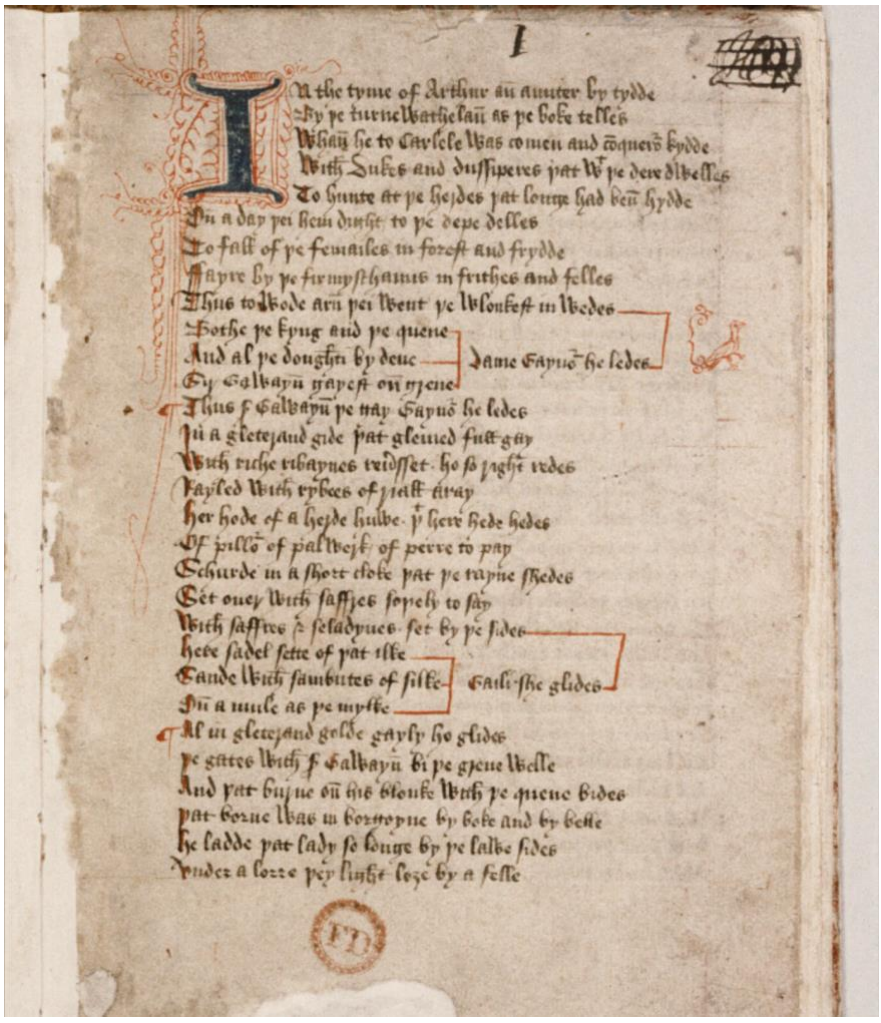
Monsters in the Sir Gawain Cycle:

Reflections of Tensions Surrounding Aristocratic Identity in the Fifteenth-Century Anglo-Scottish Borderlands



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INTRODUCTION

'The Red Wedding', one of the most popular scenes in the well-known series *A Song of Ice and Fire* shows great similarities with a real historical event that could have been one of the direct inspirations for George R. R. Martin. In the summer of 1453, a wedding took place that left an indelible mark on Anglo-Scottish history. This was the wedding between Sir Thomas Neville, second son of Richard Neville and 5th Earl of Salisbury, and Maud Stanhope, heiress of Lord Cromwell's barony, which was perceived as an insult by the Percy family. The Percies and Nevilles were the two most powerful noble families in the north of England and they also ruled parts of the English side of the Anglo-Scottish marches. The wedding would mean that the Neville family would gain power over estates owned by the Cromwells that the Percy family wanted to claim for restitution, and so the Percy family was not happy with this arrangement. As a means of revenge, the Percy family attempted to assassinate various members of the Neville family on this wedding day.[1]

According to the chronicles there was no blood shed, but the reaction of the Percy family illustrates the presence of violence, jealousy and tension between various noble families who lived in the northern part of England in the early 1450s.[2] There were various dynastic disputes and the Wars of the Roses were looming. Indeed, some scholars have argued that this part of the Neville-Percy feud actually initiated the Wars of the Roses.[3] The tensions between the noble houses, and related anxieties surrounding noble identity and power, are also represented in the literature of the period. This thesis will focus specifically on the anxieties and fears that are embedded in three works of the Sir Gawain Cycle: *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle, The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle,* and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*. These narratives were written in the third quarter of the fifteenth century—during the height of the Wars of the Roses—and were produced and circulated in northern England.[4]

Each of these narratives of the Sir Gawain Cycle tells the story of an encounter between the knights of the Round Table and the monstrous. According to Jeffrey

1 Ralph A. Griffiths, *King and Country England and Wales in the Fifteenth Century* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1991), 321-64.
2 *Ibid.*, 330.
3 *Ibid.*, 321.
4 Thomas G. Hahn, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales* (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 1995), introduction.

