TOKENS OF SIN, BADGES OF HONOR: JULIAN OF NORWICH AND *SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT*

In 2002, Robert Blanch and Julian Wasserman, reviewing decades of criticism on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, wrote of a "sea change in the authorized vision of Camelot, with the general trend being more condemnatory readings of the court" (74). Since they contend that a reader's attitude toward Camelot will greatly determine the poem's reception, it follows that any tendency to read the court negatively necessarily entails a tendency to read the poem as a record of multiple moral failures — presumably to be brought to completion in Camelot's future fall — which is tantamount to reading the poem as a tragedy. Such a reading takes the court's laughter at the poem's close as the laughter of incomprehension or moral oblivion, laughter at the idea that anyone could take so seriously the minor infraction of concealing a gift — precisely the sort of irreverence one might expect from a society founded on Trojan treason and peopled with childish revelers (which two points against Camelot I will analyze in the first portion of this essay). On the other hand, less condemnatory (or more indulgent) readers will hear Camelot's laughter as a thoughtful and proper response to Gawain's experience of sin and penance, the members of the court adopting his girdle as their own so as, at once, to remind him that even saints sin and to remind themselves that they should seek to be as rigorously introspective as this model knight. This reading considers the poem to be (divine) comedy, wherein the hero's temporary debasement results in his and his society's greater good.

The propensity of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to be read in such divergent ways, owing in great part to the question of the motivation of the court's laughter, has helped to make it "one of the most discussed of medieval texts," as Tony Davenport has observed (399). In the present study of this controverted text, I will pursue a less tragic, more optimistic reading of the poem and the court by juxtaposing Gawain's girdle as token of sin with tokens spoken of by the visionary Julian of Norwich. When, at the poem's end, Gawain displays the girdle and the scar on his neck as twin signs of his shame, and Camelot then adopts the girdle as its own device, we read that this green baldric "watz acorded þe renoun of þe Rounde Table, / And he honoured þat hit hade euermore after" ("became part of the renown of the Round Table, / And whoever afterwards wore it was always honoured" (2519-20)).[1]

Thus, I contend, does Camelot transform Gawain's "token of vntrawþe" ("token of dishonesty" (2509)) into a badge of honor, a transformation that very closely resembles what Julian claims to have seen in heaven with respect to redeemed sinners such as David, Peter, Paul, and John of Beverley, "for there the tokyn of synne is turnyd to worshyppe" (chp. 38).[2] Indeed, Julian claims, in this same chapter of her *Revelation of Love*, that in heaven "synne shalle be no shame, but wurshype to man," which seems to me precisely the viewpoint that Camelot urges upon the self-condemning Gawain, who needs to learn to see his scar not as a sign of failure but as a sign of struggle and survival — who needs to learn to see his wound as God sees it: "Though that he be helyd, hys woundys be sene before God nott as woundes, but as wurshyppes," states Julian (chp. 39). Elizabeth Spearing translates this line quite wonderfully: "Although a man has the scars of healed wounds, when he appears before God they do not deface but ennoble him" (96). I propose that reading the end of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in comparison with the contemporary, optimistic theology expressed by Julian of Norwich will help to reveal the romance also to be optimistic, more a story of *felix culpa* than *culpa mea*.

It must be conceded, however, that the poem seems to open on an ominous note, associating the founding of Britain with some primal treachery perpetrated at Troy:

> SIÞEN þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at Troye,
> Þe borgh brittened and brent to brondez and askez,
> Þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wroght
> Watz tried for his tricherie, þe trewest on erthe:
> Hit watz Ennias þe athel, and his highe kynde,
> Þat siþen depreced prouinces, and patrounes bicome
> Welneghe of al þe wele in þe west iles.
> . . . . . .
> And fer ouer þe French flod Felix Brutus
> On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez
> wyth wynne. (1-7, 13-15)

> When the siege and the assault were ended at Troy,
> The city laid waste and burnt into ashes,
> The man who had plotted the treacherous scheme
> Was tried for the wickedest trickery ever.
> It was princely Aeneas and his noble kin
> Who then subdued kingdoms, and came to be lords
> Of almost all the riches of the western isles.
> . . . . . .
> And far over the French sea Felix Brutus

