

# *The Awntyrs off Arthure: Portraits and Property*

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In the early fifteenth-century Middle English poem *The Awntyrs off Arthure* (*Awntyrs*) there are six descriptions of people (including a ghost). Though critics identify these descriptions with the overall sophistication of the text, little attention has been paid to the portraits in their own right. In this paper I look at the way the six portraits point up underlying ironies in the poem by focussing 'intertextual' resonances from popular culture.

Probably composed in the 1420s, *Awntyrs* is indeed a complex work of metrical and structural intricacy.<sup>1</sup> Its fifty-five alliterative and rhyming thirteen-line stanzas consist of nine long lines and a four-line wheel. Repetition, varying from one syllable to a whole phrase, links one stanza to the next (*concatenatio*), and similarly joins stanza lines eight and nine, though more consistently in the first half of the poem than in the second. Metrical ingenuity is matched by decorative and descriptive display. There are seven set piece descriptions in the poem, one scenic and the rest of persons: two descriptions of ladies, a description of a king, two descriptions of knights and one of a hag, and one of a tent-interior (there is also a brief feast-setting). The most striking of these is the description of the hag, which is terrifying because she appears not merely as old, ugly, poor (ragged) and low-born, like the Wife of Bath's Loathly Lady, but has in fact reached the next stage on: she is dead and ugly and reduced to the most abject poverty of all, loss of body itself, which is being eaten away by toads and snakes. From this state of total deprivation she issues a chilling message about the dangers of worldly possession and acquisition.

The simple plot is briefly summarized: while Guinevere ('Gaynor/Waynor') and her escort Gawain are watching Arthur's court hunting deer in Inglewood near Carlisle, they are accosted by the ghost of her mother rising from Tarn Wadling in a snow storm; as if unhampered by the toad which is eating her jaw, the ghost issues admonitions to be charitable to the poor, and utters a prophecy of the

end of Arthur's territorial acquisitiveness with the downfall of the Round Table through treachery. She desires thirty trentals of masses to be said for her soul.<sup>2</sup> The hunt ends and the court goes to supper. This section, which Ralph Hanna published as *Awntyrs A*,<sup>3</sup> has only two portraits: of Guinevere and of her hag-ghost mother. As Hanna's *Awntyrs B* opens, Arthur and his court are seated at supper, which is interrupted by the arrival of an unnamed lady leading Sir Galeron of Galloway on horseback. First the feast, then Arthur, then the lady are described, followed by a description of Galeron, who demands armed combat with Arthur to regain his land, which Arthur has misappropriated and given to Gawain. Gawain takes up Galeron's challenge but, surprisingly, is not himself described here, and was only accorded a one-line description of his green outfit at line 12 of *Awntyrs A*; his portrait is held back till line 508. Galeron is feasted in a beautiful pavilion (described, of course). He and Galeron fight in single combat to a draw and, through the intervention of Galeron's lady and Guinevere, the combat is stopped; Galeron does homage to Gawain, but Arthur compensates Gawain with other property, on condition he relinquish Galeron's; the re-enfeoffed Galeron joins the Round Table and marries his lady. Hanna's *Awntyrs B* is succeeded by the resumption of *Awntyrs A* in a single concluding stanza where Guinevere pays for a 'million masses'<sup>4</sup> for her mother. There are thus four portraits, an interior and a feast description in 'B', compared with two portraits in 'A'.

The portraits display a company of beautiful, glittering people, characterized by their 'glorious' clothing (line 366) – except for the filthy ghost. Guinevere (Gaynor) heads the company:

In a gleterand gide that glemed full gay  
 With rich ribaynes reversset, ho-so right redes,  
 Rayled with rybees of riall array;  
 Her hode of a hawe huwe, that here hede hedes,  
 Of pillour, of palwerk, of perré to pay;  
 Schurde in a short cloke that the rayne shedes,  
 Set over with saffres sothely to say,  
 With saffres and seladynes set by the sides;  
 Here sadel sette of that ilke,  
 Saude with sambutes of silke;  
 On a mule as the mylke,  
 Gaili she glides.

Al in gleterand golde, gayly ho glides  
The gates with Sir Gawayn, bi the grene welle. (15-28)<sup>5</sup>

[In a glittering gown which shimmered brilliantly, trimmed with bright ribbons of double-sided colour, if you understand the description, ornamented with rubies in royal splendour, her hood of grey-blue, which conceals her head, (made of) of pared fur, of rich cloth, of jewels to delight, covered with a short cloak that sheds the rain (which was) sprinkled with sapphires, I really mean this, with sapphires and celidonies studded on the edges; her saddle decorated to match, sewn with silken saddle cloths; on a mule white as silk, resplendently she glides along. All in shimmering gold she moves by in splendour (over) the forest rides with Sir Gawain, beside the verdant spring.]

Guinevere's beauty is all in the fineness of her clothes;<sup>6</sup> we have no idea of her physical conformation. All the more horrific is the ghost, who has no clothes left and whose eye-sockets are empty:

Bare was the body and blak to the bone,  
Al biclagged in clay, uncomly cladde;  
Hit waried, hit wayment, as a woman –  
But on hide ne on huwe no heling hit hadde;  
Hit stemered, hit stonayde, hit stode as a stone;  
Hit marred, hit memered, hit mused for madde.  
... On the chef of the cholle  
A pade pikes on hir polle,  
With eighen holked ful holle  
That gloed as the gledes.

Al glowed as a glede the goste there ho glides,  
Umbeclipped in a cloude of clethyng unclere,  
Serkeled with serpentes that sate to the sides –  
To tell the todes theron my tonge wer full tere.

(105-110; 114-121)

[Naked was the corpse, blackened to the bone, all clotted with earth, indecorously dressed; it cursed and wailed as if it were a woman, but no covering did it have, on body or on face; it stammered, it hesitated, it stood still as stone; it moaned, it

muttered, it looked distracted as if insane... on the top of the jawbone a toad bites into her skull with (its) sunken, hollow eyes that glowed like burning coals. The ghost glowed all over like a burning coal where she glides along, enfolded in a dark mass of dirty clothing, encircled with snakes that were twined round the edges – to count the toads on it my tongue would be quite tied.]