Jerome Cohen, monsters can be useful for understanding a culture, because the monstrous body is a projection of culture and "an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling and a place".[5] Monsters also prove to be useful in the study of past cultures. This is to say that they can be used to study anxieties that were present in the people's minds during certain historical events.

Various scholars have argued that the narratives in the Sir Gawain Cycle contain criticism on the political situation of the time.[6] For instance, Colleen Donnelly argues that *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* contains "critiques of certain aspects of noble behavior and breeding as well as of specific aristocratic codes and modes of expression".[7] She focuses specifically on the behaviour of the knights and whether they keep their oaths. However, none of these studies deals with the monsters in these narratives. The monsters in these narratives could contribute to understanding concerns and anxieties that were present in the Anglo-Scottish borderlands.

Recently, scholars have started to explore how the Sir Gawain Cycle narratives reflect and participate in the fifteenth-century conflicts of the Anglo-Scottish border area.[8] For instance, Sean Pollack and Joseph Taylor have linked *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle* and *The Awntyrs off Arthure* to the political situation in this border area. Joseph Taylor argues that *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle's* "plot is profoundly shaped by the political margins from which it emerges: the Anglo-Scottish

[5] J. J. Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. J. J. Cohen (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.
[6] Sean Pollack, "Border States: Parody, Sovereignty, and Hybrid Identity in *The Carl of Carlisle*," *Arthuriana* 19.2 (2009): 10-26.; Joseph Taylor, "Arthurian Biopolitics: Sovereignty and Ecology in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 59, no. 2 (2017): 182-208.; Sarah Lindsay, "The Courteous Monster: Chivalry, Violence, and Social Control in *The Carl of Carlisle*," *JEGP, Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 114.3 (2015): 401-418.; Colleen Donnelly, "Aristocratic veneer and the substance of verbal bonds in *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* and *Gamelyn*," *Studies in Philology* 94.3 (1997): 321-343.
[7] Donnelly, "Aristocratic veneer and the substance of verbal bonds in *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* and *Gamelyn*," 322.
[8] Pollack, "*Border States: Parody, Sovereignty, and Hybrid Identity in The Carl of Carlisle*," 10-26.; Taylor, "Arthurian Biopolitics: Sovereignty and Ecology in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*," 182-208.; Katherine H. Terrell and Mark P. Bruce, eds., *The Anglo-Scottish Border and the Shaping of Identity, 1300–1600* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).; Glenn Wright, "Churl's Courtesy: *Raul Coilɔear* and its English Analogues," *Neophilologus* 85.4 (2001): 647-662.

border".[9] However, according to Katherine H. Terrell and Mark P. Bruce, there is still much work to be done on the literary history of the Anglo-Scottish marches.[10] This work aims to shed new light on the intersection between the Gawain cycle and its socio-political environment by focusing primarily on the monsters. By analysing the monsters as cultural projections of a certain period, this thesis aims to gain insight into the feelings and anxieties that accompanied the tensions between the noble houses during the Wars of the Roses.

For exploring how these tensions emerge in the Sir Gawain Cycle narratives, it is worth considering the genre of these texts: the popular romance. This genre was read by audiences from different social classes in late medieval England. There were tense relations between different social classes at the time.[11] Raluca L. Radulescu argues that popular romances function as a means of communication between these different classes.[12] While the popular romance genre confirms the existing social hierarchy, at the same time it criticised the rigidity of this hierarchy and its models of behaviour. [13] Various scholars agree that the Sir Gawain Cycle contains allegorical critique on the behaviour and values of the aristocratic classes at the time. Or at least, as Taylor notes, "popular romance can be seen to regulate potentially tense relations between classes and, consequently, to afford stable political ground through which the Crown could rule its subjects".[14] For instance, he argues that *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle* expresses the desire for regional power of aristocratic classes at the border regions in the fifteenth century. Since monsters are projections of a certain culture at a specific period in time, they are interesting research objects. The monsters of the Sir Gawain Cycle, in particular, offer valuable insight into the works' implicit critiques of class-tensions and different types of nobilities.