> On many broad hillsides settles Britain
> with delight. (trans. James Winny)
>
> The siege and the assault being ceased at Troy,
> The battlements broken down and burnt to brands and ashes,
> The treacherous trickster whose treasons there flourished
> Was famed for his falsehood, the foulest on earth.
> Aeneas the noble and his knightly kin
> Then conquered kingdoms, and kept in their hand
> Wellnigh all the wealth of the western lands.
> . . . . . .
> And far over the French flood Felix Brutus
> On many spacious slopes set Britain with joy
> And grace. (trans. Brian Stone)

Although King Arthur is later deemed "þe hendest" ("the noblest") of British kings (26), some critics read this appellation ironically in light of the poem's preamble. As Thomas Silverstein offers, "The prologue with which this all begins, at once conventional *prohemium* for a poem of noble content and *insinuatio* by reason of its devious comic intention, takes us through a history whose primal Trojan hero Aeneas was a traitor, its founding British father Brutus a parricide and outcast, and its outcome a chronicle of 'blysse and blunder'" (14).[3] Yet critics differ as to the identity of the treasonous "tulk" of line 3, a matter of potentially profound importance concerning the poem's portrayal of Camelot. Although he sides with the majority of critics in reading Aeneas as the traitor, since such a medieval tradition does exist, Silverstein notes that this passage represents "a notable crux" — the Trojan Antenor, "not named here but [also] known to tradition," may in fact be the traitor in question (112n3). Indeed, it is not altogether clear that the syntax of the passage associates the treasonous "tulk" with Aeneas (or Antenor) at all.[4] The full stop of line 4 in James Winny's translation seems to distinguish "princely Aeneas" from "the man who had plotted the treacherous scheme"; and, although he accepts the identification of the tulk with Aeneas, Brian Stone likewise stops line 4 so as to allow a distinction between the tulk and Aeneas (although his omission of "hit watz" and "þat" from lines 5-6 serves somewhat to reconnect them). The semicolon ending line 4 in Silverstein's critical edition seems as ambiguous as the colon in Norman Davis's edition, and the poem's punctuation remains conjectural at any rate, since the poem's single manuscript, Nero Cotton A.x., lacks punctuation (although there are a few section breaks implied by initial capital letters).[5] Moreover, the epithet in line 5, "Aeneas þe aethel" ("princely Aeneas"),

seems to run counter to any identification of Aeneas with the greatest of all traitors, unless one is meant to read "Aeneas the aethel" ironically or, as Davis has it, merely as a marker of "noble birth" (70n3-5).

Gerald Morgan has put forward another intriguing possibility: the *Gawain*-poet may be employing the Virgilian tradition more directly, as opposed to the pseudo-classical tradition through Guido della Colonna; and in Virgil, Aeneas — *pius Aeneas* — cannot rightly be thought a traitor (*pace* Servius). For Dante, for example, Antenor is the sole Trojan traitor (Morgan 44). Yet, I wonder — again in the interest of ameliorating Camelot's origins — if it might be possible to go even further towards exonerating Aeneas, and Antenor as well, by considering Sinon, the fraudulent Greek of *Aeneid* 2, as the "treacherous trickster whose treasons there flourished." Whereas Winny has the tulk "tried" for his wicked treachery, Stone has him "famed for his falsehood," which could easily apply to one of literature's great liars (Dante names him in *Inferno* 30). Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron find both of these possibilities in "tried," paraphrasing lines 3-4 as follows: "The man who framed the treasonable plots there was tried (and 'became famous', a pun) for his treachery, the most authentic example on earth" (n. to 3f.).[6] When Aeneas tells his tale of woe to Dido's court, he laments both Troy's fall and the deceitful means by which it was effected: "Trapped by his craft, that cunning liar Sinon, / we believed his story. His tears, his treachery seized / the men whom neither Tydeus' son nor Achilles could defeat, / nor ten long years of war, nor all the thousand ships" ("Talibus insidiis periurique arte Sinonis / credita res, captique dolis lacrimisque coactis / quos neque Tydides nec Larisaeus Achilles, / non anni domuere decem, non mille carinae" (*Aen.* 2.195-98; cf. 2.65)).[7] Sinon's false tale, calculated to win Trojan sympathy and to survive Trojan scrutiny, secures Troy's fiery destruction and even includes (as a *tour de force* of fraud) reference to the treacherous revenge of Ulysses upon Palamedes: Ulysses framed Palamedes by planting money and a forged letter in his tent, materials which made him appear to be a traitor to Greece (*Aen*. 2.81-85). The twelfth-century *Roman d'Enéas*, as opposed to the alternative medieval tradition that negatively alters Aeneas's character, has Aeneas tell Dido, as he recounts the story of Sinon's deception, "sachiez que nous fumes trahy" ("know that we were betrayed" (973)); Sinon was there "pour nous engignier et trahir" ("to dupe and betray us" (1051)).[8] Indeed, the prologue of the *Roman d'Enéas* mentions treachery in a manner evocative of its mention in the prologue of *Sir Gawain*, only here the treachery is ascribed to Menelaus: "Quant Menelax ot Troie assise / onc n'en tourna tres qu'il l'ot prise, / gasta la terre et tout

