

The Romantic Quest. Post-Modernism Search of Encoded Ideology

Introducing...

It is difficult to give structure to a post-structurallist reading of the subject of any 'writing', and the idea of fiction itself is to impose a definition of reality onto a verbal representation, and complicit in this is a "rage for order" which must be acknowledged. For the writer, then, just as for the "characters-represent", and for us trying to 'read' or make sense of the fiction, there is a reciprocation which takes place between the process of reading and that of writing. For the writer the production of fiction, though dependant on the vehicle of language in which it is ideologically located, is an attempted quest into the 'unknown'. There is, in the propositional nature of fiction and criticism, an inherent search for its own function. This is approached without exception through the "invention" of a "fabulated" world, a quest into 'otherness' which enables a critique of, or an attempt to define, the self- the "home" initially fled from.

Magic and the romantic narrative

The "glitt'ring eye" of the storyteller.

Literature in the english language has certain common properties which can be traced back to specific sources, but the performance of storytelling has always held a position of mysterious aloofness. The immortal narrator has always had some kind of knowledge or awareness which seems to exceed the boundaries of his story itself. In medieval times, the popular source of entertainment, just as in the modern world, was not the written word, but the dramatical process of the telling of a tale. In feudal courts of the middle ages the telling of stories was performed through the form of the ballad. Tale-telling was a craft, and a Minstrel was employed to entertain his audience by recounting flamboyant, witty, but

often mystical tales of high adventure to music. The job of a minstrel was to memorise and often expand upon or exaggerate his story, and to sing it in verse form to his listeners. Hence there was a great dependence on rhythm, repetition¹, and strict metrical and structural form.

The intrigue with which these tales were sung, the bewitching ability which was so important to retain the attention of the audience was not a simple matter of form, but used to offset the content of the tale in an often alarming way. The way in which different depths of poetic meaning are projected by the fantastical and ambiguous mysterious knowledge of the storyteller obviously plays a central part in, for instance, Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, even Lewis Carroll's The Hunting of The Snark, and it is this invocation of unknown adventure, different possibilities for meaning which causes so much fascination.

Romance patterns

The encompassing term "romance" has shifting and elusive definition. The Oxford companion to English Literature states that an important quality of romance is "the suspension of the circumstances normally attendant on human actions (often through magic) in order to illustrate a moral point". The actual term "Romance" has its origins in the renaissance neo-classical fondness of roman civilisation, and the modern word 'roman' in French translates as 'novel'.² Romance, then, originates from the *act of*

¹ The repetitive 'bob and wheel' note at the end of each line of narrative in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight draws our attention to the fact that this is a narrative, very deliberately put together for the aural experience of the listener, as a kind of hypnotic, or lulling feature

² neither of these factors should be disregarded bearing in mind the close link between ancient Breton and Celtic, both in language and folklore. Early romances still survive in poetry such as the 'Breton Lays', in stories such as Emarre and Sir Orfeo. Sir Orfeo, as we would expect, is the celtic reincarnation of the greek figure of Orpheus, and the story runs that his wife, having been 'abducted' by the king of the faeries, sets out on an adventure to win her back by use of his lyrical skill and, above all, by his hypnotic enchantment of faeryland itself through his harp-playing. The 'form enacts the content' as we are enchanted by both the lyrical regularity and by the classical power of Orpheus' enthralling gift.

storytelling as much as from the art of it, the subject-matter generally being based around a far-fetched and often amusing adventure story.

Structuralist perspectives on allegory

Structuralist anthropologists such as Levi-Strauss, would point out the deep rift between mythology and language. On a linguistic level, this echoes the fundamental structuralist discussion over the relationship between the "sign" and the "signifier", and Douglas Bush says of allegory:.

Vladimir Propp, in his The Morphology of the Folk-tale takes the traditional folk-tale pattern, analysing the structural properties and drawing undeniable and far reaching parallels between the various folk-tale genres. Using the idea of diverse and variant "mythemes" which are interchangeable with each other in the overall 'syntax' of a story, he proposes that the idea of folk-tales or, more relevantly, the presence of recurring mythological structures is symptomatic of the idealistic constraints on which the signifying system of civilisation depends. The implication of Propp's work is that certain deep moral structures, reinforced by tradition, self-perpetuated through history, are inevitably present throughout the structures of all civilisation(s). One of the most important features of this analysis of "the folk-tale" (and consequently the society which has created it) is the idea of a 'quest', the adventure away from the security of home. Propp talks of the folk-tale in linguistic terms as a grammatical sentence whose structure can remain the same in spite of the insertion of varying verbs, adjectives and nouns, notably bringing the idea of the quest, perhaps concurrent with the creation of speech³. Inherent in Propp's analysis is the question of the bearing which the folk-tale has on how a society in-forms 'meaning'. The Morphology of The Folk-tale proposes the idea that mythology is inescapable not only within society but

³The modern textual example is the twentieth century fixation (precured by Jessie Weston and T.S. Elliot's respective works) with the Fisher-King myth. The legend of a knight freeing the wasteland of the modern world from its spiritual desertion by asking the correct questions, thus delegating some definition of overall purpose to the chaotic domain of the Fisher King has been a popular, almost an apothetical element in both the content of literature and its subsequent critical evaluation over the past century.

within the structure of the language which governs it. Thus, the sphere in which language seems to exist as a 'neutral' entity, in the form of fiction ('neutral' in that it makes no direct pretensions towards an *enforcement* of declarative reality), is, in fact, not neutral at all. It is part of the functional system of the "Ideological State Apparatus".⁴

⁴on Althusser's ideas

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

In the introduction to Six English Romances Maldwyn Mills tells us that romances can put into three characteristic categories, in terms of being 'heroic', 'edifying', or 'chivalric'-there is either a theme of unity in combat, of an essential learning process, or of some kind of a moral test. these features are evident in all medieval romances, but nowhere are they brought together in one text in such an interesting way as in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Romance, then, originates from the *act* of storytelling as much as from the art of it, the subject-matter generally being based around a far-fetched and often amusing adventure story.

In his introduction to the 1955 edition of the book, Tolkein encapsulates the mediavellist's attraction with it in that it is a portrait of "marvellous adventure, courtly life, knightly love-making". What makes Sir Gawain and the Green Knight so interesting for a modern analysis is the self-conscious way in which it does not simply do the job of inscribing oral minstrelsy. It consists, continues Tolkien, "of two main adventures, the first...beheading match, the second...the temptation of Sir Gawain". The poem is an all important medieval example because of the very nature of Romance, but even more significantly, because the play-off between this adventurous form and its moral content indicates a sophisticated literary awareness of itself and its own value-system.⁵

Romantic quest into the unknown

⁵Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is an anonymous poem, but it is given a date roughly in the region of 1375. If Gawain is indeed a 'ricardian' figure, then Burrow's proposition of what characterises this period being the "habit of distinguishing, defining, classifying and schematising" is an interesting one.

Tolkein may well extol the virtues of the poem in that "it was, moreover, a story to call forth all that humanity which was the greatest virtue of the medieval romancer", but another description of the "romance function" depends on "the technique which brings the known in contention with the unknown" in order that "the hero can demonstrate the very best action which a man can perform".

.With the post-modern awareness of the link between "interpretation" and "quest for meaning" in mind, it is as pointless to deny to the idea of the quest a primary place in the analysis of discourses as it is to dismiss the "romantic" quest as a medieval 'fashion'. Romantic quests are echoed and reworked in modern fiction as much as ever before, and as Northrop Fry says, "It is part of the critic's business to show how all literary genres are derived from the quest-myth".

The ambivalent way in which the poet addresses the matter of balance between known and unknown, enacted in the symmetry of the two opposing plots⁶ brings attention to this tendency for order and definition.

If Sir Gawain and the Green Knight signifies a break from traditional minstrelsy, it was still written for the intrigue and enjoyment of the courtly reader or listener. The humour in it comes from the way it treats its own romantic content, the fact that it is primarily about "disenchantment" of various types of ideals. Douglas Bush⁷ tells us that "the humanising of a myth" is a popular feature of much literature of this period, and certainly the downright humanity in the way the Gawain story is told, and the actual figure of Gawain himself, who has to come to terms with his own human failings for the first time in his history as a popular folk-figure, forces a re-evaluation of what specific "moral point" is being made. The mythical figure of Gawain is being experimented with and 'demythologised', as is the traditional convention of romance, but to what ends? Certainly there is an ironical "jolite"(mirth) in the poem, but what makes this possible is the tenets of romance and romantic mythology as set out by a tradition that we, in the twentieth century can still understand (and, whether we like it or not, still adhere to.)

ROMANCE: Flight through the wilderness to a new version of the "home" initially fled from.

