond me! Davenport mentions a good translation of the *Lais*, a Penguin book by Burgess and Busby (1986). One of the *lais, Chevrefoil*, is Arthurian, about Tristan.

We are on familiar ground in the next passage, about Chrétien de Troyes. Davenport makes the good point that Chrétien 'saw the possibilities of a single tale, created by following the adventures of one knight or focussing on one type of adventure as in his Grail narrative' (136). After the adulterous loves of the troubadours, it was a great innovation to have married lovers in three of his romances. But in *Lancelot* he reverted to adultery, possibly under pressure from one of his patrons, Marie de Champagne.[11] Davenport notes his decisive influence on French, Middle English and German romances – including (to my mind) the greatest of them all, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. I would add the three splendid Welsh romances in the *Mabinogion*.

After noting the romance material in the Latin works of Gerald the Welshman

[8] Gentil (ref 3) 35
[9] Bowra (ref 1) 532
[10] Shepherd, S H A (1993) *Middle English Romances* (New Yrok and London) xii
[11] Gentil (ref 3) 86-7

and Walter Map, Davenport turns to the various Tristan romances. He shows the change from the action adventure of Béroul (*c* 1190) to the more psychological treatments of the Anglo-Norman Thomas (1160s) and Gottfried von Strassburg (*c* 1200); in the long *Prose Tristan* (1230-50) the love story is accompanied by other knightly episodes in the general context of the Arthurian Round Table.

After considering the romances set in ancient times, the most famous being Benoit de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, and several Anglo-Norman romances, Davenport deals with the large, and to most people unfamiliar, subject of Middle English romances. This is a 'large body' of literature (141), over 100 as mentioned earlier. The early (13th century) ones are about 'homespun heroes who win kingdoms and brides against usurping regents (*Havelok the Dane*) and Vikings disguised as Saracens (*King Horn*) and young love triumphant over circumstance (*Floriz and Blauncheflour*)' (141). I do not know whether the title of Thomas Love Peacock's poem "Florence and Blanchflor" (in *Crotchet Castle*) is a coincidence: he says it is 'imitated from the *Fabliau de Florence et de Blanche Flor, alias Jugement d'Amor*',[12] but it certainly is not about young love triumphant. In such a large literature it would not be surprising if two quite different works had similar titles, and certainly a fabliau is not a romance.

Of the vast number of later Middle English romances, 'almost all in verse until the late fifteenth century', Davenport supplies a sample 'snapshot' (142). He discusses some of the 17 Middle English romances contained in the Auchinleck manuscript, compiled about 1330-40 and containing a number of works in different genres, nearly all in English. He notes in a number of these a determinedly English background, and he quotes the opening of one of them, *Arthur and Merlin*:

Of French or Latin I'll tell no more
And in English I shall tell therefore...
Many a noble I have known

That could speak no French.
(I have modernised this, I hope correctly.) Arthurian subjects are relatively rare, though Davenport mentions several besides *Arthur and Merlin*. 'Alliterative romances ... seem to have developed later, with *William of Palerne* in the 1350s the earliest' (144). The hero of this romance, Alphonse, is one of the *good* werewolves quite common in folklore, medieval and even modern literature; at the end of the story he is disenchanted.[13] In a very interesting passage, Davenport discusses Chaucer's varied and, as usual, sophisticated treatment of romance and its themes. By the late 15th century romances tended to be in prose, but there were a few late verse ones, including *Sir Degrevant*. Davenport has published elsewhere about this romance.[14] He says the name is usually considered a variant of Agravain. His account shows that this knight, whom we are accustomed to consider a double-dyed villain, 'has his moment of glory', for in this romance he is a real hero.[15]

Davenport naturally ends this section with the great prose work of Malory. He notes Malory's apparently chronicle style, his use of parataxis (discussed in my first part), and his blending of the wars of Geoffrey, Wace and Layamon with the knightly adventures of Chrétien and his successors. 'Malory presents the most contradictory version of that medieval conflict between fiction and truth, an absolute conviction of manner with almost complete unreality of content' (149).

Medieval romances had a remarkably long run. A number of them were printed in the 16th century, along with

[12] Evans, B L *ed*, Priestley, J B *introd* (1967) *Novels of Thomas Love Peacock* (London: Pan Books) 356-7