[9] Taylor, "Arthurian Biopolitics: Sovereignty and Ecology in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*," 183.
[10] Terrell and Bruce, *The Anglo-Scottish Border and the Shaping of Identity, 1300–1600*, 3.
[11] Taylor, "Arthurian Biopolitics: Sovereignty and Ecology in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*," 185.
[12] Raluca L. Radulescu, "Ballad and Popular Romance in the Percy Folio," *Arthurian Literature* 23 (2006): 75.
[13] *Ibid*., 75.
[14] Taylor, "Arthurian Biopolitics: Sovereignty and Ecology in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*," 185.

The monsters in the Sir Gawain Cycle are complex and identifying what they signify requires careful analysis. For instance, the three monsters in the Sir Gawain Cycle are ambiguous in their physical appearances and behaviour. Their physical appearances make them outsiders, or marginalised characters. Yet both Dame Ragnelle and the ghost of Guinevere's mother are noble women. Also, they tend to engage in animalistic behaviour, but some of their behaviour is more honourable than that of the knights of the Round Table. So at first, their deviant behaviour and their physical appearances classify them outsiders. However, when closely analysing the monsters, it becomes clear that they are not that different from the knights of the Round Table. In fact, the monsters prove to be more honourable and virtuous than the members of the Arthurian Court. Furthermore, in Middle English literature, the monsters can undergo spiritual and physical transformations and as a result the body fails to be a "primary indicator of identity".[15] The monsters in the Sir Gawain Cycle also undergo transformations which makes their bodies more difficult to interpret.

This thesis will argue that the monsters in the narratives of the Sir Gawain Cycle challenge the Arthurian Court to reflect on different sides of nobility. As outsiders, or as 'Others', they try to warn the knights of the Round Table to change their values and beliefs, and they urge them to live by a type of nobility that is more focused on virtue instead of wealth and status. Each monstrous body presents a different flaw within the ideology of the Round Table, and in turn, comments upon real concerns and anxieties that existed in the late-fifteenth century border region.

Secondly, this thesis will argue that the erasure of monstrous bodies in these works provides valuable insight into sites of tension and fear in this border region. 'Erasure', as discussed at greater length below, is a concept developed by Dana M. Oswald. Oswald believes that when a monster undergoes a process of erasure, it always leaves a trace. This trace of the erasure is suggestive, according to Oswald, of what was the most threatening to a text's audience.[16] The monsters in all three narratives are erased in different ways; they either disappear or transform. They also leave traces, which is important to the interpretation of their bodies. So by also exploring the traces that these three bodies leave behind, this work aims to shed light on the anxieties that

[15] Dana M. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), 23.
[16] Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, 15-16.

their monstrous bodies represented in a time of political upheaval and civil war in the Anglo-Scottish border regions.

Chapter 1, "Theoretical Framework: Monsters and Middle English Culture", will explore key issues that will be central to the analysis that follows. It discusses concerns surrounding the animal-human boundary in the medieval period, the terms 'periphery' and 'centre', Cohen's monster theory, and the phenomena of metamorphosis and hybridity. In the twelfth century, the previously clear boundary between humans and animals had started to break down.[17] This breakdown caused fear among medieval people, because the difference between animals and humans became less clear. As a consequence, it prompted people to question what it means to be human through reflecting upon the relationship between humans and animals. Furthermore, as a result of the fears and fascinations behind the animal-human boundary, people started to become interested in hybrid creatures.

This new interest in hybrids is also visible in the literature of this period, including, for example, Gerald of Wales' *Topographia hibernie* and the lais of Marie de France. In-between creatures prompted questions about what it means to be human in a world where the clear boundary between animals and humans had started to be questioned more and more.[18] Then, with this rise of hybrid creatures, monsters started to become more popular as well. According to Cohen, "monsters ask us how we perceive the world", and urge us to reevaluate set values and beliefs.[19] Furthermore, people also started to become fascinated with change and with metamorphosis in particular. Though this fascination was also inspired by fear.[20] These processes of change are also linked to the question of identity, because one could question whether species, or in this case monsters, retain part of their identity when they transform, or whether they become something new entirely.[21] All of these aspects will be of great importance to the analysis of the three monsters in the Sir Gawain Cycle.