le regne / pour la venjance de sa femme. / La cité prist par traïson, / tot craventa, tours et donjon" ("When Menelaus besieged Troy, / He moved no more until he had taken it, / Devastating the entire country and kingdom / To avenge the outrage of his wife's abduction. / He took the city through treachery, / And destroyed everything, towers and keep" (1-6)).

I am distinctly conscious (indeed, even suspicious) of the novelty of these suggestions, according to which Britain's foundations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* would have nothing whatsoever to do with Trojan treason, a situation which might reduce Camelot's susceptibility to condemnation. Yet even acceptance of treasonous origins for the British does not disallow a positive reading of the end of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* — which, admittedly, repeats its first line in its final stanza. Davis, though convinced that Aeneas is in fact the traitor in question, points out that "the legend of Aeneas's treachery did not embarrass writers in English who wished to trace the descent of the Britons from him" (70n3-5). In fact, a treasonous but somehow restored Aeneas — if reference to his nobility and his prosperity could indicate some moral restoration — might serve as a fitting parallel to the deceitful but ultimately shriven Gawain that we come to know in the alliterative poem. Katherine Ann McLoone claims that "instead of the treachery of the prologue, the Trojan context of the closing lines concludes a second, smaller treachery: Gawain's betrayal of his promise" (110). Whereas a Camelot born more of "blysse" than of "blunder" (18) would seem on the face of it more acceptable as a locus of spiritual sincerity, the comedic pattern for which I am arguing requires some movement "upwards," which itself entails an initial debasement. Gawain's experience of sin and redemption seems to fit this pattern; the question remains, however, whether Camelot, in its laughter, participates in Gawain's experience or fails to comprehend it.

An issue that may or may not follow necessarily from Camelot's origins, but that likewise enters into any judgment upon the court, is the poet's description of Arthur as "joly of his joyfnes, and sumquat childgered" (86), which Winny renders as "lively in his youth, and a little boyish" and Stone as "charming and cheerful, child-like and gay." Is Arthur merely young, lively, and happy here, or is he "childish" in a manner that would reflect negatively upon his capacity to rule wisely? Wasserman suggests that the adjective implies a "serious fault" (112; see also Burrow 7), whereas Morgan rejects any pejorative connotations, concluding that "the poet offers no criticism of Camelot in this first fitt (although there are not a few who have professed to find it)" (53, 58). Derek Brewer, likewise, criticizes critics who think negatively

of Camelot based on such things as the adjective "childgered," writing, "I do not recollect that the equally boyish horse-play of the middle-aged Bertilak is ever condemned" (12).[9] The court consists of "fayre folk in her first age" and is the "hapnest vnder heuen" (54, 56); one may or may not hear a range of moral assessment between Winny's phrasing "luckiest under heaven" and Stone's phrasing "stood well in heaven's will." Although he has come to view Camelot negatively, Wasserman allows that much of the poem's "richness" derives from its capacity to occasion "seemingly contradictory answers" to its many interpretive questions (115).