Apart from snakes and toads, she is naked, terrifying the greyhounds in the hunt and sending birds shrieking from the trees in horror (124; 126-30). As John Withrington notes of the Loathly Lady, this reverses the traditional concepts of female beauty,<sup>7</sup> and in this case it deconstructs the preceding description using the same lexical set: Guinevere's glittering gown gleams, and she is sprinkled with rubies and sapphires, while the ghost glows like a live ember; the ghost's snakes, toads and filthy shroud are a parodic version of Guinevere's rain-cloak and saddle cloths; both Guinevere and the ghost 'glide' as they walk. We are hardly surprised to discover their close relationship.

Though Guinevere has (so to speak) no physical body and her mother's has been eaten, oddly enough when her consort Arthur is described, seated at supper under a silken canopy amidst tapestries embroidered with birds (339-43), we see, highlighted by the pun produced in the stanza-linking, the grey-eyed, red-bearded man as well as the mantle which enfolds him:

...(for thi manhede.)/

The **mane** in his **mantyll** syttis at his mete  
 In pal pured with pane, prodly pight,  
 Trofelyte and traverste with trewloves in trete;  
 The tassess were of topas that were thereto ticht.  
 He gliffed up with his eighen that grey wer and grete,  
 With his beveren berde, on that burde bright–  
**He was the soveraynest [sir] sitting in sete**  
 That ever segge had sen with his eghe-sight. (352-9)

[... (for your humanity). The man (=king) in his mantel sits at his dinner in rich cloth, fur-trimmed, elegantly adorned, decorated and overlaid with rows of truelove knots; the clasps attached to it were of topaz. He looked up with his large grey eyes (and) his beaver-coloured beard, at that radiant lady – **he**

was the most noble lord seated on his throne that  
any man had ever set his eyes on.]

Without a break, but with a further detail that this is one of Arthur's crown-wearing feasts, we are precipitated into a description of the lady who leads Sir Galeron, linked to Arthur by another punning concatenation, on *wille/welde/wolde*:

King, crowned in kithe, carpis hir tille...

'... if hit be thi wille?'

Ho was the worthyest wight that eny[wy] weld wolde.

(364-5)

[The king crowned in his own territory speaks to her ... "... if you please?" She was the most splendid creature any man might wish to have charge of.]

Another surprise is the Lady herself, who is almost a copy of Guinevere but wearing Gawain's green:

Here gide was glorious and gay, of a gresse grene;

Here belle was of blunket, with birdes full bolde

Brauded with brende golde, and bokeled full bene.

(366-368)

[Her gown was of a lustrous and resplendent grass green; her cloak was (made of) fine wool, embroidered with bird motifs, threaded with polished gold thread, and a finely wrought buckle.]

Where Guinevere's head was covered in a rainhood, the Lady's goldwire caul and kerchiefs are displayed, but unless *fax* still carries its old meaning of 'fair hair', we know no more about her physical appearance than we do about Guinevere's, and even though she is a crowned queen, she remains entirely nameless in this poem:

Here fax in fyne perré was fretted in folde,

Contrefelet and kelle coloured full clene,

With a crowne craftly al of clere golde.

Her kercheves were curiouse with many proude pene.

(369-72)

[Her hair in fine jewellery was twined into plaits, the edging band and caul were brilliantly coloured, with an exquisite **crown** entirely (made) of fine gold. Her headcovers were ingenious (fixed) with many a noble brooch.]

While Guinevere walks with Gawain alone, the Lady is the centre of attention of a possessive and almost coercive kind:

Her perré was prayed with prise men of might.  
 Bright birdes and bolde  
 Had [note] ynoghe to beholde  
 Of that frely to folde  
 And the hende **knight** (373-377, and see 365 above).<sup>8</sup>

[Her jewellery was appraised by renowned warriors. Beautiful and self-assured ladies paid great attention to observing that one (who was) lovely to embrace and the courteous knight.]

As if to reinforce this objectification of the Lady, and the disturbing power of gaze and suggestion of 'control', the Lady's portrait is immediately juxtaposed to and concatenated with first, Arthur's, and then the knight Galeron's; textually she is thus held tight between Arthur and Galeron like a royal ward to be traded in marriage:

The **knight** in his colours was armed ful clene,  
 With his comly crest clere to beholde,  
 His brené and his basnet burneshed ful bene,  
 With a bordur about al of brende golde;  
 His mayles were mylke-white, enclawet ful clene... (378-82)

[The **knight** in his armorial bearings was most resplendently armed, with his handsome plume (making) a fine spectacle, his coat of mail and helmet polished most brilliantly with a surrounding rim entirely of burnished gold; his ringmail was sanded totally free of rust (and) closely rivetted...]

Like any knight, he is characterized by the quality of his horse:

His horse trapped of that ilke (as true men me tolde);  
 His shelde on his shulder of silver so shene,  
 With bere-hedes of blake, browed ful bolde.

His horse in fyne sandel was trapped to the hele—  
And in his cheveron biforne  
Stode as an unicorné,  
Als sharp as a thorne,  
An anlas of stele. (383-90)

[His horse's 'cloths matched his blazon ... with bear heads with fierce brows. His horse was covered to the fetlocks in fine silk, in full-skirted trappings – and on its head armour on the front (there) projected, sharp as a thorn, just like a unicorn, a dagger made of steel.]

and his armour, which like Guinevere's clothes is covered in gold and rubies, very ominously glows like the ghost :

In stele he was stuffed, that stourne uppon stede,  
Al of sternes of **golde**, strynkelyd on stray;  
His gloves, his gamesons, **glowed as a glede**  
With **graynes of rybé**, that graithed ben gay,  
And his schene schynbaudes, sha[pen] to sh[e]de,  
His poleinus with pe[r]ydodis were poudred to pay.  
With a launce upon loft that lovely con lede. (391-97)

[In steel he was armed, that valiant mounted warrior, with gold stars sprinkled randomly all over (it); his steel gloves, his outer surcoat **glowed like a live coal**, with beaded rubies attractively displayed. And his bright shinguards, shaped to deflect (blows), his knee guards were delightfully spangled with peridots. With lance raised, that splendid figure led the way.)

And then an odd note is struck:

A freke on a freson him folowed, in fay—  
The freson was afered for drede of that fare,  
For he was selden wonte to se  
The tablet fluré;  
Siche gamen ne gle  
Sagh he never are. (398-403)

[An attendant squire on a Frisian horse in fact accompanied him – the Frisian shied in terror at the celebrations, being rather

unaccustomed to seeing the table and its fleur-de-lys decorations; such entertainment and celebration he'd never seen before.]