As the first of the literary chapters, chapter 2 discusses the monster in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*. This text is concerned with different types of courtesy

17 Joyce Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 1-2.
18 *Ibid*., 131.
19 Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," 20.
20 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 25-6.
21 Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, 31-2.

in the late medieval period. The monster is a giant and a commoner who engages in violent behaviour, which makes him a marginalised character or an 'Other'. The Carl teaches the knights that social class is not necessarily linked to courtesy, and that a monstrous commoner can prove to be more courteous than members of the aristocratic classes. His physical appearance does not reflect his real identity, because he is more virtuous than some of the Arthurian knights. In fact, in the end, the knights of the Round Table prove to be more threatening and violent than the outsider. The Carl undergoes a spiritual transformation, but his body resists erasure and so he remains a threatening giant. Yet because of the Carl's wealth, Arthur accepts him as a member of the Round Table. His monstrous body is integrated within the Arthurian Court but still functions as a reminder of his violent practices. Furthermore, the acceptance of the monstrous Carl is a sign of the court's repressed ignorance towards excessive violence.

Chapter 3, "Dame Ragnelle", discusses a loathly lady who makes the knights reflect on the belief that beauty and nobility go hand in hand. The boar-human hybrid challenges the knights not to judge an outsider by his/her physical appearance. She proves to be more honourable than most of the members of the Round Table because she keeps her vows. By proving to be more honourable she makes the knights, as well as the audiences, question the belief that noble birth and physical appearances reflect the extend of one's honour. At the end of the narrative she transforms into the most beautiful lady of the court. As a result of her newly acquired beauty, Guinevere and Arthur fully accept her as a member of the Round Table. Even though her monstrous body is erased by means of a physical transformation, her monstrosity does not fail to leave a trace. Her new body functions as a reminder of the monstrous body that preceded it. Furthermore, her new body poses a threat to Gawain's most vulnerable sin of lust.

Chapter 4, "the Ghost of Guinevere's mother", explains how a ghost challenges Guinevere and Gawain to question their noble lifestyle and the values of the Arthurian Court. The ghost, who appears to be Guinevere's mother, warns her daughter to not engage in sinful tendencies such as lust and pride. Furthermore, she tells Gawain that the use of excessive violence should be prevented. She urges her daughter and Gawain to live by a type of nobility that is focused on virtue and tells them to help the poor and to take care of their souls. She then prophesises about the downfall of the Round Table. Nevertheless, the members of the Arthurian Court do not take her warnings seriously, and they continue in their sinful ways. The ghost is erased from the narrative; she

physically disappears. Because the court does not learn anything from the ghost, the monster is repressed and leaves a trace of her monstrosity. She continues to be present through the remaining flaws of the Round Table. Furthermore, her daughter is essentially a version of herself and functions as a trace of her monstrosity as well.

By interpreting the monstrous bodies in these literary texts, this thesis aims to offer insight into the anxieties and fears that were present in the Anglo-Scottish border area in the period of the second half of the fifteenth century. As already argued by Pollack and Donnelly, the narratives from the Sir Gawain Cycle work as political allegories, with coded opinions and critiques of the nobility classes. As these texts are popular romances, they are especially interesting, because they were written and read by different audiences of different social backgrounds. So these texts types are likely to reflect tensions between different social classes. The primary focus is on the monsters themselves. As monsters are created by people themselves, they function as displacements of concerns that are embedded within people's minds. By studying these monsters, this thesis aims to shed light on the actual emotions and feelings that were present at a time of civil war when aristocratic families were violently competing for power.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MONSTERS AND CULTURE

The study of a culture's monsters can lead to a better understanding of this culture and its fears and anxieties.[22] Cohen has written a framework called 'Monster Theory (Seven Theses)' in which he presents a method of studying "cultures through the monsters they bear".[23] This framework has become an important tool for analysing monsters in historical texts. Oswald more recently published a book on monsters and related notions, such as hybridity, metamorphosis and the 'trace'. She builds upon the framework of Cohen and gains new insights in what a monster defines and how a monster should be interpreted. Oswald's theory is particularly useful for this thesis because her theory focuses on monsters in medieval English literature, as well as on monsters of different genders. By building upon the works of Cohen and Oswald, this thesis will analyse the bodies of three monsters in the Sir Gawain Cycle. The aim of this work is to analyse the monstrous bodies and, in so doing, gain insight into the cultural tensions and anxieties that existed at the Anglo-Scottish borders in the second half of the fifteenth century.