The poem's many references to Camelot's origins, and its king, its knights and ladies, and their Christmastime festivities may or may not be equivocal, then, but they remain challenging to synthesize into a simple assessment. Morgan's statement that the poet does not criticize Camelot in the first fitt is a strong one, given that many commentators have found such criticism. On the other hand, I can see no reference that demands to be taken as a negative judgment, unless some primal and irremediable treason in fact determines Camelot's fate, or unless terms like "childgered" are necessarily pejorative. There is some danger that an initially negative assessment of Camelot might become too prejudicial in the poem, meaning that the court's actions at the poem's end will be construed as spiritually suspect, to the extent that the court has already been constructed as spiritually bereft. Equally erroneous, though, would be the attitude that Camelot necessarily acts correctly by virtue of its name. Indeed, its knightly reputation is explicitly at issue in the Green Knight's challenge (283ff., 309-15). Ultimately, my optimistic reading requires a Camelot that is at least capable at the poem's end of right action — a Camelot whose spiritual standing is at least as ambiguous as it is at the beginning. Indeed, perhaps ambiguity is necessary, so renewal can be predicated on it.

Gawain's own spiritual standing becomes the focus of the poem as he journeys north and faces the twin challenges of Bertilak and Bertilak's wife. When, on the third day of testing Gawain accepts the wife's offer of a girdle that will keep him from being slain, and when he then withholds that gift from the agreed exchange of winnings with Bertilak, readers everywhere discern his faithlessness. (That he breaks the established pattern by kissing Bertilak first, after which Bertilak presents him with a "foule fox felle" ("stinking fox pelt" (1944)), seals and symbolizes the deceit.) Complicating matters, however, is the fact that Gawain visits a priest for confession between accepting the girdle and failing to reveal it to Bertilak; critics differ as to the possible efficacy of this confession, even as the poem records that the priest "asoyled hym

surely and sette hym so clene / As domezday schulde haf ben dight on þe morn" ("absolved him completely, and made him as clean / As if the Judgment were appointed for the next day" (1883-84)).[10] Further complicating the situation is the insistence of Bertilak's wife that Gawain conceal the girdle and "lelly layne [hit] fro hir lorde" ("loyally hide it from her husband"), to which Gawain agrees (1863). Silverstein notes how Gawain has placed himself in a catch-22 here: "If he keeps the girdle he breaks his word to the host; if he tells his host he breaks his word to the lady" (14). Louis Blenkner describes Gawain's situation in more theological terms: "He is in a position where he cannot *not* sin, the position, according to St. Augustine, of all post-lapsarian men" (370-71). Indeed, he seems already to have failed a moral test in agreeing to hide the girdle from the husband, with whom he has the prior arrangement to exchange winnings. He fails, at any rate, once he fails to deliver the girdle, as the Green Knight — Bertilak — points out the next day upon the third and wounding blow: "At þe þrid þou fayled þore, / And þerfor þat tappe ta þe" ("You failed me the third time / And took that blow therefore" (2356-57)).

Gawain's initial reaction to being found faithless vacillates between proper contrition and an attempt to shift the blame. At first, the speechless Gawain is "so agreued for greme he gyred withinne; / Alle þe blode of his brest blende in his face" ("so mortified and crushed that he inwardly squirmed; / All the blood in his body burned in his face" (2370-71)). He castigates his "cowarddyse and couetyse" ("cowardice and covetousness" (2374)); he flings the belt back at the Green Knight, who then urges him to accept it as "a pure token / Of þe chaunce of þe grene chapel" ("a true token / Of the exploit of the Green Chapel" (2398-99)). Gawain, lamentably, here indulges in the "homiletic commonplace" (Davis 128n2416-19) of misogyny, bemoaning the pernicious influence of women on even the greatest men: Adam, Solomon, Samson, David.[11] Nevertheless, Gawain seems finally to accept that the failing was his own:

> "Bot your gordel", quoþ Gawayn, "God yow foryelde!
> Þat wyl I welde wyth guod wylle, not for þe wynne golde,
> Ne þe saynt, ne þe sylk, ne þe syde pendaundes,
> For wele ne for worchyp, ne for þe wlonk werkkez,
> Bot in syngne of my surfet I shal se hit ofte,
> When I ride in renoun, remorde to myseluen
> Þe faut and þe fayntyse the þe flesche crabbed,
> How tender hitis to entyse teches of fylþe." (2429-36)

"But for your belt," said Gawain, "God repay you for that!