[13] Russell, W M S and Russell, C "The Social Biology of Werewolves" in Porter, J R and Russell, W M S *eds* (1978) *Animals in Folklore* (Ipswich and Cambridge: D S Brewer for The Folklore Society) 176-7
[14] Davenport, W A "Sir Degrevant and Composite Romance" in Weiss, J, Fellows, J and Dickson, M *eds* (2000) *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation* (Cambridge: D S Brewer) 111=131
[15] Russell, W M S (2001) Review of Davenport (ref 14) *Pendragon XXIX* No 2, 38

some new ones. Translations of the late Spanish romance *Amadis de Gaula* were tremendously popular;[16] the Spanish original was a crucial influence on Don Quixote! By the 18th century, other forms of literature had taken over respectable well-made books. But versions of the medieval and later romances, shortened and simplified, often very skilfully, were published in rough little booklets – the English chap-book, French *bibliothèque bleue*, and German *Volksschrift*.[17] These continued to be produced well into the 19th century. They were read by working-class adults and middle-class children, such as Coleridge and Goethe.[18]

In 1979, in the ruins of Reading Abbey, I saw an open-air performance by the Reading Street Theatre of an unscripted and improvised but beautifully directed and acted little play, about Sir Gawain and an extremely ugly woman. (One kiss restored her beauty, but only by day *or* night; when Gawain gave *her* the choice the spell was completely broken and her beauty was restored all the time.)[19] Now this tale is told in two Middle English poems of the 15th century, a romance and a ballad, both conveniently available in a recent collection with a running glossary and copious notes.[20] A somewhat different version, but still Arthurian, is told by Chaucer's Wife of Bath.[21] Now how did a 15th-century tale, set in the North of England, arrive at Reading in 1979? 'I managed to find the director of the Reading Street Theatre, Chris Bertrand. He very kindly wrote and later talked to me at length', and gave me the answer.[22] He had got the story, which he had

dramatised so well, from a book of Arthurian tales retold by Roger Lancelyn Green.[23] Like all Green's books, this one is a delight to read, even for those familiar with the originals. So he had transmitted the tale from the 15th to the 20th century.

Fabliaux and Nouvelles

Davenport next turns to the comic tales of the Middle Ages. With again the curious medieval definitions (in contrast to ancient and modern ones), John of Garland tells us that 'A comedy is a humorous poem beginning in sadness and ending in joy' (153). Davenport points out that the comic tales Chaucer gives to the Miller, the Reeve, the Cook and the Shipman are English examples of the French *fabliaux*, which I discussed in the first part of this review. He outlines the ingenious French *fabliau* of the Three Hunchbacks, in which the jealous husband is conveniently got rid of – rather like the charming song *Le Fiacre*, sung by Jean Sablon, in which the jealous husband falls under the fiacre containing the two lovers, and is 'écrabouillé'. Davenport tells us of the English and Anglo-Norman *fabliaux* before Chaucer, and outlines a very amusing one, 'Dame Sirith', and one of the early 14th century from the Auchinleck manuscript called 'A Pennyworth of Wit', from which he gives illustrative quotations.

[16] Russell, W M S "Alvaro Cunqueiro: Merlin and Company" *Pendragon XXXII* No 4 (2005) 35-36
[17] Simons, J ed (1998) *Guy of Warwick and Other Chapbook Romances* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press) 14-19
[18] Russell, W M S "Folktales and the Theatre" *Folklore 92* (1981) 3-24, especially 3
[19] Russell, W M S "Sir Gawain in Reading" *Pendragon XXV* No 1 (1995) 4-7
[20] Shepherd (ref 10) 243-267, 378-387
[21] Russell, W M S "Tarn Wadling and Montségur" *Pendragon XXV* Nos 3 and 4, 33-34
[22] Russell (ref 19) 7
[23] Green, R L (1953) *King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books) 164-174

Davenport then turns to the *novella* or *nouvelle*, which, as mentioned in the first part of my review, corresponds not to our novel or novella but to our short story. He begins with the 13th-century Italian collection of 100 tales called *Il Novellino* – from one of these Tennyson got the theme of his wonderful poem 'The Lady of Shallot'.[24] From the *Decameron* onwards, he notes, *novella* or *nouvelles* are not necessarily comic, and they are generally more sophisticated than the *fabliaux*.

Returning to Chaucer, Davenport discusses the elaboration of *fabliaux* plots by him and Boccaccio, with a detailed discussion, with quotations, of two tales treated by both of them, in Chaucer the tales of the Shipman and the Miller. And he notes some 15th-century imitations or *pastiches* of Chaucer's comic tales. Chaucer and his imitators were not the last English writers to use *fabliaux*. I have shown that Richmal Crompton made brilliant use of the *fabliau* 'Le Pauvre Clerc' in an episode of *William in Trouble*.[25]

Davenport ends this section with 'the famous German collection of "merry pranks" associated with Till Eulenspiegel' (178). (In the German of the time, the name means not *owl-mirror* but *scrape-arse*, very appropriate for his often scatological pranks.) Davenport discusses the author and the sources in earlier German jest-books, and notes that Till often created havoc by his habit of *literally* obeying orders. Personally I can never read about Till without hearing the delightful motif from Richard Strauss's tone-poem.