Narrative time is held up for the portraits of king, lady and knight but with the disruption of the restive horse and as if a spell has been broken, Arthur now addresses the intruder knight. Once Galeron has stated his grievance, listing his true territorial rights, he is assigned a pavilion, decorated with birds like Arthur's hall and his lady's cloak, comprising (it really does sound like an estate agent's advert) a chapel, sleeping-quarters and hall with dressed table and silver service, heated by a brazier and lit extravagantly; even the horse is fed well (441-59).

The sheer volume of description in *Awntyrs*, over one hundred out of the total 715 lines, has aroused unfavourable criticism for mere attention to surface detail to the neglect of coherence.<sup>9</sup> Yet the poem's formal brilliance reflects the glittering people who inhabit it, and the downbeat conclusion where Guinevere sets in motion the requested trental of masses, while reinforcing the message of transience of worldly goods shows them commodified into spiritual wealth. However much critics used to slate its structure, the poem has always been popular: it survives in four manuscripts, was published six times in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and has seen five editions since 1970, each republication promoting sustained support for its formal and stylistic merits.<sup>10</sup>

Critics have tried to 'polyfill' the fault line between *Awntyrs* A and B by providing ingenious reasons as to why the two 'parts' may be said to form one indivisible text. Here the prize goes to A.C. Spearing, who eliminates the apparent split in the structure by identifying a 'sovereign mid-point': at the exact middle of the text, line 358 in 'B', Arthur is described as 'the soveraynest sir sitting in sete'.<sup>11</sup> The middle line occurs twenty lines *after* the 'A'/'B' divide, exactly in the middle of the twenty-eighth stanza out of fifty-five. Clearly, the description of Arthur was specifically designed to contain this midmost point of the poem: Arthur is enthroned at its very centre, as centralized male power. As the poem is in thirteen-line stanzas, each linked to the preceding and following stanza, the whole stanza describing Arthur must have been designed (or adapted) for this effect. Unfortunately the argument is slightly undercut by the very weak concatenations at the beginning and end of this stanza (*manhede/mane ... mantyll*, 351-2; *wille / weld wolde*, 364-5; see above)

which suggest an adapter tinkering with an earlier poem, and, as I shall explain later in this paper, that earlier text very probably endorsed *female* sovereignty.

Perhaps it was the central role of Arthur which led Robert Thornton to supply the universally adopted title *The Awntyrs* (sic) *off Arthure*, even though both *awntyrs* ('adventures') in the poem are Gawain's, acting as Arthur's surrogate.<sup>12</sup> Thornton seems to have appreciated that the poem's theme is the mores of Arthur's court: *Awntyrs A* and *B* are thematically linked, if divergent in genre and tone, and the link is the questionable nature of wealth and power. However, of the six portraits (king, knights, ladies and hag), the portrait of Arthur is the second shortest at eight lines (352-59), surpassed in brevity by Gawain's at a mere three lines (508-510), and last at that, though he has been on the scene since line 12, escorting Guinevere to a hunting-lodge.<sup>13</sup> The other portraits are between thirteen and sixteen lines long, with two exceptions: the ghost just tips them at seventeen lines (105-121) and the knight challenger clocks up twenty-six (378-403). Modern readers prefer the horror of *Awntyrs A* to the 'commonplace' chivalry of *B*, yet as the poem is designed, the knight challenger occupies more attention than Arthur, his central sovereignty notwithstanding. The 'traditional' portraits of ladies and king must be read against the grain: their very exquisiteness makes them suspicious against the backdrop of physical and moral degeneration.<sup>14</sup>

There is also something unexpected about those two longest portraits, the hag and the knight challenger. Both are parodies of traditional descriptions of lady and knight, and in both cases the parody is enforced by the stanza form: each portrait concludes at the stanza-end wheel, but in each bathos is provided by the untoward goings-on of animal accoutrements.

The knight's description is not the arming-of-the-knight *topos*, but a dramatised description of his arrival at court in the banqueting hall. Led in on his *destrier* by his green-clad lady, perhaps reflecting the role-reversing hocktide ceremonies,<sup>15</sup> he is accompanied by a servant and a spare horse, a Frisian. Six lines of the description are devoted to the *destrier* and its fashionable pointed spike, turning it into a unicorn (383, 386-90), and a further six to the Frisian horse (398-403), which shies at the banqueting table. Description of each horse occupies the ninth line and concluding wheel of successive stanzas. The knight's mounts – the most expensive part of his equipment – take up nearly half of his portrait.<sup>16</sup>

Never act with animals: the ghostly hag also has problems with beasts, though in this case they are mounted on her. Apart from the toad at her gullet, like a parody of a necklace, she carries additional toads which, together with snakes, form a grotesque kind of clothing: her parodic 'clothing' obliterates her even more effectively than the concealing garments of the living courtiers.

In other words, the hero Gawain and the 'soveraynest' king are upstaged by a woman whose jewellery and fine clothes are transformed into predatory beasts, and by a knight whose main chivalric accoutrements, his horses, are variously out of control or metamorphosed into myth – a unicorn, held by a virgin.

What is going on here? The pinnacle of Arthurian society, Arthur and his nephew, are displaced by a challenger and two unnamed female intruders into the hunting and feasting of courtly life, whose portraits in turn are disrupted by the activities of the unregulated lower order of beasts. There is a satirical thrust here which has not been fully isolated.

Both the ghost hag and the knight Galleron challenge the principles on which Arthur's court runs: territorial conquest and the conspicuous consumption of resources derived from it. Put simply, fighting and fun. Galeron boldly states that his land, for example, has been unjustly annexed, and the ghost has already prophesied that when Arthur seizes Tuscany it will be his last acquisition and prove his downfall. These intruders are given longer, if parodic, portraits to give weight to their significance for the theme of earthly transience – the sinner will end lower than the beasts – and the need for personal probity, yet one is an unnamed queen and the other led by a nameless queen. Both invaders critique the court in a manner similar to that in which Fortune invades the narrative of Arthur's progress through Tuscany in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, presaging his decline at his moment of triumph as 'soveraynest sir'. Not surprisingly, the ghost actually refers to 'false fortune' as she impels Gawain towards the ultimate territorial conquest:

'Gete the, Sir Gawayn,  
Turne the to Tuskayn.' (283-4)

['Take care, Sir Gawain, make your way to Tuscany.']