⁶both the temptation and the adventure plots are being reworked from celtic mythology

⁷Classical themes in the Middle Ages from Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition

a: The post modern quest and "écriture"

Roland Barthes, in *S/Z*, outlines what he describes as the "écriture" of the reading process, saying that in this process "there are no 'innocent readers'". Later theorists, such as Christopher Norris⁸, describe the process of 'reading' a text as "part of the interpreter's rage for order". The process of criticism, or obtaining a 'reading' of something enigmatic and ambivalent (i.e., assigning 'meaning' or 'value' to it), may well be a manifestation of a desire for order insofar as it consists of imposing meaning.

Within the 'flight through the wilderness' idea which the reader performs alongside the central character, there is, by both 'entities', an "interpretation" of his circumstances, a self-definition through through action both of reading and performing the quest. There are levels of 'reading' and 'writing' which are present within the action of the plots themselves, which occur between the 'characters-represent' -for instance, the way in which Sir Gawain has to interpret and assimilate a world in which the Green Knight is at the "imaginative centre"⁹. This factor foregrounds the self-reflexivity of the fictional representation which is occurring in the telling of the tale and also the decentring of the ethical stance for which Gawain stands. Gawain has the task of imposing definition on an indefinable world-a contradiction in terms in its own right.

The Green Knight stands for disorder and transgression of normal behavioural and social boundaries, and the setting of the story is in a world in which "the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended"¹⁰

Jessie L. Weston, in her anthropologically influential *From Ritual To Romance* suggests that various types of quests are to be found in prehistoric rituals common to various civilisations, the indication being that the tendency of man towards an assertion of his rationality over the "irrational", (of "self" over "other"), towards a knowledge of 'the unknown' is an inherent feature in the production of mythology or fiction in general . Although the implications of how man becomes conscious of himself through the creation of mythology, fiction, language are not followed through by Miss Weston, the generality of her

⁸Christopher Norris; *Deconstruction*

⁹Sperring *Criticism and Medieval Poetry*

¹⁰see Northrop Frye's fictional modes below

investigation has repercussions throughout literature, whether it be for medieval 'lays' or modern novels.

In Orwell's Nineteen Eighty Four, Conrad's Heart Of Darkness, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, there is an obvious reflection of the structural properties of romance in this 'flight through the wilderness' form. The construction of the plot is based around the entry into an extra-ordinary or "magical" world, a journey into the unknown, a fragmentation of an established social framework. Common to all three texts as well, however, is a deliberate refusal to allow us, as interpreters, a final analysis of the overall 'message' to be found within the "mythology" of the fiction. This 'fragmentation' is never finally reconciled. This deliberate denial of closure stems fundamentally from the problematics and dialectics of how the hero 'reads' or 'gains meaning from' his experiences which affects how we gain meaning from our experience of him. Whether there is a quest through the wilderness of the unknown "hautdesert" in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight or through a more immediately recognisable environment such as the hostile but eerily familiar world of "Oceania", there is an attempt towards a familiarisation of the hero with his (always, of course, 'textual') environment; a search for the reaffirmation of the identity of character through its own function as such. In all the characters excepting, perhaps, in some of the historically pre-formed ideas about the medieval myth of Hawaiian, there is the illusion of having somehow existed before the commencement of our story.

b: Realism: verbal colonisation.

Catherine Belsey's¹¹ comments on the production of fiction are useful tools to tackle the fictional presentation of expectations which cause so many problems for reader and character alike. Belsey outlines how, in the example of the detective novel, narrative "turns on the creation of enigma through the precipitation of disorder", and the "disclosure, the dissolution of enigma through the re-establishment of order" is what is revealed. The text is an ideological tool which is used to reinforce people's sense of a structured and dominant reality by inferring its absence, restoring its presence, thus providing the illusion that it has the right to be there. "Realism" is far from a reflection of reality. Because of its ideological

¹¹Catherine Belsey-Critical Practice gives a clear synopsis of the modern preconception of the production of the fictional text

nature as discourse, it is revealed as an artificial (and 'capitalist') construct whose structure is used to ideologically 'create' social values, normal behaviour, a universal concept of reality.

The illusion of characters existing outside of the fiction (thus the successful operation of a fiction) is an example of what Belsey, discussing 'classic realism' calls a "disclosure of the mythical assumptions which are prevalent in the text". It is the way in which quests are generally concluded problematically, left incomplete, which brings attention to the ideological assumptions which are somehow preordained by the structure of the text. Ideological assumptions are invoked through the sub-text of the fiction, then reveal themselves through their own subversion.

The way in which conflicts occur when systems of behaviour are called to account, or present themselves to our heroes in paradox, brings attention to the way in which they are represented-these texts ultimately fail to "efface" their "own nature as discourse", because the "truth" which they tend to propose is always problematic. Similarly, the way in which each hero fails to locate himself within the ideology of the quest brings out the instance of his establishment of himself being a "rage for order". Words are imposed onto a proposed reality, but the 'colonisation', rather than reinforcing the structure of its own departure point, highlights its flaws and its artificial nature. On a textual-linguistics level, each character as we recognise him, is brought into existence by the world into which he is written. The 'plot', as it were, is for him to structure the world around him and make it reflect and enforce his character.

The character of "Sir Gawain" as he is in this story, for instance, is given existence by the quest itself. He is set up as an idea by his own construction within the text, his own relative function. He is not merely reinforced, but brought into very existence by firstly the creation of fictional instability in terms of his proclaimed knightly perfection and the testing of his integrity in adverse circumstances, then secondly his survival. His reputation as an absolute figure is very nearly still in tact on his return to Camelot, but flawed in his humanity. In many ways Gawain has, through his one sin of transgression, lost everything which gave him status as the perfect knight. He has encountered an alternative discourse in action and his disillusionment can never be reversed. In reality the 'hero' is a "disclosure" of an ideal which Gawain is alienated from and cannot live up to. It is also a creation of the text and only the text.

J.A. Burrow describes Sir Gawain and the Green Knight as a conglomeration of many different tenets of Romance, saying the poem is "a matter, not of changing the world by founding new kingdoms or

conquering new enemies...but of coming to terms with...one's own nature and the world around one"¹². Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, then, signals the emergence of a more complex form which could truly be termed 'literature'; "out of all this", says Burrow, "the poet builds a hierarchy of moral issues based on scholastic principles of subordination, with 'trawthe' at the top". The 'naissance' of English literature could, in this sense, be said to coincide with that rebirth of classical thinking, the 'Renaissance', in this, its departure from the craft of minstrelsy.

In his "Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" Burrow looks at Frye's analysis of the position of the 'hero' within the text (see "Irony and Fictional Modes chapter) in terms of his "power" over his own circumstances, or, in Burrow's words, his "power of action. The hero, then, is created against the background of the text, reflected by the world around him. He is defined in terms of the action he takes in his situation, and also in terms of the knowledge he has of it. The world around acts as a series of symbolic backgrounds against which he can assert different elements of character, in terms of virtue, prowess or bondage. The values epitomised by certain symbolic registers, are generally found in plentiful and conflicting abundance, and it is the choices which have to be made which denote "humanity", or, more accurately, the development of characterisation. Power comes through knowledge, and knowledge is reflected in the world around..

Often the mirror-image is not quite true¹³, and the crises imposed upon the characters subjects them to perpetual conflict with their (and our) ideal conception of themselves. The way in which this is brought out ,in each text, is that the quest for 'order', or structure, the search for an overarching and omniscient existence or 'controlling hierarchy' is always thwarted, rendering each text problematic and "interrogative" (i.e. it interrogates its own ideological assumptions).

¹²p101 Ricardian Poetry

¹³in Lacanian terms, its very nature is essentially "other"

Language and "Trawthe".

Gawain, for instance, is circumstantially prevented from living up to his "name" (and indeed his name/reputation has power over him, not the other way round) which would define him as a "perfect knight", Marlowe who is in search of the "truth" is forced to 'lie' to Kurtz's fiancée, saying: "I laid the ghost of his gifts with a lie". Indeed, it is "trawthe" which is located at the top of the moral hierarchy in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. In terms of ideal and actual representations there is a fault line which runs right to the core of language itself, a fundamental rift between signifier and signified.