Journeys, Visions and Dreams

Davenport next considers imaginative literature, beginning with journeys. He discusses Sir John Mandeville's *Travels*, 'originally written in French about 1360 but had been translated into most European languages by 1400; about 250 manuscripts survive, some of them magnificently illustrated and indicating

the appeal of the work to an aristocratic audience' (182). 'This fiction which pretends to be an account of a genuine journey and incorporates factual material' (183) was long taken as seriously as Geoffrey's *Historia*, slightly but not much more deserving of this belief.

At this point I cannot resist putting in my own favourite medieval journey, *Herzog Ernst*. This Middle High German fantasy poem, unlike *Parzifal*, *Tristan und Isolde* and the *Nibelungenlied*, was *continuously* popular from the 12th century to the present, with versions in the *Volksschriften* from the 15th to the 19th centuries.[26] There is a terrifying moment when the heroes, having explored an incredibly wealthy and apparently unoccupied city, hear a frightening noise and then see the inhabitants returning – in every way beautiful and stately people, but with the necks and heads of cranes![27]

The next voyage, St Brendan's, is a transition to the otherworldly visions, for the saint and his companions pass an island of fire which is clearly a mouth of Hell, for one of the monks is seized by devils and taken there. Davenport mentions Latin, Anglo-Norman and English versions of a visit to St Patrick's Purgatory (off the Irish coast) and of the vision of the monk Tundale when near death, and more visions told by Bede and Roger of Wendover. There were many such visions before Dante. Theodoric, Dagobert I and Magnus of Denmark were all seen on their way to Hell, and 'Scottish visionaries saw Edward I carried off to Hell by demons, and William Wallace borne up to Heaven by angels.[28] Davenport rightly declares the *Divina Commedia* too large a subject to be packed into his already dense book. But he quotes the claim that the poem has both literal and allegorical meanings in the *Letter to Can Grande*, sometimes ascribed to the poet himself, but 'the authorship of which is still

[24] Russell, W M S "Tennyson and Arthur (2)" *Pendragon XXXI* No 1 (2003) 23-28, especially 23
[25] Russell W M S "Literary Adaptation of a Fabliau" *Folklore Society News* No 29 (1999) 14-15
[26] Sowinski, B ed and transl (into modern German) (1972) *Herzog Ernst* (Stuttgart: Philip Reclam Jun.) 403-404
[27] *Ibid* 160-163
[28] Russell, W M S "Dante and Arthur" *Pendragon XXVIII* No 1 (1999) 32-37, especially 33

disputed' (191). From the sublime to the ridiculous, Davenport ends this account of otherworldly visions with the 13th-century Irish *The Land of Cokaygne*, where milk and honey flow and walls are made of cakes, *etc.* I have shown there is an echo of this fantasy in the Schmoos of Al Capp's great comic strip *Li'l Abner*, whose supreme ambition was to be eaten, taking the form that would give most pleasure.[29]

Passing on to dream narratives, Davenport notes that they permit flights of fancy without arousing the medieval worry about fiction not being true. He discusses the influence of Boethius and Macrobius, who distinguished five types of dreams – nightmare, apparitions and three kinds of prophetic dreams. Chaucer includes a discussion of dream interpretation between the cock Chauntecleer and his hen wife Pertelote, and a cogitation about dreams by the narrator of *The Parliament of Fowls* after he has been reading Macrobius.

Davenport discusses at length religious dream poems. These include *The Dream of the Rood*, *Pearl*, the three dream poems about pilgrimage by Guillaume de Deguileville, and the no less than *ten* dreams of *Piers Plowman*.

Returning to Chaucer, Davenport calls the dream in *The House of Fame* 'a spectacularly extrovert venture into medieval science fiction' (205) – with some reason, when the dreamer is taught Aristotelian mechanics and the physics of sound by an eagle who is carrying through the air! In *The Parliament of Fowls* 'an apparently serious opening has managed to slip and slide by degrees through a whole repertoire of fourteenth-century notions of dream towards playful fun' (208-9):

The goos, the duk, and the cukkowe also
So criden: 'Kek! Kek!', 'Kukkowe',
  'Quek, quek!' hye
That through myn eres the noyse went tho.

'Tragedies'

Davenport compares two poems that called themselves explicitly *tragedies*, in the odd medieval sense I have discussed

more than once of tragic *narratives*. The two are the alliterative *Morte Arture* and Chaucer's second-greatest poem, *Troilus and Criseyde*. Like the Attic tragedians, these poets used well-known tales. The *Morte Arture* tells of the war against Rome and the final Mordred episode. It is essentially an epic about fighting. It is based on Geoffrey, Wace and Layamon. Chaucer's poem is of course mainly about love (gone wrong), and approximates to romance. It is based on *Il Filostrato*, a poem by Boccaccio, and on Lollius, a writer about the Trojan War. This Lollius resulted from an amusing misreading of an epistle of Horace's to a friend called Lollius, in which he talks of re-reading the writer about the Trojan War (obviously Homer). Chaucer had made the mistake when he put Lollius on a pillar with Homer in *The House of Fame*. By the time he wrote *Troilus* he *may* have known better and have been making a joke.[30] The *Morte Arture* has 4346 lines, *Troilus* 8239. Both poets make a point of their hero's rise and fall, and therefore of the tragic nature of their poems.