It should not surprise us that the audience is indeed directed to the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*. Only in the *Morte Arthure* – at least among extant texts – does Arthur penetrate as far as Tuscany (3150) before being recalled to Britain by Cradoke's news of Mordrede's usurpation of the throne and adultery with Guinevere. This is the most explicit of many prompts that the full meaning of *Awntyrs* is only yielded up by intertextual reading. There are many more. The *Awntyrs* poet also intended his audience to link up *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* with his poem, because he directs them to do just that by quoting it: *For the sneterand snawe that snaypped hem snell* (82) ('because of the sleeting snow which nipped them keenly')<sup>17</sup> is a reminder of: *The snawe snitered ful snart that snaypped the wylde* (SGGK 2004, 'the snow showered down sharply, stinging the wild animals')<sup>18</sup>. The echo is not poetic ineptitude but a cue towards reading *Awntyrs* as a critique on chivalric values, like *Sir Gawain*.

These and other echoes of *Morte Arthure* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* have long been noticed in *Awntyrs* which, until the 1970s, was simply thought a poor imitation of them – or even two imitations by poets with divergent aims. Today we are in a better position to understand the powerful undertow of its intertextuality which admits currents from at least five late medieval cultural motifs, pretty certainly known to the poet's audience in written/oral, painted and embroidered representations.<sup>19</sup> These are: the exemplum of the dead relative returning from hell to request masses;<sup>20</sup> the loathly lady who has a beautiful counterpart;<sup>21</sup> the mysterious place in the wildwood where personal values are tested; the intruder in the hall; the contest voluntarily lost.<sup>22</sup> The first four are closely associated with the first half of the poem, and the fourth, along with the fifth, also with the second half. All five motifs depend on a contrast in tone and pace between narrative setting and the arresting confrontation with self and mortality. In *The Trental of Gregory* St Gregory's mother appears to him as a hideous ghost while he is saying his papal mass, begging for a trental of masses; the well-known Loathly Lady tale has a rudely interrupted hunt; in the legend of the *Three Living and three Dead Kings* three young kings are also enjoying the hunt when they encounter their dead fathers; *Sir Gawain* is the most famous 'intruder' narrative, and also shows Gawain submitting himself to a blow.<sup>23</sup> All the intertexts confront the issue of death and bodily disintegration as a stark contrast to wealth, beauty and power in life. Gawain frequently appears in Middle English as a hero whose courage in wildwood

encounters with shapechanged people reintegrates them in body and social status, and as Hahn notes, Gawain recoups normality in the face of the threatening unknown.<sup>24</sup> The *wodwos* Gawain encounters in *Sir Gawain* – along with beasts (713-723), cryptically allude to a motif developed in texts like *Turk and Gawain*, and *Carle of Carlisle*, which present male transformations in shape and status, and *The Marriage of Gawain* and *The Weddyng of Sir Gawen*, which dramatise women restored to power through beauty.

A close comparison of the descriptions in *Awntyrs* with those in the Loathly Lady texts suggests both the inspirational flashpoint for *Awntyrs* and the kind of associative reading demanded of its audience. The two extant narratives of Gawain and the loathly lady are located in Inglewood, and the confrontation at Tarn Wadling of Gawain and a 'loathly lady' figure in *Awntyrs* bears so close a relation to the *Weddyng/Marriage of Gawain* narratives, that we must surely assume that, like the verbal echoes of *Morte Arthure* and *Sir Gawain*, some version of the Loathly Lady tale not too distinct from *Weddyng* is also being signalled as an intertext – and more, if *Awntyrs* stands in parodic relation to the loathly lady topos, as I hope to show.<sup>25</sup>

The Inglewood setting is the audience's pointer to read *Awntyrs* alongside Gawain's other supernatural experiences, notably those with old women, which includes *Sir Gawain*. The *Awntyrs* setting of Carlisle, Inglewood and Tarn Wadling may derive directly from the oral version of the tale which also lies behind the extant *Weddyng/Marriage of Gawain* texts.<sup>26</sup> *The Weddyng of Sir Gawen* begins with Arthur hunting in Inglewood forest (the noble great hart rather than the more commonplace bow and stable hunt of barren hinds and does in *Awntyrs*): he is threatened with death by Gromer Somer Joure, a 'strong knight', who accuses him of having 'gevyn my landes in certayn/ With greatt wrong unto Sir Gawen' (58-9). Arthur is given the chance to save himself if he finds the answer to the question 'what thing is it that women love best?' ('most desire' in *Marriage*) and an aged crone in Inglewood tells him, on condition Gawain will marry her, the answer:

'We desyren of men, above alle maner thyng,  
To have the sovereynté...  
Of alle, both hygh and lowe.  
For where we have sovereynté, alle is ourys...  
Of the moste manlyest, is oure desyre

To have the sovereynté of such a syre;  
Suche is oure crafte and gynne.' [‘plot and design’]  
(422-25; 428-30)

which Arthur, conceding Ragnell's greater authority as he does so, quotes almost exactly: 'Women desyre sovereynté... And that is ther most desyre,/ To have the rewle of the manlyest men./ And then are they welle' (468-71).<sup>27</sup> The crone is Sir Gromer's sister Dame Ragnell and he, enraged, fears reprisal from Arthur, which does not come. After Ragnell's grotesque wedding feast she too poses a question: Gawain can have her beautiful by day or by night but not both. After laboriously spelling out to himself the implications for his private self or public image of the choices, Gawain correctly defers to her by letting her choose: she exercises the sovereignty he has thus given her by electing to be beautiful all the time, so breaking the spell put on her by a stepmother, who, she says, made her 'walke in womans liknesse/ Most like a feeind of hell' (*Marriage of Gawain*, 181-2),