> I accept it gratefully, not for its wonderful gold,
> Nor for the girdle itself nor its silk, nor its long pendants,
> Nor its value nor the honour it confers, nor its fine workmanship,
> But I shall look at it often as a sign of my failing,
> And when I ride in triumph, recall with remorse
> The corruption and frailty of the perverse flesh,
> How quick it is to pick up blotches of sin."

Once back in Camelot, groaning and blushing all over again, he tells his story and shows the court the girdle and "þe nirt" ("the scar" (2498)) on his neck, the two working as reciprocal signs of his guilt. The girdle he terms the "token of vntrawþe þat I am tan inne" ("token of the dishonesty I was caught committing" (2509)); he claims that he "mot nedez hit were wyle I may last" ("must wear it as long as I live" (2510)). King Arthur then consoles Gawain, and the entire court "laughen loude þerat, and luflyly acorden / Þat lordes and ladis þat longed to þe Table, / Vche burne of þe broþerhede, a bauderyk schulde haue" ("laughs loudly about it, and courteously agrees / That lords and ladies who belong to the Table, / Each member of the brotherhood, should wear such a belt" (2514-16)).[12]

The salient question, then, is the spirit in which Camelot adopts Gawain's girdle as its own. McLoone claims that the knights "choose to forget its shame and to prize it as either (or both) fashion and a mark of their common status" (110). I would rather read the adoption of the girdle as an explicit memento of past shame, just as Gawain would have it, but also and at once a mark of their common status (all nobles and sinners) as well as an aspirational symbol: may we perform as well as Gawain if faced with such an extraordinary test. Morgan considers it a sign of the fitness of the court's response — as opposed to its lack of understanding — that it wants to associate itself with Gawain's imperfection; likewise, Brewer argues that what for some outstanding individuals seems failure "represents for the rest of us a standard to which we can rarely hope to attain, but with which we like to associate ourselves" (Morgan 169; Brewer 14). Though I cannot quite agree with Nicholas Watson that Gawain's "continuing remorse so closely resembles injured self-esteem as to be hard for most readers to take seriously," I do agree that, from the medieval Christian viewpoint, there is little wrong with Camelot's response to Gawain's ordeal: as actives rather than contemplatives, Watson explains, the knights of the Round Table can never achieve perfection in practice "but must expect to live their lives in a cycle of venial sin, repentance and penance" (293). Indeed, the court's laughter may well be medicinal in and

of itself, countering Gawain's despair with its emotional opposite, per the operational logic of the medieval penitential. John McNeill and Helena Gamer point out how "the reconstruction of personality" was a key aim of medieval penance and was to be effected by opposing contraries to contraries, such as joy to dejection (44-45).