As a pendant to the section on dreams, Davenport makes a detailed comparison of the dramatic use of dreams in both poems. This is quite fascinating, but alas impossible to summarise – it has to be read in full to be enjoyed.

[29] Russell, W M S "Avalon, Munsalvaesche, Rothesay and Cockaigne" *Pendragon XXXII* No 1 (2004) 4

[30] Highet, G (1967) *The Classical Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press) 96-97

Tale Collections, Cycles and Composites

In considering tale collections, Davenport begins by discussing the Auchinleck manuscript and several other *composite* manuscripts. While they are 'miscellaneous compilations, they show' (as he demonstrates) 'signs of editing, grouping, and placing of texts' (240). Then he considers collections of similar tales – *exempla* collections such as the *Alphabet of Tales*, and collections of saints' and martyrs' lives, the most famous being of course the *Golden Legend*; he notes a number of English works based on it. Then he notes that Marie de France's fables and Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* 'were given an overall coherence not only by repetition of narrative formulae and recurrence of situations and themes, but by a defining prologue which explained the purpose of the collection and established the narrator's voice' (241). Though Chaucer tries to introduce as many variations of treatment as possible, even he cannot avoid a certain repetitiveness in a series of stories all about virtuous women 'as the victims of deceiving men' (242).

After several examples of collections with a narrator linking the tales, Davenport turns to collections with a *frame* story. There is *The Seven Sages of Rome*, in which a wicked stepmother tells seven tales to persuade her Emperor husband to kill his son, seven sages tell tales to recommend mercy, and the prince tells the final tale which convinces the Emperor, who spares him and punishes the Empress. There is a chapbook version of this work.[31] Other collections with frames described by Davenport are the Spanish *Libro de Buen Amor* and Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. But 'Boccaccio and Chaucer are the only two medieval writers who triumphantly solve the problems inherent in writing a tale collection – how to create unity and coherence in the series and yet leave room for individuality and constant surprise in the tales' (248).

In Boccaccio's frame, seven women and three men in country estates, avoiding plague in the city and telling tales for entertainment, 'the hundred tales are rendered comprehensible as a totality by the division into ten sets of

ten and the setting of the themes day by day (and this is made flexible enough to allow the subjects for two of the days to be left to individual choice)' (249).

After rightly omitting the *Divina Commedia* as too large a subject for this book, Davenport does now devote 20 pages (besides the many earlier references) to the second-greatest medieval narrative poem, *The Canterbury Tales*. The great poem is incomplete. According to the Host's plan, it should have been '120 or so tales', but 'only about a fifth of that number was written and some of the tales that exist are unfinished' (249),

'On the basis of earlier explorations of the roles of teller and listener, Chaucer invented the fascinating narrative complexity of *The Canterbury Tales* and its variety of invented voices. The character called Chaucer ... has apparently the most reticent of the voices, even though it is the one that repeats the words of all the rest. The Host's voice is, in contrast, loud and clear... The voices of the pilgrims are used both to tell the stories and to express the audience's reception of them: all are simultaneously tellers and listeners, narrators and commentators' (251-2).

A particularly delightful feature is Chaucer's jokes against himself. He deliberately tells the worst of all the tales, the tale of Sir Thopas, which is 'composed of doggerel, cliché, a naïve mishmash of fairy bride, giant, armour, and high-sounding bravado' (254). He lets the Man of Law 'imply that Chaucer the poet has written far too much and is not very good at metre, rhyme, and the whole business of writing English' (254). Da Ponte and Mozart made a similar joke at Don Giovanni's supper, when his musicians play 'Non piu andrai' from *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and Leporello sings *Questa poi la conosco pur troppo!* ('I know this one too well!') or, as Edward J Dent renders it freely, 'Well, I can't say I think much of this tune!' Davenport proceeds, with illustration and quotation, to show the lively interactions between the pilgrims that bring the whole thing to life, and the allotment of different genres to different voices that makes the poem 'a virtuoso tour de force of medieval narrative kinds and styles' (264).