This last phrase pinpoints the connection with *Awntyrs*. When Gawain meets the decomposing ghost like Lucifer in *helle* (84) at Tarn Wadling, the audience is being reminded of the 'disformyd' (*Weddyng*, 699) hag of the traditional tale. The Ghost's warning of the danger of *pride with þe appurtenaunce* ('attendant evils') (239) takes the reader back to the description of Guinevere whose splendour justifies the ghost's warning. All that glory (as on a transi tomb) has become the filth and nakedness of the ghost's decomposing frame: loveliness has become loathsome. But once the reader has linked up to the Loathly Lady tale, the ghost's statement that Arthur is too covetous (265) is ironic: the hag of tradition cheated her brother's claim to misappropriated land by playing along with Arthur's redistribution to Gawain, so as to enjoy even greater prestige herself as sovereign over him.<sup>28</sup> Although the *Awntyrs* audience may well have known the high status versions of the tale: Gower's 'Tale of Florent', and Chaucer's nameless Arthurian hero in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, these respectively realign and ignore the political dimension of the plot. More relevant, though, is Gawain's meeting with Morgan le Fay in *Sir Gawain*, for she too desires power (of death) over Arthur's court and wife by manipulating Sir Bertilak, and is placed alongside a 'beautiful figure' but one with analeptic rather than proleptic force: this is how Morgan was before age (and excess?) reshaped her, and like the hag in *Awntyrs*, she is stuck in ugly mode.

Where the hag does transform, narrative is directed by the lady's hideousness, which itself forms an imperative to action: portrait is meaning. But it is the non-transformed hags in *Sir Gawain* and *Awntyrs* who are invested with the greater narrative power, as the sinister reminder that real life poses problems of mortality which cannot be magically solved, that time cannot run backwards to youth.

*Sir Gawain*, Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*, Gower's *Florent*, and the *Weddyng/Marriage of Gawain* all describe an aged woman who wields the power to change lives and to remind us of the one unchangeable factor, death, which rules all life.<sup>29</sup> The parodic description of aged ugliness, usually to appeal to male superiority, is a parody which backfires: however much sniggering this kind of portrait might arouse among senior widowers wealthy enough to replace an old wife with a far younger one, (the reality which the text romanticises), they cannot ultimately evade old age and death:

Her face was red, her nose snotyd withall,  
 Her mowith wyde, her tethe yalowe ouer all,  
 With bleryd eyen gretter then a balle,  
 Her mowith was nott to lak;  
 Her teth hyng over her lyppes;  
 Her chekys syde as wemens hyppes;  
 A lute she bare vpon her bak,  
 Her nek long and therto greatt,  
 Her here cloteryd on an hepe,  
 In the sholders she was a yard brode,  
 Hangynge pappys to be an hors lode;  
 And lyke a barell she was made;  
 And to reherse the fowlnesse of that lady,  
 Ther is no tung may tell, securly-  
 Of lothynesse inowgh she had. (Weddyng, 231-45)

[She had a red face and a snotty nose as well, a gaping mouth full of yellow teeth, bleary eyes larger than a bale (? of wool), there was no lack of size in her mouth (corruption: ? 'face'); ... her cheeks as broad as women's hips; a hump like a lute on her back. Her neck as wide as it was long, her hair tangled in a heap ...her pendulous breasts enough to make a full load for a packhorse; and she was shaped like a barrel; and certainly no

tongue could itemise the hideousness of that 'lady': she had ugliness to spare.]

The bride is not merely old, she is dirty and malnourished. The writer of *The Weddyng of Gawain* does not hesitate to describe the whole body, and the *Gawain*-poet is similarly indiscreet, also using the word *blered* but applying it to Morgan's lips, and emphasising the repugnant details of her weight problem by running the description into the bob and wheel (957-969). The *Marriage* (as far as we have it) is more reticent, and, apart from the uncomplimentary comparison of the old woman with a woosack, so is Gower. Chaucer's Wife of Bath is understandably so coy about the shortcomings of elderly female physique that the Old Wife is not described at all, but, even more loquacious than the Loathly Lady, when her ungallant spouse pinpoints the way such an ugly (*loothly*), old and low-born creature downgrades her male partner, she unerringly counters each shortcoming for male prestige in turn, even admitting she is 'poor' and substituting for *loothly* the terms *foul/filthe* which can mean 'dirty' as well as 'ugly' (*Wife of Bath's Tale*, 1100-01; 1177 / 1207 / 1213-15). The parodic description identifies the dirt and premature old age of impoverishment which must be eliminated from a marriage contract, where a young and beautiful bride reflects the male wealth and power which has been able to command her, and which can use her fertility for its continuance. Only in *Sir Gawain* is there grudging respect for the old woman, and only because she is wealthy dressed.

But where the Loathly Lady appears, she poses a challenge to male identity and dominance; she is only present at all because of *male* needs, great though her own would seem to be. The Loathly Lady is actually part of a dispute about prestige and property, and takes her place in a tale about men fighting over landrights or status. Her attainment of sovereignty brings the restoration of her beauty and therefore power over the 'manliest man' but actually serves to reinstate the male self-image; paradoxically she is actually most powerful in her ugliness, like Morgan and the *Awntyrs* ghost who make or know the future.

The un-transformed hag in *Awntyrs*, a loathly lady of Tarn Wadling, can never be young again. Though she could become spiritually beautiful when the thirty masses of the trental have been said, like the mother in *The Trental of Gregory*, we never see this spiritual shape-changing in Guinevere's mother. The Loathly Lady

story has been cunningly subverted: the challenger whose lands have been removed uses exactly the same expression as Gromer Somer Joure: 'Thou has wonen hem in werre with a wrange wile/And geven hem to Sir Gawayn – that my hert grylles' (*Awntyrs*, 421-2) and Gawain steps in on Arthur's behalf, but he gets no bride in this text because the loathly lady's other, beautiful, self has not been released. Yet that self is present in *Awntyrs*, but as a separate person, now the challenger knight's consort rather than his sister, and he – not Gawain – marries her (whoever she is) at the close. Unlike Gromer Somer Joure, Galeron also gets his lands back and Gawain himself does not lose out: the celebration of male dominance through land and marriage is reinforced, and like the transformed lady, Galeron's nameless and faceless consort becomes a mere adjunct of this new Round Table knight. Yet the Loathly Lady had power over Arthur as well as Gawain, and the Ghost in *Awntyrs* critiques the whole basis of Arthur's society.