Parallel ideas and images in Julian's *Revelation of Love* help to encourage this more affirmative reading of Camelot's adoption of the girdle. Julian firmly believes, with Augustine and Aquinas, that "Almighty God would in no wise permit evil to exist in His works, unless He were so almighty and so good as to produce good even from evil" (Aquinas 1.22.2, repl. obj. 2). Sin constitutes for Julian "alle that is nott good"; "yf synne had nott be, we shulde alle have be clene," which poses the question "why, by the grete forseyng wysdom of God, the begynnyng of synne was nott lettyd [prevented]." Jesus answers Julian as (now famously) follows: "*Synne is behovely* [necessary, beneficial]*, but alle shalle be wele, and* alle shalle be wele, and alle manner of thynge shalle be wele" (chp. 27). Denys Turner offers the Latin term *conveniens*, as employed by Aquinas and Bonaventure, as a synonym for Julian's term behovely, with both terms denoting narrative, aesthetic necessity rather than formal, logical necessity (415-16). Sin somehow fits into God's plans, which include the ultimate redress of this essential but otherwise undesirable defect. The triple repetition of "all shall be well" explicitly corresponds to the Trinity's actions, which for Julian encompass a "deed" to be done on the last day, "by whych deed he shalle make all thyng wele. For ryght as the blessyd Trynyte made alle thyng of nought, ryght so the same blessyd Trynyte shalle make wele alle that is nott welle." Julian's universalistic vision must be counted among the most optimistic of Christian theologies, though she herself claims that no contradiction exists between the idea that "many creatures shall be dampnyd [damned]" and "alle shalle be wele." Jesus tells her that what is impossible for her is not impossible for him: "*I shalle save my worde in alle thyng, and I shalle make althyng wele*" (chp. 32).

Leaving aside any possible implications of universal salvation, which the *Gawain*-poet undoubtedly does not share, Julian's *behovely* treatment of sin remains the key affinity between the poem and the revelations.[13] Julian calls sin "the sharpest scorge that ony chosyn soule may be smittyn with," and this scourge can so afflict the sinner that "he thynkyth hym selfe he is nott wurthy but, as it were, to synke in to helle" (chp. 39). Indeed, for Julian sin is its own worst punishment: "For it is the most payne that the soule may have to turne fro God ony tyme by synne" (chp. 76). The sinner is self-afflicted rather than punished by God; "it longyth to man mekely to accuse hym selfe, and it longyth

to the propyr goodnesse of oure Lorde God curtesly to excuse man" (chp. 52). Julian goes so far as to claim that "yf God myght be wroth [even] a whyle, we shuld neyther have lyfe ne stede ne beyng" (chp. 49; cf. Psalm 130.3). So it is the sinner who despairs and condemns himself or herself, not God who condemns, just as Gawain continues to berate himself, before the court, even after the Green Knight has pronounced him "on þe fautlest freke þat euer on fote yede" ("one of the most perfect men who ever walked on the earth" (2363)). Gawain lacked only "a lyttel" and understandably so, "for ye lufed your lyf; þe lasse I yow blame" ("because you wanted to live: so I blame you the less" (2366, 2368)). Yet even that modicum of blame haunts Gawain, who is one of those "reasonably charitable people," as J. R. R. Tolkien puts it, who applies a "stricter" scale to himself than he would another (97). This being the case, "þe kyng comfortez þe knyght" ("the king consoles the knight" (2513)), just as, according to Julian, "oure curtesse Lorde wylle nott that hys servantys despeyer for ofte fallyng ne for grevous fallyng" (chp. 39). "Oonly payne blamyth and ponyschyth [punishes]," says Julian, "and oure curteyse Lorde comfortyth and socurryth" (chp. 51), which very much resembles what Paul Ricoeur observes with respect to guilt as *poena*, "a term that bridges the gap between evil committed and evil undergone." Our experience of guilt includes "the feeling of having been seduced by overwhelming powers and, consequently, our feeling of belonging to a history of evil . . . . This strange experience of passivity, at the very heart of evil-doing, makes us feel ourselves to be victims in the very act that makes us guilty" (250). And thus does Gawain — having been caught up in a "history of evil" involving the machinations of Morgan le Fay, and hence having entered into a situation where he was (all but) bound to err — still require reintegration into pleasant community, even after the "penaunce" (2392) of the Green Knight's axe.[14] He must be shown, by the court, the way forward, which is to acknowledge the wound and the band as tokens of both sin and redemption. Through the court, Gawain learns to see the girdle and the scar as marks of renown and honor. To his own credit, however, Gawain's adventure serves to improve the very community by which he himself needs to be recovered. There is no mention of treachery when the poem's preamble recurs at the story's end (2522-26), and the poem's coda beseeches Jesus to "bryng vus to his blysse" ("bring us to his bliss" (2530)), a bliss that will presumably contain no more blunder. Camelot adopts Gawain's green baldric not as an empty fashion but for his sake — "for sake of þat segge" — as well as its own (2518).