[31] Simons (ref 17) 36-38, 151-166

Davenport now introduces an absolutely brilliant dichotomy between two kinds of tale collections, centripetal and centrifugal. The *Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales* are centripetal: a host of disparate tales are gathered towards a central frame story. Conversely, the *Roman de Renart* is centrifugal: once the central narrative of *Ysengrimus* has introduced the hero and the supporting cast, a host of tales branch out from this centre in all directions. Similarly, once Till Eulenspiegel has been invented, an unlimited number of tales about him can be told.

The same principle can be applied to whole cycles of long narratives, at least the centrifugal type. Once the *Chanson de Guillaume* (d'Orange) existed no less than twenty-three chansons could branch out from this centre, telling the exploits of Guillaume's large family.[32] Davenport observes that the same can be said of the whole vast cycle of the Matter of Britain, branching out from the two centres of Geoffrey and Chrétien. But, as Davenport shows with a quick glance through some of the romances, this cycle is immensely complex, with an intricate interweaving of themes and episodes. He mentions C S Lewis's term for this as *polyphonic* narrative. Dante was already well aware of this Arthurian feature. In his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (*l* 10) he praises 'the convoluted but very beautiful narratives of king Arthur' (my translation of *Arturi Regis ambages pulcherrime*).[33] Davenport then analyses the polyphony and composite structure of the Malory manuscript, which combines Geoffrey's Arthurian wars with Chrétien's knightly adventures and the Grail, probably taking off from the great – and huge – Vulgate *Lancelot*. And he finally analyses the interweaving of three stories in the brilliant composite structure of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Postscript

Davenport ends with a few generalisations. In the first part of my review I marvelled at the amount of narrative literature surviving in manuscript, but Davenport makes the equally valid point that, apart from no doubt a lot of manuscripts that did *not* survive, we must have lost a vast amount of story material that never got written down, and of which only a fraction was transmitted by spoken tradition to persist as modern folktales.

Next he notes that we must expect large historical differences between narrative works spread over the roughly 700 years of the medieval period. Of course modern literature has had an equally long run, extending as it does from Ariosto to Arthur C Clarke.

He notes the political use of many of the narratives, a subject I have often discussed, most recently in connection with Edward IV.[34][35]

And finally Davenport looks at four narrative *journeys* in the 14th century – *Piers Plowman, Confessio Amantis, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *The Canterbury Tales*, and notes that none of them, any more than the *Odyssey*, has a really final ending. But then, as it has been wisely said, to travel hopefully is better than to arrive. ∞

[32] Gentil (ref 3) 41
[33] Russell (ref 28) 33
[34] Russell, W M S "Alchemy, Arthur and this Sun of York (1)" *Pendragon XXXII* No 3 (2005) 34-41
[35] Russell, W M S "Alchemy, Arthur and this Sun of York (2)" *Pendragon XXXIII* No 2 (2005-6) 39-46

⟪REVIEWS⟫ Bernard O'Donoghue *transl* **Sir Gawain and the Green Knight** Penguin 2006 £8.99 0 140 42453 9 PB 94pp
Simon Armitage *transl* **Sir Gawain and the Green Knight** Faber and Faber 2007 £12.99 978 0 571 22327 5 HB 114pp

Over the years there have been many modernised versions of that wonderful anonymous Arthurian poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, including those of Gwyn Jones (republished in Wordsworth Classics) and Brian Stone (long available in Penguin Classics). Side by side with the popular renditions there have of course been scholarly editions, with the original Middle English text glossed in the margins and in footnotes, but in general these have not made the poem really accessible to the modern public. How successful as translations the popular versions have been, from the rather Victorianised archaisms of Jones to the awkward 20th-century alliterations of Stone, is debatable, and so the need for a readable 21st-century presentation has been well overdue.

The celebrated children's author Alan Garner hailed from the same north-west background as the *Gawain* poet, and as he has noted the Middle English of the poem has no mysteries for him, a native of Cheshire.[1] For those of us brought up with Standard English or Received Pronunciation the problem is more acute, leading to a need for a modernised text retaining both the story and the flavour of the language. Two recent attempts have appeared in cheap editions (Simon Armitage's translation – one that "you can actually read for pleasure" according to Nicholas Lezard[2] – is now available in Faber paperback priced at £7.99) and the question is, how successful are they?

Brian Stone's elderly translation of 1959 has been replaced in Penguin Classics by that of Bernard O'Donoghue. He has eschewed the alliteration of the original while trying to retain the original stress-patterns and rhythms of the poem, leading often to what he terms "post-Shakespearean blank-verse". When Gawain prepares for his re-encounter with the Knight, "He put on his magnificent clothes, / his topcoat with its emblem of the clearest design / emblazoned in velvet, with precious stones / set and sewn into it, embroidered at the seams, / and elegantly edged with most beautiful furs." As a poet O'Donoghue cannot totally avoid alliteration, but it is not a slavish imitation of the original. With introduction and notes this is a more than worthy replacement of Stone's version (compare Stone's rather archaic "While he was putting on apparel of the most princely kind...").