But is *Awntyrs* perhaps not as deeply serious as modern critics see it? Surely there is meant to be laughter – hollow? – when the action is halted from line 352 to line 403 while everyone and everything within view gets described? This is the very 'wealth of the world that vanishes' which the Ghost warned of in line 215: it is pointless. Chaucer's Loathly Lady devotes a whole curtain lecture to proving the vanity of human values, before embracing them after all. Such intertextual reading on several levels of tone and genre is only partly available to us: we do not have the full set of allusions and correspondences which build the sophisticated, balanced meaning of *Awntyrs*. But nor, I suspect, did any one member of its original audience: this is a case where a performance, especially a reading of those 'purple passage' descriptions, would be greeted with amused whispers like those which run through cinema audiences: 'that shot's from *Goldfinger*, that's a skit on *Excalibur*', informing those who hadn't noticed, so that consumers of the culture can pool their knowledge and develop the intertextual range, with its accompanying complexity of tone: part fun, part deadly (in every sense in *Awntyrs*) earnest.

So in *Awntyrs* the type narrative of the transformed lady of Inglewood has been turned back to front and masculinized: land is not retained through marriage but restored in the same way it was removed, by combat. In *Awntyrs B*, the only involvement women have in the male contest for power is to plead for the combatants and

to be presented as desirable – embraceable – partners. Woman has no face, let alone a desire for sovereignty, and is merely a bundle of clothes to be admired by men, and erased, her message only half-heeded, when naked in death. Guinevere can only help her mother by relying on male clerical power structures to get the ‘million’ masses said: we never know if they worked. Gawain’s question is not ‘what do women want’ but ‘what shall we *men* of war do?’ – and what they do is go on fighting, regardless of the doom prophecy. The Ghost’s solution is not ‘sovereignty’ for anyone but ‘mekenesse and mercy’ (250) and only very temporarily is sovereignty achieved, invested in a male figure, Arthur *þe soueraynest [s]ir sitting in sete* (358), and, as the ghost warns, his seat on the Wheel of Fortune is precarious (269–73).

*Awntyrs* creates intricate networks of written and oral (and probably visual) narratives to provide both an affirmation and critique of the society it depicts. The audience is invited to see the Ghost as both Fortune, agent of the Round Table’s collapse, and Loathly Lady. In Part Two the hag as intruder is indeed replaced by a beautiful woman, but she lacks both name and power: her attire may be ‘glorious’ (366) but her function is only to plead to Guinevere on behalf of her knight. It looks very much as though *Awntyrs* parodies the ‘hag transformed’ plot by showing that restructuring of the person, like reform of a society, is not probable, and nothing can circumvent the ultimate degeneration of both, a chilling message for a politically prominent audience – especially in old age.<sup>30</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hahn observes: ‘The decorated qualities of *Awntyrs* ask to be understood as a cultural event for listeners and readers already stocked with phrases and themes’ (*Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Medieval Institute Publications, 1995, p. 174). There are four manuscripts of *Awntyrs*, Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91, Oxford Bodleian Library MS Douce 324, ‘Ireland’ now in Robert H. Taylor Collection, Princeton University Library, and Lambeth Palace Library MS 491.

<sup>2</sup> *Awntyrs*, 218; this totals 900 masses (see Hahn, *Sir Gawain*, p.209), which would be said over a period of two-and-a-half years. The normal trental was said over the course of one month, or on the ten major feasts of the year as in *Trental of Gregory*, lines 106–120. The practice of saying masses for the dead predates Gregory himself (c.540–604 AD) but Gregory instituted the ‘month’s mind’ commemoration of a mass a day for thirty days (see Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and*

*the Dead in Medieval Society*, transl. Teresa Lavender Fagan, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 32). As Schmitt shows, the increase in preaching and instructing the laity, beginning with the Cistercians and continued with renewed vigour by the Franciscans and Dominicans, gave further impetus to the 'trade' in trentals; tales such as the Ghost of Gui de Corvo (1325) were used to encourage the saying of masses: 'Purgatory, indulgences, and series of masses were an integral part of the economic machine that supported the church at the end of the Middle Ages. Ghosts were one of the cogs in that machine' (*Ghosts*, p. 159). On the popularity of the trental, see Stephen H. A. Shepherd, ed. and select., *Middle English Romances*, Norton Reader, New York and London, 1995, p. 227 n.1 and 366-7; Shepherd prints an edition of its popularizing text *The Trental of St Gregory* on pp. 369-375.

<sup>3</sup> *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn*, ed. Ralph Hanna III, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1974. Hanna designates lines 1-338 and 703-715 as 'Awntyrs A', stanzas 1-26, 55, and 339-702 as 'Awntyrs B' on the basis of the incidence of iteration (Hanna (1974), 17-24). Helen Phillips, 'The Awntyrs off Arthure: Structure and Meaning'. A Reassessment', *Arthurian Literature* 12 (1993): 63-88 reappraises Hanna's criteria and thinks the poem was composed by one writer. The 'two poem' theory goes back to Hermann Lübke, 'The AunTERS of Arthur at the Tern-Wathelan, Teil I: (Handschriften, Metrik, Verfasser)', Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangen der Doctorwürde, Berlin, 1883, 20-27, whose promised edition never appeared. I have found evidence of several layers in the composition (Rosamund Allen, 'A Textual Study of *The Awntyrs off Arthure*' M.A. Dissertation, University of London, 1968, 90-109), but the point at issue is not how the poem was produced, but how it was consumed; from the latter perspective it has 'organic unity'.

<sup>4</sup> Line 706, as she had promised: 'a myllion of masses' (236); however, this probably means 'a thousand' (*mille*).

<sup>5</sup> All quotations from *Awntyrs* and from *Weddyng of Sir Gawen* are taken from Shepherd, *Middle English Romances*, pp. 219-243 and 243-267. Quotations from *Marriage of Sir Gawain* are from the edition of Thomas Hahn, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, pp. 362-371, which also contains *Awntyrs* (pp. 169-226) and *Weddyng* (41-80); both editors supply marginal glosses and explanatory and textual notes.