Winston Smith's escape is an attempt to define himself beyond the ideological language of the Party (and, indeed, "newspeak" itself), an attempt to 'read' the world in which he lives in a way which will authenticate his individuality beyond the confines of the language he is given, but, of course, he fails. Winston's attempt I have called a 'reading', but the book contains the 'sub-plot' (which we later realise with O'Brien's revelation of Winston's position all along, is the main plot) of Winston's attempt to 'write' a diary-that is, to invent another discourse beyond what Christopher Norris calls "the endless displacement of meaning which both governs language and places it forever beyond the realms of a stable, self-authenticating knowledge" Man writes language, and language writes man.¹⁴ Self-authentication is what each of our heroes is after, and the authentication of the "self" outside of a hierarchy of images, myths, words even (-that which constitutes our ideological identification) is what eludes them all. Words can never authenticate themselves, but yet they are essential to self-expression. Certainly the way "mythemes" present themselves in a consciously ambivalent way is as much a problem for the courtly knight trying to live up to conflicting ideals as it is for Winston Smith trying to affirm his existence outside of the politico-linguistic system in which he is just a number. Similarly, Marlowe can never describe the true nature of Kurtz's "horror" because his language doesn't equip him to do so.

a: Fiction and History

¹⁴C. Norris: "writing is the endless displacement of..."

In Northrop Frye's The Secular Scripture various approaches toward the subject and origins of fiction are mentioned. Frye cites Wallace Stevens's use of the strictures "imagination" and "realism" which could be seen in opposition to each other where the production of literature is concerned, saying that "in the fiction-writing of the last four or five centuries there has been a kind of reversible shuttle moving between imagination and reality...one direction is called "romantic", the other "realistic". Robert Scholes tells us that "reality is too subtle for realism to catch it", in a justification of 'magical realism', "but by invention, by fabulation, we may open a way toward reality that will come as close to it as human ingenuity may come". Both these quotations assume the existence of some kind of stable reality, and make a fictional distinction between representation of reality and of fantasy which cannot ultimately be justified. The self-reciprocating and arbitrary relationship between language and meaning makes the reversibility of the two Stevensian categories "romantic" and "realistic", even the inversion of them, not only plausible but imperative to our understanding.

So, in terms of this 'Romance', Sir Gawain is given existence by the poem itself, he does not exist beforehand. He is set up as an "idea", or "mytheme", in the syntagmatic linear structure of the Arthurian romantic norms. This is played off against the circular movement of the plot (Gawain ends up back at Camelot, but it is a 'new version' of his "Home") to introduce a paradigmatic element to the tale, which is reinforced by the author's ambiguous attitude to his character and that "Home". There is the initial security of the round table, the ensuing instability of the quest and testing time, then his eventual survival of the trial. Gawain's perfection is reinforced by the potential in the story to lose it. He returns defeated but why is it that he is still referred to as a "constant knight", even immediately after he has accepted the treacherous "green girdle". As Burrow says, Gawain refers to his adventure as a failure, as "trecherye and untrawthe", but "Bertilak and, by implication, the court, represent that same conduct as an example of "grete trawthe"...which are we to believe?" Under whose judgement can Gawain be counted constant? Certainly not under the moral regime of the Arthurian ethos. The fact that the Green Knight eventually commends Gawain for his love of life and his "jolite", indicates Gawain's position within the 'alternative' judgement of the Green Knight himself. The poet himself obviously does not take Gawain seriously any more than the green knight does. In many ways, Gawain's 'tragic-flaw' is in fact comic; "take care, Sir Gawain", says the author, addressing him as from afar.

The presence of such multiple perspectives suggests what Jonathan Culler calls a "hierarchy of discourses"¹⁵. There is a self-consciousness in the way characters attempt to carry out the roles assigned to them.

b; Irony and fictional modality.

The Gawain poet is aware of what his text does, that it "'interpellates' the reader, addresses itself to him or her directly, offering the reader as the position from which the text is most 'obviously' intelligible, the position of the subject in (and of) ideology"¹⁶. The "obvious" intelligibility is as a romance, but it is the use of the words "position of the subject of ideology" here which makes us aware of the possibility of irony at different levels in the text.

Northrop Frye's ideas about "Fictional Modes" from his Anatomy of Criticism are interesting to apply as a template against which we can match up the different levels of representation in fiction. Frye's analysis encourages a plurality of fictional standpoints; an interrogation of the nature of fiction itself.

1. If superior in *kind* both to other men and to the environment of other men, the hero is a divine being, and the story about him will be a 'myth' in the common sense of a story about a god...
2. If superior in *degree* to other men and to his environment, the hero is the typical hero of 'romance', whose actions are marvellous but who is himself identified as a human being. The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended: prodigies of courage and endurance, unnatural to us, are natural to him and enchanted weapons, talking to animals, terrifying ogres and witches and talismans of miraculous power violate no rule of probability once the postulates of romance have been established...

¹⁵Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poets*

¹⁶Belsey

3. If superior in degree to other men but not to his natural environment, the hero is a leader...
This is the hero of the *high mimetic* mode of most epic and tragedy...
4. If superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is one of us: we respond to a sense of his common humanity and demand from the poet the same laws of probability that we find in our own experience. This gives us the hero of the *mimetic* mode...
5. If inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have the sense of looking down on a scene of bandage, frustration, or obscurity, the hero belongs to the *ironic* mode...

What Frye is veering towards in this analysis is a definition of how much knowledge a hero has of his circumstances at different points, how this is represented to us fictionally, and consequently how much knowledge we have of what is going on. "So we may come to see the story not as a last analysis of 'truth', but of the capacities and limitations of man"(Burrow).

Thus a differentiation must be made between our own reading of the "fearsome and wild" textual world and Gawain's. At given points in Gawain's own 'quest' for a true re-presentation of his identity, he finds himself inserted into an ideal role and laughed at by author, reader and other characters in close succession. However this joke depends upon his heroic status in the first place.

The location of the 'Knight-Errant'

Burrow says of the Green Knight, "in essence he is the other - the other than human." However, the knight is not represented as simply as that on a plot level. In terms of Malvyn Mills' "heroic" romance category, in which there is a unity between participants in battle, Gawain is "initiated" (Burrow) into the world of the Green Knight. We, and he, are given knowledge of 'otherness' which provides us with the same power as the Green Knight has - we are enabled to take a stance outside of arthurian courtly ideals and see the paradoxes and conflicts of that system. We here have actually adopted the position of 'other', as we objectively view the romantic ideology of the poem in microcosm-civilisation in macrocosm. So 'Self' and other are subverted but also here inverted.

On page 62 of Medieval Literature¹⁷ J.A. Burrows gives a simple synopsis of how the idea of romance can be brought together with the definition of 'self'. The idea of the escape from a supportive environment, escape from home into an 'other' magical or unfamiliar world, in order, objectively, to redefine the 'self' is something which is a central model to bear in mind. In Sir Gawain "the courtly order has been put to the test of nature. As a consequence Gawain recognises his own nature knows himself" according to Burrow, but on a more complex level, the 'self', which Gawain sees is in fact a representation of himself dependent on, and defined by, his restricting cultural circumstances. More importantly still is the fact that the way Gawain sees himself is, by necessity, through a 'representation'. We are very deliberately first introduced to a Gawain that is very different from the Gawain we get to know through the text. Indeed, the Gawain who lies awake in bed on the morning of his execution is everything which the traditional fearless honourable Gawain is not.

So the purpose of romance is so that we can see ideology reflected by archetypes. The problem is that there is always a flaw. The archetypes used to symbolise ideals never quite measures up to expectation (like, for instance, the archetypal 'perfect knight').

Derek Brewer says that the poet's treatment of Gawain is "without irony" - and insists that this poem can and should be treated as a "Symbolic Story", which would seem debatable in the circumstances.¹⁸ He is right, however, in the assumption already outlined by post-structuralism, that all fiction is infinitely symbolic and cannot represent but rather in itself shapes and 'discloses' our values, it is very difficult to argue a constant and similar presence of the second of Frye's catagories in the poem, and the second only (ie, that Gawain is "superior in *degree*" to the reader). Brewer says that "the argument ...is not to deny the obvious literal face value of the words of the text, but to show that the words also have wide associations and symbolic implications." This leaves room for the flexibility required to read this poem, but surely part of the enjoyment of the levels of irony is that, in a certain light, Gawain can be seen as a "fool" A fantastical world, in the light of ongoing critical debate over 'realism' which is outlined above, holds as much weight as any text pretending to be a genuine reflection of what we call reality.