Simon Armitage, also a poet, had the fortune of his version being produced as a BBC radio play, and no wonder. He *does* consciously attempt sustained alliteration, but it doesn't feel forced: "He clothes himself in the costliest costume: / his coat with the brightly emblazoned badge / mounted on velvet; magical minerals / inside and set about it; embroidered seams; / a lining finished with fabulous furs..." A little later on the description of his horse Gringolet also comes over as natural: "The steed had been stabled in comfort and safety / and snorted and stamped in readiness for the ride." Of these two translations I prefer Armitage's for its flow and approachability; if you want some more literary background, O'Donoghue's may be the one for you.

Chris Lovegrove

[1] "Achilles in Altjira" in *The Voice that Thunders* (Harvill Press 1997) 39-58
[2] Nicholas Lezard "There's life in the green giant yet" *Guardian Review* March 8 2008

⊛bookworm⊛

Edited by Elisabeth Brewer, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: Sources and Analogues* was first published in 1975 as *From Cuchulainn to Gawain*. Elisabeth Brewer lectured in English at Homerton College, Cambridge, and here presents modern English versions of themes familiar from *Gawain and the Green Knight* – beheading, seduction and other traditional material – from a range of medieval writings. This unusual small anthology of medieval literature's greatest success "lies in providing a context for a fuller understanding of Sir Gawain, through its presentation of extracts and poems (including translation from Celtic and French originals) illustrating the tradition in which the Gawain-poet wrote, underscoring his own great achievement". The 192-page paperback (978 0 8599 1359 1 £14.99) was last printed in 1992, but is now available as print on demand (with up to 3 weeks for delivery) in D S Brewer's valuable Arthurian Studies series.

The History Press declares itself the UK's largest local and specialist history publisher. Among its imprints are Phillimore, Pitkin, Jarrold, Sutton and Tempus. Created in December 2007, The History Press integrates "core elements of the NPI Media Group within it, including all existing published titles, plus all the future contracts and publishing rights contained in them". So that means you can carry on ordering titles previously produced by those publishers.

They state that they have a commitment to strengthen their position as the UK's leading local history publisher, develop their traditional book business and invest heavily in digital publishing, continue to publish quickly and price affordably, and invest in their authors, customers, clients and colleagues. At the time of writing their new website is being built:

http://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/

Typical of Sutton's output is Geoffrey Ashe's *Merlin: the Prophet and his History*. This appeared in hardback in 2006 (978 0 7509 4149 5 £16.99), but it's not clear when it will be available in

paperback. Several Tempus titles were published (or re-published) in 2007 which relate to the Arthurian period. Richard Reece's *The Later Roman Empire: an Archaeology AD 150-600* (£17.99 192pp 978 0 7524 4205 1) analyses the changes, especially in the visual arts, that led into the medieval world. Jeremy Knight's *The End of Antiquity: archaeology, society and religion AD 235-700* (£17.99 224pp 978 0 7524 4082 8) is a study of the transition from the Classical world to Medieval Europe that covers a longer time-span than Reece's book; incidentally, Knight visited the Pendragon dig at Llanelen when it was at its busiest in the 70s. Finally, Timothy Darvills' *Stonehenge: the biography of a landscape* (£19.99 PB 320pp 978 0 7254 4342 3) is a multi-period study looks at the site in its wider setting and through time up to the present, taking in the familiar legend that Merlin was responsible for transporting and erecting the stones.

Karen Maitland's *Company of Liars: a novel of the plague* (£12.99 Michael Joseph HB 978 0 7181 5322 9 576pp) has been described as "a diabolic take on *The Canterbury Tales*", with travellers escaping the Black Death. The narrator is a character called **Camelot**, a trader in holy relics, who leads a bunch of misfits. His name is derived from the French *camelot*, a pedlar, via *camelote* meaning "rubbish" (ultimately from the Arabic for a cloth made from a mix of materials such as silk and camel hair).

North American author Krystal Shannon brought out *The Return of King Arthur* (PublishAmerica PB $19.95 236pp 978 1 4241 9937 2) at the end of 2007. In this the "ancient king", killed by his nephew and saved by his sister to rest in Avalon for two thousand years, is finally brought back to help the new Knights of the Round Table.

Where possible the **International Standard Book Number** of a title is included. The ISBN is a unique machine-readable identification number, which marks any book unmistakably, and makes it possible for retailers to locate a book quickly. The number has been in use now for 35 years and now 170 countries and territories are officially ISBN members. The ISBN accompanies a publication from its production onwards.

From 1 January 2007 the number consists of thirteen digits, divided into five parts of variable length. The number of digits in the second, third and fourth parts of the ISBN (group identifier, publisher prefix, title identifier) varies. The number of digits in the group number and in the publisher prefix is determined by the quantity of titles planned to be produced by the publisher or publisher group. Publishers or publisher groups with large title outputs are represented by fewer digits.