<sup>6</sup> Although Hanna and Shepherd gloss *hawe* as 'greenish-blue' and 'blue-gray' respectively, the latter following *MED*, *OED* (s.v. *haw*) shows its range of meaning covers the green-grey shade of the northern seas and the livid colour of corpses; Jean-Claude Schmitt shows that in tales of revenants, deriving initially from Cistercians, monks reappear cowed, and the colour of their hood suggests the state of the soul, fading from deep black to the true Cistercian white on successive reappearances during intercessions by their brothers (*Ghosts*, pp. 201-3). Guinevere already symbolises imperfection and prefigures the state after death her mother's

ghost tells her to be mindful of (*muse on my mirroure*, *Awntyrs*, 167); like the kings out hunting in the Three Living and the Three Dead legend, popular from the early thirteenth century, Guinevere is reminded that she is as her mother was, and will be as her mother is (as Grimestone puts it *suich as thu art was i wone to be/And suich as i am now saltu sone be*; see G. R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England*, Cambridge, 1926, p. 344). *De Tribus Regibus Mortuis*, the Middle English version of the Three Living and Three Dead legend, is published in Thorlac Turville-Petre, ed., *Alliterative Poetry of the Later Middle Ages: An Anthology*, London, 1989, 'The Three Dead Kings', pp. 3, 148-57.

<sup>7</sup> *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, *A Modern Spelling Edition of a Middle English Romance*, ed. John Withrington, Lancaster, 1991, p. 42, n. 231.

<sup>8</sup> With the descriptions of Guinevere and the Lady, compare the description of the Duchess Fortune in *Alliterative Morte Arthure*: 'A duches dereworthily dyghte in dyaperde wedis,/In a surcott of sylke full seilkouthely hewede,/All with lyotour ouerlaide, lowe to þe hemmes./And with ladily lappes, the lenghe of a 3erde./ And all redily reuersside with rebanes of golde./ With bruchez and besauntez and oþer bryghte stonys/Hir bake and hir breste was brochede all ouer;/ With kelle and with corenall, clenliche arrayede./ And þat so comly of colour on, knowen was neuer./ Abowte cho whirlride a whele with hir whitte hondez./ Ouerwhelme a qwayntely þe whele, as cho scholde./ The rowell whas rede golde with ryall stonys./ Raylide with reches and rubyes inewe;...Thereone was a chayere of chalke-whyte siluer./ And chekyrde with charebocle, chawngyng of hewes (3251-3267, ed. Mary Hamel, *Morte Arthure: A Critical Edition*, New York, Garland, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> George Kane once thought the plot 'weak and meagre', pace and even sense being overwhelmed by the prosodic virtuosity and 'verbal resource' (*Middle English Literature*, London, 1951, cited in Hanna (1974), p.11). For Hanna the application of the overused lexis to 'situations where it appears in a new and sterner light' imparts a moral slant ('*The Awntyrs off Arthure: An Interpretation*', *MLQ* 31 (1970): 275-97, 275, 283), but this hardly redeems the diction itself. Hahn says its 'lapidary brilliance' gives preeminence to pattern and that 'profligate consumption of formulaic phrases and type scenes' and 'nearly fetishized objects' encourage the audience to take delight in performance (*Sir Gawain*, p.173). See also Shepherd (1995), p. 368.

<sup>10</sup> The two most recent editions, those of Hahn and Shepherd, comment incisively on the relationship of text and audience. Hahn comments: 'The repetitions within *Awntyrs* at the level of phrase, line, stanza, and episode are calculated not to appear novel, but to resonate with what the audience brings to the poem, at the level of conscious memory and of a cultural unconscious' (*Sir Gawain*, p. 173); Shepherd observes: 'the very fabric of the poem...is associative, and one should be invited by that circumstance

constantly to seek affinities on the larger scale' (*Middle English Romances*, p. 369).

<sup>11</sup> 'Central and Displaced Sovereignty in Three Medieval Poems', *RES* n.s. 33 (1982): 247-52.

<sup>12</sup> Gawain takes on the fight for Arthur, as in *Sir Gawain*, and renounces his lands, but accepts another set of lands from Arthur; he is more magnanimous in *Weddyng* where taking up Arthur's cause means a disgraceful marriage. On a similar motif in *Golagros and Gawain*, see Gillian Rogers, "'Illuminat with lawte, and with lufe lasit": Gawain gives Arthur a lesson in magnanimity', in *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*, ed. Jennifer Fellows et al., Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1996, pp. 94-111.

<sup>13</sup> Among others, Turville-Petre suggests that in this association 'the suggestion of moral dalliance is clear' ("Summer Sunday", "de Tribus Regibus Mortuis" and "The Awntyrs off Arthure": Three Poems in the Thirteen-Line Stanza', *RES* n.s. 25 (1974): 10); on the other hand, Raymond H. Thompson explores a tradition of rivalry between Arthur and Gawain in 'Gawain against Arthur', *Folklore* 85 (1974): 113-21.

<sup>14</sup> My aim in what follows is to show that the ornate and traditional fabric of *Awntyrs* chimes in with the ethos of conspicuous consumption which the poem both celebrates and critiques, inviting the audience both to associate and reanalyse the cultural baggage which they bring to the poem's elaborate performance. See also n. 10 above.

<sup>15</sup> The season is wrong, of course: *Awntyrs* is set in winter, 'hocktide' ceremonies took place on Monday and Tuesday of Low Week, after Easter; on the Monday, women intercepted/took hold of members of the opposite sex who paid a small fee for release (see Marie Denley and Virginia Davis, *The Medieval Seasons*, London, 1991, p. 61; Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsler, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present*, 2 vols., Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1988, vol. 1, p. 103). However, at hocktide courts met, and rents were due, which may have some bearing on Galeron's complaint.

<sup>16</sup> For the relative cost of the knight's horse, see for example R.H.C. Davis, *The Medieval Warhorse*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1989, p. 89, and pp. 43-5.

<sup>17</sup> This reading is based on the correct version of the line in the Thornton MS, rather than the editions of Hahn and Shepherd, which follow Douce (and Ireland) in reading: *that snartly hem snelles* 'which sharply/bitterly hurries them on'.

<sup>18</sup> As translated by R.A. Waldron, ed., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, London, 1970, p. 115.