A token of sin, then, becomes a badge of honor, just as a scar at once represents vulnerability and resilience. Gawain transforms in the

poem from nominally perfect knight — the knight of the pentangle (619-65) — to perfected knight, a knight made perfect through testing, failure, and recovery, a knight now perfect in his continuous knowledge of imperfection. His is a *felix culpa*, a happy fault, because the fault leads to "manyfolde joyes, ovyr passyng that he shuld have had yf he had nott synnyd or fallen" — the only condition for Julian under which God would allow sin to enter his creation (chps. 27, 38). "It nedyth us to falle," Julian writes, "and it nedyth us to see it. For yf we felle nott, we shulde nott knowe how febyll and how wrechyd we be of oure selfe . . . And if we se it not, though we felle, it shuld not profyte us" (chp. 61). As Barbara Newman observes, Gawain's arguably "excessive" penitence nonetheless "marks a necessary phase: he must abandon belief in his own impossible perfection to adopt a more truthful humility. Hence both judgments, the hero's self-abasing remorse and the court's forgiving laughter, are ultimately true" (37).

Net honor accrues to Camelot out of Gawain's experience, even if — and even because — there was a moment of dishonor at the Green Chapel. Victor Haines, keenly interested in the poem's use of the "fortunate fall" idea, understands Gawain's scar as evidence of redemption as opposed simply to evidence of change: "The redeemed man with a scar is not the same as a man with none, yet being in a perfect state he cannot wish the scar not there or . . . even if the scar is the result of sin, that he had not sinned" (102).[15] Tolkien, likewise, finds redemption the essence of the poem's meaning: "After the shame the repentance, and then the unreserved confession with sorrow and penance, and at last not only forgiveness, but the redemption, so that the 'harm' that is not concealed, and the reproach that is voluntarily borne, becomes a glory, *euermore after*" (100). Thus, Haines concludes that "the court's adoption of the green baldric may be taken as a sign of happy humility and the fact that they, too, participate with Gawain in the felix culpa" (123). Camelot makes a sign of shame into a sign of honor, just as in heaven, according to Julian, "the tokyn of synne is turnyd to worshyppe."

Notes

1 Unless otherwise noted, Middle English citations of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (by line number) will be from the Davis revision of the J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon edition (but with the substitution of a modern equivalent for yogh). Modern English translations will be Winny's, unless otherwise specified.

2 Middle English citations of Julian of Norwich's *Showings*, also known as *Revelation(s) of Divine Love*, are from Baker's critical edition, which is based on the Paris manuscript of the "long text" (MS Bibliothèque national anglais 40). (See Baker's introduction (xx-xxi) for the manuscript witness for the short and long texts and

for a statement of her editorial and modernization practices.) It must be stated that I am positing no direct contact between Julian's work and that of the *Gawain*-poet, even as I find certain ideas and images distinctly similar.

3 It should be noted by way of comparison that Geoffrey of Monmouth (1.3) makes this parricide accidental and the outcome of prophecy; moreover, Geoffrey's references to Aeneas in parts 1 and 3 of his *History* make no mention of treachery. Geoffrey was almost certainly working in line with the Virgilian tradition on Aeneas's heroism.

4 Silverstein, citing Davis, notes such texts as *The Geste Hystoriale*, the *Scottish Troy Fragments*, and *Lydgate's Troy Book* as preserving the tradition of a treasonous Aeneas, an idea that goes back through Guido della Colonna to "the ancient accounts ascribed to Dares and Dictys" as well as Servius's commentary on *Aeneid* 1.242 (112n3). Davis prefers the identification of the "tulk" with Aeneas over Israel Gollancz's identification of him with Antenor, even as he admits that the "hit watz" in line 5 may refer forwards or backwards (70n3-5). See Haines 40-45 for painstaking analysis of the poem's opening lines.