¹⁷Medieval Literature

¹⁸Derek Brewer in his 'Symbolic Stories' resists any application of the levels of 'realism' to Gawain, discounting any arguments which suggest irony

At the climax of the moral tensions which converge on, and are exposed by Gawain's situation, Gawain is forced into a position in which 'tact' is the only thing which can preserve his integrity as a "courtly knight". Paradoxically, 'tact' is the application of "half-truths", or 'lies', and thus a betrayal of the "pentangle" of "truth" which he displays on his shield. Bertilak's wife manages to verbally argue (N.B. Collonise) Gawain into a position whereby "to reject her advances bluntly would be to insult her. To accept them would betray his position as the hosts guest." (Brian Stone). Gawain's courtliness does not measure up to conflicting discourses within the construction of his "image" as "Gawain the Glorious". The poet is not providing so much a critique of secularity but rather of the patriarchal desire to impose ideology, symbols, words upon the undefinable world of reality.- and, of course, the relativity of these signifiers.¹⁹

The 'courtly lover' ideal and that of the chaste, pious knight, respectful of patriarchal (and christian) institutions are here brought into conflict. On such occasions, where the presentation of ideological discourses causes a crisis of self-conflict, a self-conscious blame-shifting process is characteristic, where the hero, in order to emancipate himself, blames some new element of the unknown-in this case (and also in Heart of Darkness), women take the blame. When the real nature of his bargain with the Green Knight is revealed by him, Gawain's grief for his own 'fall' from perfection, the way in which the binary system which gives him definition is trivialised, needs an outlet. His self-

¹⁹Of the pentangle legend, Burrow again illustrates in an analysis of lines 2025 - 2042 (where the green girdle becomes the central motif of Gawain's armour) how Gawain has appropriated a signifier of a more useful ideology in these circumstances than the 'protective' pentangle, or the Virgin Mary. We, as readers, see here the belittling of the patriarchal ideology with which Gawain has been seeking to colonise this unknown land. Burrow's comment is interesting: "The pentangle, which occupied such a commanding position in the first arriving scene, is here subordinated both theoretically and grammatically... to the 'lace'. It is almost as if the latter has taken the pentangle's place" - certainly the 'pentangle' lacks power in this situation, but the green girdle does not, it seems, have any intrinsic power. Its only power is that it signifies to the Green Knight Gawain's love of life. In this sense it does have significance -it leads to the survival of Sir Gawain- but only in the value which the Green Knight attaches to it.

deprecatory tirade in defence of his actions is in offence to women in general. He condemns the 'unknown' and threatening domain trying to reassert his manhood, and this bathos is much to the amusement of his audience. This also brings attention to the 'phallogocentrism' of the quest. (In the light of the deconstruction of the theme of the romance as outlined above, Gawain's loss for words in this situation is also a "phallogocentric" denial.)

Christianity, or a new Godhead?

The tension between the heroic ideal of the 'questing knight' and the patriarchal values of christendom which he is supposed to represent is discussed in Jessie Westons investigation of the original romances as a "high spiritual adventure of actual possibility".²⁰ The patriarchal and primarily christian nature of the 'crusading' arthurian court is encoded in the structure of romance, but paradoxically the pagan elements, such as the round table and the 'pentangle' symbolism, and, of course, the "Green Man" epithet provide a very basic contradiction which is marginalised, understandably enough, in the poem, but is still present.

The construction of Gawain' quest brings out the tension between these ideologies in a very illustrative way, for instance, when we discover that Gawains shield has a pentangle on one side and the Virgin Mary on the other. The basic symbolism of the pentangle²¹ is as a signifier of "truth". However, it does not represent any element of the central truth of the christian ideology, but rather stands for the indigenous mystical ideology, the 'uncivilised', the antithesis of christian patriarchy. Rather than presenting this poem as anti-christian, what the Gawain poet does here is rather to conflate two

²⁰From Ritual to Romance. This book looks at the way in which western christianity, with the expansion of "christendom", assimilated certain prehistoric or pagan rituals into its own system, and how this combination led to the development of 'the romantic quest' as something conveying christian ideas. The convention of the 'romantic quest' was appropriated by the patriarchal western church for its own, and used as a manipulative tool, to control the populace, to establish a presiding and dominant "ideological state apparatus"

²¹as revealed by Brian Stone - "The Common Enemy of Man"

(seemingly) opposing ideologies in an interesting and illustrative way. Gawain's mythological persona dies, in effect, with his acquisition of knowledge.²²

It is Gawain's will to survive that overrides his will to die heroically (signified by his acceptance of the given girdle), that is commended so much by the Green Knight at the end: "But that you loved your own life; the less, then, to blame." says the Green Knight. The Green Knight takes up here a position outside of this, and with the reader he can see the kind of discursive world which has been forced upon Gawain by familiar ideological signifiers. The poet sets up a discourse (brings a text into existence) through both the representation of, and the undermining of, such ideological signifiers. He is constructing a text through the presense of conflicting ideological propositions which he seems happy about leaving unreconciled. If there is no solution under the guise of 'what it all means' for Gawain, may there be, in the arrogant, haughty and removed behaviour of the Green Knight, a feasible stance outside of Gawain's discourse for us, the reader?

The way in which the Green Knight seems to have an overview of Gawain's position within the text puts Gawain, fictionally, into the "ironic mode". Gawain is brought from a signifier of mythical status, in the high mimetic mode, into the textual quest, where his position of moral dilemma changes to a mimetic mode of representation, and, at this turn, into somebody we as, readers, can see as ironic or comic. We are in command here of more than one level of fictional discourse, as is the Green Knight. However, the way in which the "interrogative" text not only proposes an ambivalence, but refuses any didacticism, is through the extension of our alienation from the narrative even further. We, as readers,

²²This sketch consists simply of Morgan's unexplained hatred of Guinevere. This supposed "denouement" in the final fitt, where Morgan's hand is revealed, is what Burrow calls the "turning up of the house lights" - the attitude of the reader towards 'meaning of Gawain's quest has, yet again, to be re-evaluated.

-there has been much critical debate on the nature and motives of M.leF.-see alan friedman in SGandPearl.Critical Essays(R. Blanch ed., andBaughan-The role of m.le f. in SGGKELHXVII:1950 p241-251) This linear movement is played off against the cyclical structure of the plot - Gawain ends up back at Camelot not having achieved anything but we are, just as Gawain is, rendered much more knowledgeable about the ideological nature of Gawain's construction as a 'constant knight'.

are still aware that although Gawain's quest has been 'written' or orchestrated by the engine of the Green Knight/Morgan Le Fay discourse, this still falls within the overall narrative of the poem-thus there is a unique dramatic alienation which is experienced. The Green Knight is a signifier of 'natural' or primitive ideology - the primal value system of vitality, but whilst "placing the Green Knight at the poem's imaginative centre" (A.C. Spearing, *Criticism and Medieval Poetry*) the text actually 'interrogates' its own methods of presenting its main protagonist, Sir Gawain, in diametrical opposition to this manifestation of 'otherness'. Can self and other happily exist in binary opposition? Even if the message of Gawain's quest, within the arthurian court, is that its patriarchal values are contradictory, and life-force or "violent energy" (Spearing) of the Green Knight is more important and more 'essential' than "rationality", the artificial delineation of this force *in terms* of those patriarchal values brings the whole question of the origins of an authentic value system, of "essentiality" into question. The world of the "hautdesert" is still represented in symbols, albeit elementary ones, and the text can never escape its own textuality, from the fact that it is constructed through words, symbols, ideological signifiers of one kind or another, which are far from self-explanatory. Not only does the text project certain ideals without reconciling them to each other, it actually interrogates *its own projection* of these ideals.

We are never eventually given entrance into the Green Knight's world, for instance, he is not explained or given a real personality or "humanity" and we could almost expect that, if he was, he too would be 'demythologised'. He is ironic in that he is a pawn in Morgan Le Fay's game.

The consequences of plurality

The Gawain poet is rendering the symbol of arthurian society, the pentangle coupled with its christian counterpart, impotent, and by using a magical world of primal discourse:

"the Gawain poet is using the myth of the hero's quest to develop a theme which lies at the core of medieval literature: that the tragedy of the Round Table, and of the secular society of which it is a symbol, was inevitable"²³.

²³Charles Moorman's "Myth and Medieval Literature" *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. *Medieval Studies* XVIII 1956 p172

The mythical status of the 'Round Table', such an emblem of secular or patriarchal civilisation has here fallen into the ironic mode of representation itself. Gawain is completely at the mercy of the Green Knight, not only because the Green Knight has the power to kill him, but because ideologically he has betrayed his own value system. The Green Knight is omniscient in the last scene, and can, alongside us, see the mechanics of what J.A. Burrow calls Gawains "conflict between fidelity to the pledged word and love of life" Even he, though, is finally, through his subservience to Morgan Le Fay, and the revelation that his name is Bertilak rendered only another emblem of a higher (yet elusive) discursive hierarchy. We, as readers are left 'interpellated' as the subjects of a 'new' ideology, that of the 'Green' World, and the Green Knight as a fellow 'subject' is 'demythologised'. However, in that the Green Knight is represented one-sidedly, and that he is just a 'pawn' in Morgan's 'game' or 'plot', we are encouraged, at the end, even to view him ironically. Gawain, certainly, once he knows who he is, gains the power to snap out of his enchanted obligations, and refuses his offer to dine (we wonder if he would ever have returned to 'tell the tale' if he had taken up the offer).