Internet browsers will be familiar with Wikipedia, the on-line free encyclopaedia. **WikiProject King Arthur** is a WikiProject created to "better organize information in articles related to King Arthur". Its ultimate goal is "focused on offering Wikipedia readers a comprehensive and informative guide to high-quality Wikipedia articles relating to King Arthur and his various representations in literature, film, and so on". More specific goals include creating, maintaining and improving all Arthurian articles, serving as the central point of discussion for issues related to the world of King Arthur; and providing standards and guidelines for articles related to the world of King Arthur. Finally, its scope encompasses the Arthurian myths and legends, and printed versions of them, plus any film or television productions, or other music or art inspired by the books. In addition it will include "relevant traditional British history", it says.

Chris Lovegrove and Steve Sneyd

LATE NEWS

John Billingsley draws attention to the news that Edward Burne-Jones' last work, *The Sleep of Arthur in Avalon*, was "allowed to be exported after auction in the 1960s and ended up in a Puerto Rican

gallery, but has now returned for an exhibition at Tate Britain" (from April 15). A BBC Radio 4 programme *The Return of King Arthur*, produced by Celia Quartermain, was broadcast on April 14, and followed the painting's long journey.

According to a BBC press release, it was commissioned by George Howard, Earl of Carlisle, and started in 1881. "Burne-Jones worked on it for the next 17 years but died before it was complete. By this time, however, the fashion for his work had passed and so the huge canvas was eventually given to the artist's neighbour. However, in 1963 the family sold it at Christie's and King Arthur travelled across the sea to the tropical island of Puerto Rico... By chance, the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico is being refitted this year and is sending out its works to be cared for by experts around the world, so King Arthur is coming home." ⊗

The Board

Arthuriana in the arts and popular culture compiled by Steve Sneyd

Uther Pendragon

COURT CIRCULAR

The *Observer Book of Space* (2007: 42), in its list of "The 10 best-named celestial bodies" notes an asteroid named **Lancelot** in 1960: as there wee already ones called **Arthur** and **Guinevere,** Lancelot joined them in "a cosmic love triangle".

Two feminist books, *When God was a Woman* and *Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood* were written by a **Merlin,** *viz* Merlin Stone, born 1948 – or is this a penname?[1] **Merlin** is also a medical aid charity, mentioned in respect of the Kenya crisis on BBC Radio 2 news, January 5 2008.

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[1] Possibly her best-known work *The Paradise Papers: The Suppression of Women's Rites* was published in 1976 by Virago in association with Quartet Books (London). *Ed*

BROADCAST

The oddest "Grail referentiality" was in a science fiction serial on BBC Radio 7: the episode broadcast on December 19 2007 of *Time Hops,* by Helen Gilbery and David William Fox. The essence of the overall tale was that a human-sized intelligent mouse, a distant descendant of one of the lab animals in our time affected by Mutagen 666 supposedly spilled during a raid by animal rights activists, had escaped from future tyranny and come back to our present to try to change events and bring about a better future (to summarise ruthlessly!).

The relevant point is that in this particular episode the mouse describes to a couple of human children her daily routine in the future, which includes having to worship, on orders from the dominant race of superintelligent rats, in the shrine of the Moly (*sic* – it *was* M not H!) Grail, a cup which holds the sacred essence of rodent-kind!

Malory: a Tale of Two Texts got a repeat on BBC Radio 3 as the Sunday Feature on January 27 2008.[2]

BBC Radio 7, on February 18 2008, in their series of *The Goons* had 'The Spectre of Tintagel' (a January 1956 episode, No 5 from Series 7). This was silly but entertaining, and more coherent than a lot of Goons tales.

Neddie Seagoon, discovering that his parents had officially christened him King Arthur Seagoon, went to Tintagel to seek proof he really was King Arthur's descendant. In a pub he was told of a haunted treasure buried at Tintagel Manor, allegedly the site of Galahad's hunting lodge. He leased it from an estate agent based in Merlin's Cave, and moved in with recording equipment with which he hoped to capture the ghostly voices of dead knights and so obtain evidence of his ancestry. The villainous butler, played by 'Man in Black' Valentine Dyall, attempted to frighten him away with fake ghostly music which, if heard three times, would supposedly kill him.