5 See Davis (xii, xxviii) for information on the capitals and the absence of punctuation.

6 In his glossary, Silverstein gives "tried" and "of proven quality" for "tried, tryed" (s.v.). "Famed" could derive from "of proven quality." Davis, on the other hand, disagrees with Gollancz that "tried" may here mean "distinguished, famous," since "the development of this passage calls for an event, not a general condition" (70n3-5).

7 Only Latin references are given; the translations are those of Fagles.

8 Translations of the *Roman d'Enéas* are mine. McLoone indicates that it is unlikely that the *Gawain*-poet knew the *Roman d'Enéas*, but does not say why (111).

9 Blanch and Wasserman cite Morgan and Brewer specifically as bucking the trend of more negative readings of Camelot; they add that British voices have proven more likely to skew positively, whereas American-trained scholars have tended to adopt negative readings (73-74).

10 Whereas Blanch and Wasserman make the attitude toward Camelot determinative, Tolkien writes that "it is not too much to say that the whole interpretation and valuation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* depends on what one thinks of the thirtieth stanza of the Third Fit," i.e., lines 1870-92, in which Gawain confesses to the priest. Tolkien argues that Gawain's confession is valid (87-88; see also Davis 123n1882). Newman, on the other hand, states that Gawain's confession "cannot have been pure," since he did not "own up" to possessing the girdle (35).

11 In their edition of Julian, Colledge and Walsh here note the similarity between Julian's reference to famous sinners (e.g., David, Peter, Paul, John of Beverley) and Gawain's reference to defeated men, though Colledge and Walsh do no more than note the similarity: "In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the discomfited hero consoles himself with the thought that greater men than he had been tricked by women" (1.255n19).

12 Arthur, tracing the changing signification of the girdle, concludes that it is a failed sign, since (a) the court rejects Gawain's use of it as a sign of permanent *untrawþ* because of the court's flawed spiritual condition; (b) the court goes "so far as to reverse the meaning," and (c) permanent *untrawþ* properly belongs only to the fallen angels (111-12). I argue rather that the girdle need not be "a simple memento" (Arthur 109) but may be a complex one: the court is right to reverse Gawain's meaning insofar as it indicates *wanhope* (permanent despair); the girdle at once stands for failure and

hope. Silverstein (168n2513-21) cites from the Vulgate *Lancelot* (which follows Chrétien de Troyes's *Chevalier à la charrette*) another transformation of a symbol of shame into a symbol of triumph: the court's willingness to ride in carts after Lancelot does so.

13 Watson points out how *Cleanness* is frightening in its evocation of God's anger when not operating within a covenant that restrains him (306). Julian, however, "saw no manner of wrath in God" (chp. 49). Burrow (143) points out that John Mirk, in his Advent sermon, also compares the wounds of a knight, which earn him respect, to shriven sins that likewise earn honor. It is perhaps also worth noting that Julian speaks in chp. 2 (and again in chp. 39) of having desired "thre[e] woundes" in her life —"the wound of verie contricion, the wound of kynd compassion, and the wound of willfull longing to God"— and in the short text version of the *Revelations*, as Baker notes (6n5), Julian makes a connection with Saint Cecilia's reception of three sword wounds on her neck, to which one might compare the three "blows" to Gawain's neck.

14 Winny (162n2456-62) considers the late exposure of Morgan and her role in the proceedings to be "a blemish on an otherwise perfect story," since she "confuses the motivation": "The plan of frightening Guenevere to death cannot have been in the poet's mind when he described the Green Knight's intrusion, for the Queen's reactions are not mentioned. The poet's reasons for introducing this last minute surprise are hard to fathom." The magical Bertilak/Green Knight duality does, of course, require that some explanation be proffered. See Davis 130n2460 for a grudge against Guinevere on Morgan's part that may be her motivation.

15 Pearsall, finding Gawain's Christianity merely perfunctory, argues that, since "the wound has already healed (the body has no shame, apart from the transitory moment of the blush)," Gawain's attempt to associate it with the girdle is problematic (353-54). But the healed wound as scar may be shown, and thus can be the body's shame as well as its honor. See also Arthur (123), who also speaks of a "wound" that can no longer work in conjunction with the girdle as a sign since it is "already healed."

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