Derek Brewer's statement which encapsulates the real motives which underlie Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is that "it is focused on the family drama, whose latent drives control the story". We, the readers, are given the 'power' to 'name' the "drives" which are disclosed by the discourse of symbols in the text, and we are, through the proposition of the ideals which they represent, encouraged towards a vision of the patriarchal structure (the arthurian court etc) which the poem, through its very straying from this system, attempts (very self-consciously) to reinforce. The "rage for order" implies a fear of, and thus inherent presence of, "disorder".

With Burrow's comment that "a conflict between fidelity to the pledged word and love of life" characterised the problematic features of Gawain's quest, I would like now to turn him to the crisis which Marlowe, in "Heart of Darkness", faces when he eventually confronts Kurtz's fiancée.

Joseph Conrad; Heart Of Darkness

Conrad's Heart Of Darkness is often used as a marker-point for the beginning of the "modernist" period. This novel, like Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, does not believe in impenetrable mystery or ritual over reality as represented in secular terms. Rather it undermines the idea of a central essence to either of these counterpoised polarities, ultimately exposing itself as contradictory. Of course there are arguably certain features which locate it exclusively in this bracket, but there are also elements in it which depend upon the age-old tenets of the romance.

Similarly to Gawain, Marlowe is a hero in terms of how he is culturally defined, in terms of his context as we share and understand it (as a shipmate on the "Nellie" or as Conrad's reader). He is confronted with what seems to be an alternative system of values which threatens to undermine his location in society, his significance; thus his identity. Again it involves a journey into, and therefore an exposition of a marginalised world, and through the self-conscious relativity of this exposition, the very marginality of the 'other' world is brought into question. The concentration upon the hero in these circumstances subverts the binary opposition between 'real' and 'marginal/magical'. The nature of the real (and also, of course, 'home') is brought into question, for instance Marlowe 'reads' (i.e. understands) Europe in terms of his experience in the 'darkness'. A question is posed from the outside of 'normal' experience, too, when the Green Knight, unnervingly, is at the "imaginative centre" of Sir Gawain's 'decentred' world. Reality is brought into existence through structuring, but it is a very self-conscious structure and Conrad seems to be, as a modernist writer, perturbed by the fact that "il n'y a pas d'hors texte"²⁴

What both works seem to believe in is the existence of a reality which lies beyond words, beyond the powers of definition, a belief which is undermined, as we shall see, by Nineteen Eighty-Four. In this sense, attention is brought to the act of verbal expression in that the idea of the "form" of language undermines, rather than enacts, the content.

There is not, in Marlowe's quest, a mystical centre to which we can attribute his motives, such as there is in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight²⁵. However, through the levels of narrative insight which occur between Marlowe on the London Barge, Marlowe as a pioneer, Marlowe as a 'knower of the truth' and Marlowe as returned 'liar', there is a sense of deliberate adventure which questions its own purpose, its own ideological origins.

The positioning of Marlowe as a narrator - the fact that Conrad writes a 'quest' which does *not* efface (but rather brings attention to) its own value as "discourse" (Belsey), leads us, as readers, into an alternative and critical standpoint from which to view both Marlowe's own character and the colonialist endeavours which define him.

²⁴Derrida: Of Grammatology

²⁵friedman;though"motive does seem surprisingly slight and vague"

'Marlowe the narrator' gives us (and The Lawyer, The Accountant, The Director, and the 'overall narrator') an objective comment on the pioneering quest into the "heart" or "meaning" of this unknown, uncharted, "darkness" which defies definition. He tells us (as listeners, ideologically "interpellated" by the captivating linear development of the story) of his romantic attempt to explore or define the "gaps" in our (western) knowledge (symbolised by the "map"). This is done both overtly in the plot of his journey up the Congo, ("work-the chance to define yourself", as Marlowe calls it) and internally, in the idea that he tries to confine or reduce his experience to the language we read- To rationalise the 'unknown' is to contain it. 'Marlowe the narrator' addresses us on the common ground of telling a story, recounting a quest - an ideological convention with which we are familiar. We are "interpellated" by our contingent understanding of the idea of a quest and, as our narrator he perceives the character of Marlowe the questor 'objectively'. There is a complex degree of irony present when he says "the snake had charmed me" here and, at the end, "the heavens do not fall for such a trifle". The alienated viewpoint of the questor is reminiscent of the viewpoint of Sir Gawain which is taken by both the Green Knight - the constructor of Gawain's quest - and of the poet himself, the constructor of the 'poem overall.'

Marlowe interpellates us into his own quest as a pioneer, his own search for the "truth" about Kurtz and the darkness, but at the same time he addresses his audience on the deck of the 'Nellie' through this irony, objectifying his search for the meaning of his tale. His own reminiscent interpretation of his travels are justified by an ideal; "what redeems it is the idea only" he says, but his sense of the semantic origins of this idea is fraught with inconsistencies and self doubt. A man "must meet the truth with his own true self... Principles won't do", but whilst exactly *is* this 'self'?

Marlowe's own narratorship is in question right from the beginning. The overall narrator pulls us into a detached relationship with Marlowe who, despite his 'aura' of "a Buddha preaching in European clothes", "the only man of us who still "followed the sea"" can only relate "inconclusive experiences". Marlowe himself is "inconclusive" as a character, but so is the "overall narrator", in terms of a final judgement on "Marlowe's inconclusive experiences". The Marlowe story is about a 'rage for order' which meets with semantic denial at each turn, but the narrator who frames the story for us presents Marlowe in 'high mimetic' ("ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended") but at the same time 'ironic' (in "bondage" to the darkness) mode to us. It is Marlowe himself who, with his invocation as a 'Buddha' (a

symbol of a cyclical philosophy re; Gawain) and his "inconclusiveness", hints towards a critique of his own attempt to civilise or rewrite a chaotic darkness which denies 'interpretation' in terms of 'self' or 'otherness'.

Writing the Darkness

There is, of course, within this rage for interpretation, the colonialist idea of the rape of a country by an alien.²⁶ This is reminiscent of the imposition of geographical and linguistic colonisation of the chaotic "darkness" of the Congo, the (very sexual) "culminating point of my experience"

At the same time as being a rereading of Marlowe's "experience", Conrad, by the narratorial organisation of his text, points out the inevitable process of interpretation involved in the (very western and patriarchal) quest ideology. The morality of the quest ideal is, as the 'overall narrator' points out, and the nature of this tale actually 'proves', "inconclusive". The way it is inconclusive is in that it is a tale. Conrad tries to refine himself out of the picture he paints,²⁷ but the telling of this tale is foregrounded, because of the plurality and inconsistency of narrators points out its presence as a writing process itself.

Within even the telling of this tale, we, as readers, are contingent in Marlowe's ploy to rewrite the "darkness", to give it a structure we can understand, to colonise it, to make it ours, we are made aware that our need for fiction, our captivation by the story, is as much a colonisation (of, for instance, the text itself) as Marlowe's original adventure into the Congo. Conrad constantly reminds us of the unreliability of the narrators, 'turning up the house lights' by the repetitive insertion of "pass the bottle" (this reminds us of the 'bob and wheel' insertions in the narrative of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and not for no reason), thus forcing us to face up to the fact that we, too, are on a quest for order, meaning, "reaffirmation of our own existence" in relation to the text.

Knowledge.

²⁶and as one critic said of William Carlos Williams' "Raper from Pastenak", the rape gives him "a measure of fulfillment, affirmation of his own existence": twentieth century english literature?

²⁷one of the popular ideas of modernism

Indeed, the most gripping and self-reflexive element in the plot is the "horror" of Kurtz's knowledge, a knowledge in which we, alongside Marlowe, are participants. What this "horror" is, it seems, is the terrible realisation of firstly, the nature of the colonialist project in all its cruelty, but secondly, the more important horror of the failure of this project: the futility of the push for "order" and, consequently, the lack of potential for self-reaffirmation. The terrible and insurmountable power of the "darkness". This mystical unfathomable dark power has a void at its centre, which is why the unknowable, ungovernable image of the sea is such a prevalent symbol in Conrad's works as a 'modernist'.

In a response to Claire Rosenfeld's "Paradise of Snakes: An Archetypal analysis of Conrad's Political Novels" Tony Tanner²⁸ writes that

"uniqueness of novelistic detail is lost by reference back to certain rudimentary shapes... a man can hardly get into a boat but he will find himself engaged in a repetition of 'a night sea journey into an ambiguous region either in the dark interior of the earth or below the waters of the sea'".

Marlowe, then, understands through his experience and disillusionment, the impossibility of the quest for an overall "meaning", a truth at the centre. The African tribal queen and what she seems to symbolise for Marlowe, like Morgan Le Fay, does not necessarily have all the answers. There is a distinct void amidst this darkness, a gap which should be filled with the ultimate "truth" which Marlowe is looking for, but it is really a terrifying and chaotic black hole into which we, as much as Marlowe, are sucked.