The reason of this behaviour proved to be that the butler's employer, Major Bloodknock, had hidden the stolen regimental gold and silver plate of the

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[2] First broadcast August 27 2007, and reviewed in *XXXIV* No 4 (2007) 35-37. *Ed*

2nd Poona Horse in the manor, to be kept safe till he could escape from prison. He arrives, but he and the butler are scared away by what they think is genuine ghostly music, but is actually from Neddy's recording of the butler's earlier fakery. Neddy finds the abandoned regimental plate, believes it is Arthur's treasure, and is gloating over his "discovery" when the police arrive. He tells them he is the rightful king now – "THE WINDSORS WILL HAVE TO GO" – and offers the Inspector in charge the post of PM. The episode ended with Neddy removed in a plain van to "join all our other Arthurs and our three Napoleons".

PERIODICAL...

Three Arthurian items appear in a recent issue of D J Tyrer's *Monomyth* (No 43, November 2007): first, Sally Richards' half-page poem "Dreams, Visions, Reflections of the Lady of Shalott" (in her persona as a goddess-worshipper / shape-changer; Lancelot is also a shape-changer, as green man and white horse): an intriguing revision(ing).

Next, Pamela Harvey's story "The Cave of Coventina", entertainingly revisionist (and some of it very amusing): a Dark Age teenage girl attempting, by offering to Coventina, to lure back her Roman(ised) soldier lover encounters, in a barrow, figures including Arthur, Lancelot, Coventina, Morgana, a Pict and a Saxon, and discovers that they all, and she herself, have Elven blood. A wonderful line from Arthur: "Since our loves are so complicated, why don't we all just slip across the Channel to Gaul..."

Also, a long poem of mine, "Called Before The Fire, Being The Sonnet Inventor's Tale", in the persona of a court poet to Frederick II, who fobs off his (the poet's) gift of the supposed Excalibur, left in the treasury since Tancred's day. The poet is convinced it is bogus, but in the end decides to hurl it into Etna on the off-chance it is after all genuine and Arthur is down there and needs it.[3] ✃

Steve Sneyd

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[3] Pamela Harvey's "The Cave of Coventina" is due to re-appear in the next issue of *Pendragon. Ed*

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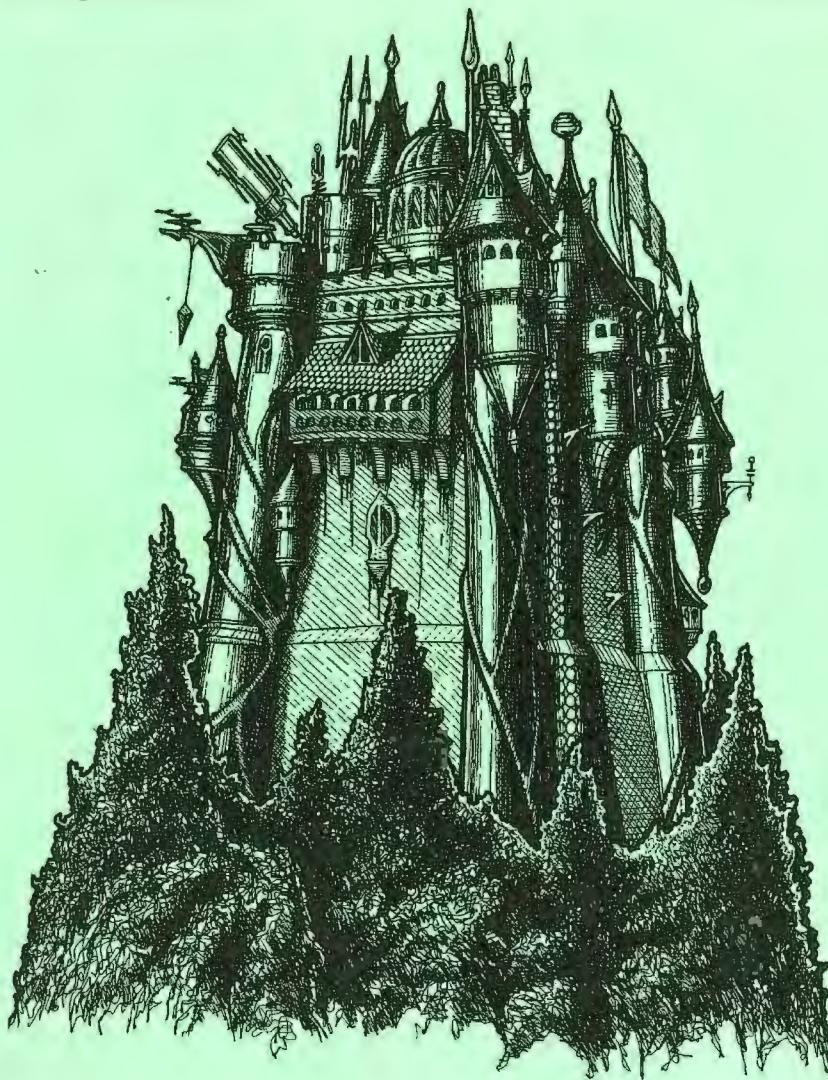
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