<sup>19</sup> 'Three Dead Kings' was a frequently subject for domestic and religious wall decoration, and is the probable source for the transi tomb style, the

first example of which in England was that which Archbishop Chichele prepared for himself in Canterbury Cathedral in 1424 (well in advance of his death in 1443) and about the time *Awntyrs* was probably composed (or compiled!). Shepherd notes the similarity of confrontations between living and dead and the transi tomb, where the (usually high-ranking religious) occupant appears in formal regalia on the upper section, and as a cadaver consumed by worms, snakes and toads on the lower (*Middle English Romances*, p. 367). For detailed treatment of transi tomb monuments see Kathleen Cohen, *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Berkeley/ Los Angeles/ London, University of California Press, 1973; Cohen shows that toads, like those which consume the Ghost in *Awntyrs*, symbolise sins, and belong to a German iconographic tradition, the earliest and most famous example of which is the tomb of François de Sarra at La Sarraz in Switzerland, perhaps dating from just before 1400 (pp.77-883). Many household books must have contained poems like *Trental* (in the Vernon MS) and *De Tribus Regibus*; another poem using contrast is *Somer Soneday* (ed. Turville-Petre, *Alliterative Poetry of the Later Middle Ages*), which also begins with a hunt, and has a wheel of Fortune on which three kings are ascending, at the pinnacle and descending, and a duke lies dead at the foot.

<sup>20</sup> As in *The Trental of Gregory*. For the adulterous mother exempla, see David N. Klausner, 'Exempla and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', *Medieval Studies* 34 (1972): 307-25. Medieval theologians stated that though ghosts might come from hell, they could not request or receive any help; this was only available to those in purgatory, whose sufferings, however, were so acute that they might speak of their abode as 'hell' (see Schmitt, *Ghosts*, p. 178-181); such figures claimed the kind of foresight shown by the *Awntyrs* ghost (ibid. 90-92).

<sup>21</sup> *The Weddyng of Sir Gawen, The Marriage of Sir Gawain, Gower's Tale of Florent in Confessio Amantis*, I, 1396-1871, *The Ballad of King Henry*, and Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*. See also Sigmund Eisner, *A Tale of Wonder: A Source Study of Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Tale*, Wexford, John English, 1957.

<sup>22</sup> See also, perhaps in imitation of *Awntyrs*, *Golagros and Gawain*, 1094-1111.

<sup>23</sup> See A. C. Spearing, 'The *Awntyrs off Arthure*', in Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach, eds., *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*, Kent (Ohio), Kent State University Press, 1981, pp. 183-202: 185. For a typically shapechanged intruder, see, e.g. *The Turke and Gawain*, 12-15. The Green Knight's counterpart in the later *The Greene*

*Knight* fails miserably to create a dramatic intrusion by being kept waiting at the porter's lodge to make his entry (98). Sir Gromer intrudes on the hunt rather than the feast, as does the ghost in *Awntyrs*.

<sup>24</sup> 'Gawain's role...works to effect the reconciliation or reappropriation, rather than the destruction, of the strange or alien' (*Sir Gawain*, p. 25).

<sup>25</sup> As two recent critics observe, both *Weddyng* and *Marriage* independently derive from a source which spoils the type-narrative of the loathly lady: the huntsman and bridegroom must originally have been identical (Gillian Rogers, 'The Percy Folio Manuscript revisited', in Maldwyn Mills *et al.* ed., *Romance in Medieval England*, Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 1991, p. 56; Elizabeth Williams, 'Hunting the deer: some uses of a motif-complex in Middle English romance and saint's life', *ibid.*, p. 198).

<sup>26</sup> Carlisle itself figures frequently (e.g. in *Greene Knight*, *Carle of Carlisle* (484), *Avowyng of Arthur* (also Inglewood), but Shepherd thinks *Weddyng* (which is set in 'Ingleswod') must have had Tarn Wadling as setting (like *Marriage*, 84) ('No poet has his travesty alone: *The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell*', in *Romance Reading*, ed. Fellows *et al.*, pp. 112-128).

<sup>27</sup> Shepherd advances the very plausible theory that the original version of *Weddyng* very probably used stanza-linking (like *Awntyrs*) and presented the answer 'sovereignty' at the sovereign mid-point line ('No poet has his travesty', pp. 116-7). Shepherd comments that *The Awntyrs off Arthure* and *The Weddyng of Sir Gawen* are to be read as analogues of each other (*Middle English Romances*, Preface, p. xiii) but in his opinion the extant text of *Weddyng* parodies *Awntyrs*, just as it has been influenced by *Wife of Bath's Tale* and *Morte D'Arthur*; my own view is that *Awntyrs* itself is a deliberate subversion of the original Loathly Lady tale, which the poet of *Weddyng* may well be acknowledging by citing *Awntyrs* in his own version.

<sup>28</sup> Presumably Sir Gromer is meant to be her step-brother, which is why she is keen to retain through her own marriage the lands he has lost to Gawain.

<sup>29</sup> Gower's narrative is manipulated by two old women, since the question Florent has to answer is posed by his accidental victim's grandmother.

<sup>30</sup> I have suggested elsewhere that *Awntyrs* may have been written in 1424-5 for the very aged Ralph Neville earl of Westmorland and his second wife, Joan Beaufort, whose still-living mother was Katherine Swynford, formerly Gaunt's mistress ('*The Awntyrs off Arthure: jests and jousts*', in *Romance Reading*, ed. Fellows *et al.*, pp. 129-142).

## Appendix

The structural divisions below show how *The Awntyrs off Arthure* is an adaptation of the type narrative of the Loathly Lady:

### Loathly Lady: Type Narrative

1a Arthur hunts in Inglewood.

1b Knight appears: 'You have taken my lands and given them to Gawain!'

Arthur is set a puzzle to solve instead of being killed: what do women want most?

2 Arthur, helped by Gawain, sets out to find the answer.

3 Arthur (?originally Gawain) meets a powerful Loathly Lady who (on condition that Gawain marry her) gives the answer: women want to be sovereign.

4 Gawain agrees to marry her, so freeing Arthur.

5 The Knight is therefore worsted: his lands are lost and Arthur is his enemy.

6 Gawain marries, his bride turns beautiful when given power to choose her own status (by giving either power as a public icon or pleasure in domestic privacy).

### Adaptation in *Awntyrs*

1a Arthur hunts in Inglewood.

3 Gawain meets a *disempowered* Loathly Lady; (her answer: what no one 'wants' is death).

2 Gawain seeks an answer to his own question 'how shall we [men of arms] fare?' i.e. what **men** want most is sovereignty over others' lands.

1b A Knight appears: 'You have taken my lands and given them to Gawain!'

4 Gawain agrees to *fight* for landrights (i.e. he is not asked to marry the Lady).

5 The Knight is worsted (by combat not wit), **but** he regains his lands.

6 The *Knight* marries (not Gawain). The Loathly lady gains her wish: masses. [*Does her soul become beautiful?*]