Marlowe is described as a "Buddha", an image (or symbol) which his story reinforces. The African Queen is described (with obvious idealisation) by Marlowe as "the barbarous and superb woman". The book is related to us in terms of signifiers, but the way these signifiers are presented is always in irreconcilable contradiction. How much does and can Marlowe know, and how much of an extra-cultural position can he really claim? Marlowe talks of man's incredible capacity to adapt, presents his fellow

²⁸in modern language Review LXV, 1970, p407

adventurers idealistically as "the great knights - errant of the sea", and the nature of his story reveals that the quest of this particular 'knight-errant', Marlowe the pioneer, can only adapt to a new cultural environment by attaching very dubitable significance to the experiences which he has.

Language, the 'glitt'ring eye'; The mystical controlling hand.

What Marlowe has in common with the "superb woman" is, of course, a problem with language. The African woman is left on a mythical level (which is conflated with an ironic status) because she is linguistically represented (therefore dominated) by Marlowe. She is deprived of a voice of her own, she is represented two dimensionally (unlike Marlowe and Gawain who are, through their representation at different levels of the fictional register, "demythologised"), but, to a certain extent, her inability to communicate a 'message' is coupled with the ambivalence of Marlowe's *own* representation of his domain, i.e. his experiences. The book, like Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (and this is also the central motif of 1984) is about the idea of a "voice", it is about the process of its own coming into existence as a text.

The problematics of Marlowe's own "quest" revolve around the gap between his experience and the voice he is given to portray it. He hates himself as a person and a narrator (the idea of a 'person' and 'narrator' are curiously complicated as we have seen), because his dialogue is, centrally about the 'unknown', but the language he is given is forced to address it in terms of the known. Language is always a misrepresentation. In saussurean terms, there is not just a breakthrough of, but even a conflict in "the fundamental link... assumed to exist between signifier and signified" (????????????????????????????????)

The self-conscious way in which Marlowe relates his story, his confession at the end "I could not tell her", the way in which there is a level of irony between 'overall narrator' and Marlowe, are all illustrations of what Beckett calls "the impossibility of expressing oneself... coupled with the need to

express."²⁹ The "flight through the wilderness" has taken place, but the "'home" returned to' is not reaffirmed. Rather it is inherently undermined.

The Ethical Dialectic in Marlowe

Marlowe has a need to express - Heart of Darkness is really the story of the writing of itself, it is Marlowe's attempt to find a 'voice' with which to express - but this need is coupled with an inability to take the "idea" of colonisation seriously. In fact there is a tremendous note of sympathy which runs through his tale, exemplified by his identification with the wail of "unrestrained grief" let loose by the natives as he streams up to Kurtz's outpost. Marlowe is very much an outcast amongst the "pilgrims" because the imperialist ideology with which they manage to view the venture does not fit in with his 'reading' of the situation. Marlowe's method is an "unsound method" to the pilgrims, and though we are encouraged at this point to identify with his ethical stance, he is still inescapably a part of the colonialist enterprise. His method is "unsound" to us, too in that he is applying a method at all, but this method is inevitable: it is the story structure with which he recounts the tale.

Marlowe's voice, which constantly effaces its own arrival at final definition, ties him in as a character with Sir Gawain and Winston Smith. Like Sir Gawain, who is ultimately a failure (whose attempt to reaffirm his status as a perfect knight to 'write' himself in to his own quest for order), Marlowe is made aware that the structures he hoped to impose on the world map are fundamentally flawed. Marlowe's attempt to give meaning, to impose language, does not simply lead us to an ironic perspective of the Knight "errant", but a flawed vision of the civilisation which he stands for, the flawed vision of "errand"; language itself.

Knowledge Flawed.

²⁹ Beckett

Marlowe's journey, like Sir Gawain's, is a 'journey of knowledge', and it is easy to read the "Christ"-ian imagery, coupled with the idea of man 'falling from grace' in a simplistic way in both of these texts. A structuralist's viewpoint such as the one outlined by Propp's Morphology of the Folk-tale (and with which Jessie Weston's analysis links up in many ways) takes a very strong position simply because of the intertextuality of all fiction, but as Harold Bloom³⁰ points out "every poem is a misinterpretation of a parent poem" - "to imagine is to misinterpret".

As Barthes says "message and medium are one", and if it were not for the highlighted unreliability of Marlowe's tale, it would be possible to understand his journey in a purely symbolic light, but it is the ironic awareness of Marlowe's ideals (about the "idea" of his exploration) which makes a simple analysis in terms of structures and archetypes ultimately reductive "what saves us is efficiency- a devotion to efficiency". The medium in which Heart of Darkness is written is not purely "romantic". Marlowe realises his own position, in that his ideology as a young man is subject to his interpretation of the "glories of exploration", colonisation, and acquisition of knowledge. The sad note with which Marlowe finishes his tale has the same biblical register as the tragedy of the fall. Marlowe's knowledge is self-destructive rather than self-reaffirming. It destroys his ideals. Indeed, Marlowe actually supplies us with a metaphorical resume on the nature of knowledge as an introduction to his tale. He speaks ruefully of the 'blank spaces' on his childhood map, a "space of delightful mystery" being filled in with the basic colour "red- good to see at any time because one knows that some real work is being done there), and this enables the alternative colour of "a place of darkness" to have significance.

This blatant misreading of the countries mentioned provides us with an allegorical example of the subjectivity of knowledge. The places were not "blank" before they were colonised, but with the propositional nature of colonisation set into play, the binary opposition of known and unknown is brought into existence. The misreading of the colonised countries, along with the "darkness" which is set up in order for the colonisation of them to have positive value, are purely subject to a western ideological system. Marlowe's predecessor is a picture not of "the cause of progress" or of knowledge, but of decay. "the grass growing through his ribs was tall enough to hide his bones", and Marlowe really believes that "pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief" in comparison to knowledge.

³⁰Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence, Oxford 1973

There is a curious kind of play off in Heart of Darkness whereby the structuralist reading of the 'acquisition of knowledge' is paralleled with the cyclical regressiveness of the colonialist project. Marlowe's problem is that the more we know, the less we can say for 'definite'.

Like the failure of the imposition of values in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Heart of Darkness brings out a questioning of its own morality which never arrives at finality or definition amongst the multiple levels of narration, the multiplexity of 'meaning'.

The knowledge which Marlowe finally gains through his recounting of his experiences, is a knowledge of the nature of himself (in true romantic style) and his position within the system which he stands for. Marlowe steps outside of this system into Kurtz's world of "savagery" and is able to provide a critique of it. (what he himself calls the power of "sham distinction"). The overall metaphor of the map, of the "spaces" where truth should be found, however, infers a consciousness of the fact that there can only be a gap at the centre - there can be no definition. This tale, just like the 'chartering' of the Congo, is bound within his own culturally defined discourse, it can never describe the "truth" - Marlowe is helpless in trying to describe the "unspeakable" to Kurtz's fiancée, but does the "unspeakable" exist?

The Insanity of Fiction- "Nineteen Eighty-Four"

Politics and the post-modern

George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four is, in itself, the textual actualising of the political and critical tendency to "select from the past what is modern about it and assume that we have a very privileged view of the past that enables us to do so" ³¹. This statement has been applied specifically to criticism, but the textual post-modern conflation of the two ideas of literature and criticism, fiction and reality, madness and sanity, which we see at work in the society vividly described in Nineteen Eighty-Four, owes its totality to this effacement of historical and 'fictional' privilege itself. The disintegration of secular thought in the development and aftermath of the modernist period had led to the unstable emergence of the actual possibility, of a totalitarian political plurality enacting itself in actual terms (if, indeed, post- modernism can or would want to define what, in fact, 'actual' means).

³¹Frank Kermode "History And Value" 1989

De-fragmentation, or disassembly of an ideological hierarchy can enable re-assembly to occur on random grounds, these grounds being based, in a capitalist society, on financial control. Orwell investigates not only the way in which this control is gained, but, in a more disquieting way, how this has already happened. The question is; when did 'ideological control' first occur, and we find that the answer is not so much that it is a product of capitalism, but rather that it is a pre-eminent feature of society in general. Control consists not through the simple creation of money (which is itself socially relative), but in the possibility of the total containment of abstract thought on a massive scale. In short, media control is the new centre for such a hierarchy. Orwell reveals how society can be (and is being) contained in an arbitrary and completely false, (or 'fictional') reality.

Multiplicity-Stances of interpellation /interpretation

We have looked at what we can call, for the purposes of this argument, the origins of 'fiction'. Now we come across a text which illustrates the way in which it not only controls the 'real' world, even shapes it, but ultimately creates it. It does not simply project the 'otherness' (as fiction) against which the reader can contrast himself: the idea of 'self *in*' and 'self *as*' ideology are interwoven and indiscernible. "If the high , as we have called them, are to keep their places permanently - then the prevailing mental condition must be controlled insanity" ("The Book", p172). The Party in Oceania have organised a state where sanity, thus reality, is controlled by whoever has power over the mass media, and whoever can provide convincing potential for social dissent, against which to assert themselves. It depends on a system of hatred, but and it is no use us calling it "insanity" as Winston does- we are part of it.

Winston's life as we see it depends on romance, depends on the fictional adventure which occurs in his head. Nineteen Eighty-Four can be used to 'read' the quest pattern as much as Nineteen Eighty-Four must be used to read it they must be used to read it. At one level, Winston's quest is 'romantic' - the 'individual against society', the search for the "self" - but on a more complex level the material quest

which he is on is one for 'voice'.³² The sub-text, (or is it the main text even?) is that of Winston learning to write, learning to understand the social symbolic order. His first words in his diary are "DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER", AND HE IS ALMOST CHILDLIKE. But is this book eventually written by Winston himself? Afterall, he does work in the "Ministry of Truth"...

. Orwell's book does not come at the end of this study for chronological reasons, but because it is a conscious and (dare I say it) materialistic exploration of the creation of fiction and thus reality. The blandness of this fact has the curious effect of obscuring itself to a 'first time' reader of Nineteen Eighty-Four, but an eventual analysis, using similar narrative levels of representation which are manipulated in the narrative formation of, for instance Heart of Darkness reveals a critical scenario in which 'meaning' ricochets away from any and all destinations.

The constraints of romance are obviously relevant to the story of Winston Smith, and there are certain parallels to be drawn between this plot and those of Marlowe and Gawain. The vision of the actual connection between artistic and political endeavour which is supplied by Orwell not only decentres identity in relation to it, but disempowers and conflates the opposition, art is politics in Oceania.

Containment

Ultimately Winston's quest is limited to the confines of a deliberate ideological discourse (Newspeak). He is culturally determined and at once decentred, but his quest is romantic in the same way as Marlowe and Gawain are. Winston is the individual in an adverse environment. The paradox is that his alien environment, (like, in fact, the pastoral but alien environment created for Gawain's quest. Romance is the containment of other; "outside man there is nothing"p213) is in fact dictated by his native ideological background. The 'escape' from a 'false' reality into a 'truer' one is tyrannised and controlled by an entity which has complete ideological control. All levels of reality are revealed as social constructs. Winston thinks, of the general public, that "by lack of understanding they remained

³²for an interesting application of this to the 'voice' of twentieth century lit., see Raymond Olderman in "Beyond The Wasteland", -The Grail Knight Arrives

sane"(p128). Through the absence of a centre for an alternative stance outside the system, the people never envisage the mechanics of it.

The Alternative disempowered-Winston's 'story'

The eventual totality of the inversion of the ideas "home" and "alien", are a production of the novel, but also the romantic opposition between the individual and society is contained not so much by Orwell, but by the party itself. This causes a reshuffling of most of our erstwhile assumed ideas about 'genuineness' and 'artificially' in all areas of the novel. For instance, O'Brien's supplying "The Book" to Winston has to be measured in terms of "The Book" being an implement in Big Brother's management of Winston's quest. There is not simply a plurality of readings brought into play, but a satirical element which not only withdraws us from the political mechanisms in Nineteen Eighty-Four, but tends towards the actual question of where we stand *ourselves* in relation to this artificial manipulator of thought, Orwell's book itself³³. In humanitarian terms, the overarching model of the 'romantic quest' as a quest for 'self-meaning' encourages a post-modern approach to the nature of romance ideology and the way in which it reflects the society which creates it.³⁴

Language Control

"If the high , as we have called them, are to keep their places permanently - then the prevailing mental condition must be controlled insanity" ("The Book", p172). As Florence Lewis and Peter Moss say in their essay "The Tyranny of Language"³⁵ "George Orwells Nineteen Eighty Four has two large encompassing thematic principles - the development and the imaginative uses of manipulation and

³³For the self-reciprocating political element, see the caustic, but less 'decentred' A Modest Proposal, Swift

³⁴Christopher Norris;"writing is the endless *displacement* of meaning "

³⁵Nineteen Eighty Four in 1984, autonomy, control and communications

suppression". These manipulations seem to exist everywhere we look inside both the text, and our reading of it.

Meanings of concepts like 'the brotherhood', 'Goldstein', in fact anything which first appears to supply affirmation of Winston's ideological independence, his individuality - cannon off into the realms of fictional manipulators designed by the state. "I wrote it ", for instance, says O'Brien of "The Book".

Romantic Doublethink ; Big Brother, the quest ing knight

Orwell shows us two 'quests' in Nineteen Eighty Four, quests which initially appear to be diametrically opposed. The first is Winston's quest for individuality, for 'truth' within what unfolds as a catalogue of lies. The second, which occurs once he is captured and in the "house" as it were, of Big Brother, "The Ministry of Love", first appears as voyage into unspeakable horrors (he is tested, but his survival is an horrific inversion of the Gawain test in Bertilak's house). The language slowly changes, Winstons desires are manipulated, and on p207 we see Winston's longing for that "luminous certainty" of delusion, of the 'fact' that "two and two make five". This is contrasted with then everything was normal again, and the old fear, the hatred and the bewilderment came flooding back, thus reinforcing the new 'truth' or dominant. At first Winston's 'flight through the wilderness' seems to be inverted, in that the book starts with him in an alien, rather than home environment (and the clocks were striking thirteen), goes into a process of authenticating his real 'self' which initially seems to be 'home', then goes back into the (artificial) system in room 101. When we eventually find out that his whole quest for 'self' was orchestrated by Big Brother, the representation of it is shifted into "ironic mode", it is even more artificial than the 'home' created by the disciplined and controlled world of "The Party".

All meaning is supplied by Big Brother. The Party incorporates subversiveness into its political framework, hence O'Briens "mind contained Winston's mind"(p207) and there is a sense in which the party creates subversiveness to reaffirm its own status. The Party is on a quest of its own - the quest into Winston's mind, the 'colonisation' of his thoughts, the rewriting of them in terms of 'reality as defined by the party', what is and what isn't "only an "opeless fancy" (romance and 'unromance', to use the grammar of newspeak).

Winston's mind is the "unknown" territory to the party until the "eleven year drama" of its adventure into Winston's mind starts. The 'colonisation' starts by the sewing of the seeds of dissent, the picture of Jones, Aaranson and Rutherford. This starts off the possibility of an imposition of a dissenting and structured opposition to 'Party' reality in Winston's mind (p207, "Eleven years ago you created a legend" says O'Brien, but was it Winston or the Party who created it?), but this, of course, at the end, has to be re-evaluated as another of Big Brothers contrivances to get into Winston's mind.

Just as Morgan Le Fay's motives for orchestrating Gawain's quest were apparently to 'kill Guinevere, drive the court mad, destroy their pride by the spectacle of a beheaded man speaking to them' (Brewer) so O'Brien's aim is to drive Winston mad by presenting him with a "headless" state in which "sanity was statistical" and all moral binaries are ultimately controlled by those in power. "The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake" - there is no overarching moral hierarchy.

Charles Moorman points out that the actual motivation for Morgan Le Fay is "vague", and the same can be said of Big Brother. The question "why?" is not relevant because these two entities are entirely created for and by their own discourse - Big Brother is purely a focus for ideological control (and there is manifest evidence that this entity itself is, in fact, purely a construct). There are many ways, for instance, to argue that O'Brien *is* the Party, Big Brother, The Controller - he explains things in terms of 'concepts', the proof of which we never see. O'Brien brings the material reality of Big Brother, even 'The Party' into doubt: "does Big Brother exist?... in the same way as I exist?" says Winston. "You do not exist" replies O'Brien.

The creation of ideological centre

Big Brother has created Winston in his own image successfully, as we eventually come to understand. Embodied in Winston as a rebel are all the ideals of Big Brother in their antithetical element which serve to enable the 'thesis' of Big Brother to exist. So Winston's 'quest' is orchestrated by Big Brother in a variety of complex ways. Winston is Big Brother as a character in the textual world, but also as a figure of 'myth' to us. In his very assertions of what Big Brother isn't (i.e. his hunt for radical dissent), he in fact defines what Big Brother is, and is used as a cursor by Big Brother presumably as

a public focus of disgust (like Goldstein), or, in fact, as a publicity pawn (this portrait of Big Brother couldn't exist without Winston).

What this novel provides in *Big Brother* is in fact "no new Godhead - it may provide us with a cause for the incredible element of fact, but unlike God it provides no purpose for life" (as Raymond Olderman says is typical of the post modern novel Beyond the Wasteland). With the loss of function is a loss of purpose.

Fact and fiction are not only inverted to provide critiques of each other but the assumption of opposition between the two is undermined. As Paul Chilton points out³⁶ "To speak of preserving our civilisation made sense only if there was some threat to preserve it against the very antithesis of civilisation" - Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-Four" exposes the methods of the production of social 'reality' creating otherness, but, in the same essay "the intention was to make speech, and especially speech on a subject not ideologically neutral, as nearly as possible independent of critical consciousness". Many readings of Orwell have been founded assuming his intention of a socialist political critique, but the structure of Nineteen Eighty Four indicates a more general mistrust of language.

"Home "textually decentred-The Folk Tale exposed as 'doublethink'

One of the major questions in Nineteen Eighty Four revolves around the idea that there is no "speech" which is "ideological neutral", there is no "organic unity" of reality which Winston strays from. Both "home" and "wilderness" are realities which are ideologically constructed by language and that language, or the 'quest for meaning' is controlled by "the lunatic who is more intelligent than yourself" (p210).

Language is power, and the Party's power is in the linguistic (thus mental) colonisation of its subjects [However, the question arises, 'are there flaws in Big Brother's quest to colonise Winston? "to die taking them , that was freedom" (p226) thinks Winston] The real question is not the dominance of one or the other, but the fact that both extremes are controlled and in fact invented by language,

³⁶in his comparison between "Nineteen Eighty-Four" and the Thatcherite reality of "Nineteen Eighty-Four" itself, in "Newspeak: Its the Real Thing".

knowledge, power. The unnerving consequences of this argument are that there is nobody in power at the top of Big Brother's power system, nobody to attack or undermine, just another man-made void.

The unsettling of any authenticity which this viewpoint provokes works its way through the rest of the text - the dramatic interaction of 'écriture' is brought into Nineteen Eighty-Four's reality, and disempowers any singular critical standpoint. Some kind of authorial or stable reader stance is at the other extreme of the interpretative scale. Even this opposition as I have already hinted at, between "state" control of the 'story' and 'reader' control (i.e. the interpretative capacity of our 'interpellated' reading personae) is fraught with problems. Are we, as a literate, thus knowledgeable and powerful reading force actually in the position of orchestrating our own "rage for order" over Winston/Nineteen Eighty Four itself? Goldstein, in "The Book", tells us "it is only by reconciling contradictions that power can be retained indefinitely".

The guilt of the Individual

"How does one man assert his power over another, Winston?"

Winston thought, 'By making him suffer', he said."

Winston's quest is for a truth which lies ultimately in duality, like, perhaps Gawains acceptance of both worlds, fantastic and realistic, in Marlowes acceptance of himself 'then' and himself 'now'. The quest is orchestrated by Orwell himself (in the obvious sense) and he asserts his power over Winston by throwing him into crisis. However, Big Brother does the same, and so, to an extent, does the reader. "Discourses are objects of appropriation" says Foucault³⁷ and we, through our 'creation' of Winston in our own image for the first half of the book, appropriate him. We are guilty of trying to withdraw from our identification with him in his captivity, trying to abandon him when he ceases to be a romantic (in the 'individual against adversity' way) figure. There is a strong tendency to use him as a scapegoat, a traitor to individuality, to alienate him, but at the same time we are implicated, through his humiliation,

³⁷Foucault: "what is an author?"

as his torturers. The way in which this echoes the "National Hate Week" episode, where Goldstein is the scapegoat, incriminates us to a disturbing point.

The only certainty is the delusion and illusion. Gradually we see the parallels between these two quests, the inversion of their opposition. Winston's reconstruction as a 'new' being by O'Brien is really not very different from what he was before - his personality was controlled by a discursive power greater than himself. Of "the individual", O'Brien says "if he can escape from his identity, if he can merge himself into the Party so that he is the Party, then he is all-powerful and immortal". Winston's story has all the time been controlled by the Party, certainly his identity in Nineteen Eighty Four is purely in relation to the party, to the ideological source which controls the apparatus of his society. Any conclusion on the subject of the post-modern can only really, in true Brechtian style, concentrate on the dramatic element in fictive art. Jerome K Jerome, in his introduction to the 1955 edition of Our Mutual Friend by Charles Dickens (an author similar to Orwell in both his supposed "Englishness" and his active engagement of art with politics) recounts the vivid reality of childhood "voyages of discovery" round Dickens's London. He concludes "I have never been able to regard Our Mutual Friend as a mere story". Jerome refers to the dramatic presence of the novel, the engagement required of the reader, and it is a similar kaleidoscope of weird and horrific images which leer out of the pages of Nineteen Eighty Four. The fundamental difference is that our participation in the drama, the facades, the pretences, the deception or self-deception is undesirable and slightly too personal. "You know this, Winston... Don't deceive yourself... you have always known it" says O'Brien (on p192), and we, in a sense, are guilty of the same masochistic self-deception. The difference is that Orwell accuses us of our own tendency towards fiction, towards representation, towards preference. It is designed to shock.

Jonathan Dollimore in his "Radical Tragedy"³⁸ says of Elizabethan drama (which faced, like the modern period in which Orwell writes, a similar "disintegration of an inherited social and cultural order"), that

"the response to the drama to crisis was not a retreat into aesthetic and ideological conceptions of order, integration, equilibrium and so on, on the contrary, it confronted and articulated that crisis, indeed it actually helped precipitate it".

Nineteen Eighty Four was probably the most powerful political move that Orwell ever made in that we, as the general public, are guilty of audience participation. We are so thoroughly interpellated, led by the nose, that it is only on reflection that we actually realise our own state of "crisis". This crisis is not so much the crisis of the 'romantic hero', or even of the individual, but of the sanity, the 'equilibrium', the 'ideologies' of the society in which we ourselves function. Are we consumers or producers, and what is the difference?

³⁸Radical Tragedy: Religion...ideology.....

Bibliography

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Blanch, R (ed) | 1967 | <u>Sir Gawain and Pearl. Critical Essays</u>
Indiana |
| Belsey, C. | 1980 | <u>Critical Practice</u>
Methuen |
| Bloom, H. | 1973 | <u>Anxiety of Influence: A theory of Poetry</u>
Oxford |
| Brewer, D. | 1980 | <u>Symbolic Stories</u>
Rowman and Littlefield |
| Burrow, J.A. | 1965 | <u>A Reading of Sir Gawain and The Green Knight</u>
R.K.P. |
| Burrow, J.A. | 1971 | <u>Ricardian Poetry</u>
R.K.P. |
| Calder, J. | 1977 | <u>Heroes: From Byron To Guevara</u>
Hamilton |
| Chilton, P. and Aubrey, C. (eds) | 1983 | <u>Nineteen Eighty Four in 1984</u> |

Comedia

- Culler, J. 1975 Structuralist Poetics
Routledge
- Dollimore, J. 1989 Radical Tragedy: Religion Ideology and Power in
The Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries
Harvester Wheatsheaf
- Froman, E. 1954 Afterword to Nineteen Eighty Four
New York Signet
- Gerber, R. 1955 Utopian Fantasy: A Study of English Utopian Fiction
Since the End of the Nineteenth Century
London
- Machin, R. (ed) 1987 Post-Structuralist Readings of English Poetry
Cambridge
- Mills, M. 1973 Six Middle-English Romances
Rowman and Littlefield
- Norris, C. 1982 Deconstruction, Theory and Practice
Methuen
- Northrop Frye 1957 Anatomy Of Criticism
Princeton
- Northrop Frye 1976 The Secular Scripture

Harvard

- Olderman,R. 1972 Beyond The Wasteland-The American Novel in the
Nineteen-Sixties
- Propp, V. 1968 Morphology of the Folktale(transl. L. Scott)
texas
- Rabinow,P.(ed) 1984 The Foucault Reader
New York
- Reilly,P. 1986 George Orwell,The Age's Adversary
Macmillan
- Spearing,A.C. 1964 Criticism and Mediavel Poetry
Arnold
- Weston J. 1920 From Ritual to Romance
Cambridge
- White J. 1971 Mythology in the Modern Novel; A Study
of Prefigurative Techniques
Princeton

PRIMARY SOURCES:

- | | | |
|---------------------|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Borroff, M. | 1967 | <u>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight- A
New Verse Translation</u>
New York |
| Carroll, L. | 1967 | <u>The Annotated Snark</u>
Penguin |
| Conrad, J. | 1988 | <u>Heart of Darkness-A Norton Critical Edition</u>
Norton |
| Orwell, G. | 1954 | <u>Nineteen Eighty-Four</u>
Penguin |
| Tolkien, J.R.R.(ed) | 1955 | <u>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</u>
Oxford |