1.1 Concerns regarding humanity in the twelfth century: humans, animals and monsters

Before discussing monsters and how they should be read, it is important to first discuss medieval concerns surrounding the animal-human boundary. In the twelfth century, views on the animal-human boundary were changing, and these changes led to fears and anxieties in the later Middle Ages.[24] Joyce Salisbury, tracing the changing attitudes towards animals in the medieval period, argues that, generally speaking, there were two different views on the animal-human boundary. According to Salisbury, in the Early Medieval Period, animals and humans were thought to be different.[25] Early Christian thinkers came up with various explanations that marked a qualitative difference between animals and humans. For instance, Augustine posited that there was a clear boundary

[22] Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," 3.
[23] *Ibid*., 3-4.
[24] Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, 1.
[25] It is important to note that Salisbury mentions that this is a dominant view put forward by the early Christians. In the classical and pagan world animal-human boundaries were fluid or illusory. *Ibid*., 4-6.

between animals and humans, since humans are rational creatures and animals are not.[26] But towards the twelfth century, views surrounding this boundary started changing; according to Salisbury, it is in this period that "this paradigm of separation of species was breaking down".[27] People started to realise that humans and animals might share more similarities than was thought previously. This realisation lead to major concerns about what it meant to be human.

Salisbury notes that as this boundary between humans and animals started to blur, humanity started to become defined by behaviour, rather than by body.[28] This change meant that human behaviour could become associated with animalistic behaviour, and vice versa. For instance, the marriage canons in Gratian's *Decretum* state that some positions for sexual intercourse were considered sinful because they were too animalistic.[29] So here human behaviour is compared to animal behaviour. Also, in the often cited thirteenth-century travel account of Gerald of Wales, animals portray human behaviour. Here through praying to God, wolves are portrayed as behaving like humans. Animalistic behaviour in humans and human behaviour in animals then further challenges the boundary between humans and animals. Moreover, Salisbury states that "people's definitions of animals really amounted to the definition of what it meant to be human".[30] In other words, the definitions of what it means to be human cannot exist without defining the relationship between humans and animals.

Dorothy Yamamoto also argues that the definition of humanity relies on defining the relationship between humans and animals, but she explains this relationship in a more theoretical way. She uses the terms 'centre' and 'periphery'/'margin' to explain the relationship between animals and humans. She argues that the centre can only maintain its identity through an on-going dialogue with the periphery.[31] Applying

[26] For other early Christian ideas on the differences between humans and animals that were posed in the early medieval period, see Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, 4-6.
[27] *Ibid*., 1-2.
[28] *Ibid*., 150; 167.
[29] Sed omnium horum pessimum est quod contra naturam fit, ut si uir membro mulieris non ad hoc concesso uoluerit uti. [But what is the worst of all is that what is done against nature, as when a man uses a woman's member that is not permitted.] *Decretum Gratiani*, ed. T. Reuter and G. Silagi (Munich: Münchener DigitalisierungsZentrum, 1990), c. 23 q. 7 c. 11.
[30] Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, 168.
[31] Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in English Medieval Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.

these terms to a medieval world view, she argues that humans stand at the centre and animals at the periphery. Yamamoto classifies the uneasy relationship between the centre (man) and the margins (animals) as a "dynamic instability" through which the identity of man is reflected on and formed.[32] She adds more nuance to her statement by arguing that the "degree of difference" between the centre and the periphery is what constitutes identity.[33] The terms 'centre' and 'periphery' and/or 'margin' will be used in the literary analyses that follow; the knights will be interpreted as the centre and the monster as the periphery.

The concerns surrounding the unclear boundary between animals and humans gave rise to in-between creatures like hybrids and wild men. Creatures that existed on the border between humans and animals, previously considered taboo by Christian thinkers, became increasingly more popular and feared at the same time from this period onwards.[34] For instance, Yamamoto notes that the wild man becomes popular in Middle English literature. She argues that "the wild man brings to a head questions about the dividing line between animals and humans, and the distinctiveness of human identity".[35] The increase of hybrid creatures like the wild man then suggests that there were anxieties and fears among the people with regards to the changing human-animal boundary. Furthermore, these creatures also helped humans reflect on humanity and what aspects constituted human identity. Yet aside from the wild men, Yamamoto and Salisbury are primarily focused on the difference between humans and animals and do not devote much attention to monsters.

Oswald elaborates on Salisbury's work by posing the following idea: if the boundary between animals and humans was unclear and problematic, then "the division among animals, monsters and humans were considerably more troubling".[36] According to Oswald, monsters in the medieval period were viewed primarily as hybrid creatures. Oswald takes the example of the Old English *Liber Monstrorum*, which divides monsters into three categories: "monstrous men, monstrous beasts, and monstrous serpents".[37] Monsters are thus ambiguous creatures that cannot be considered either

[32] Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in English Medieval Literature*, 8-9.
[33] *Ibid*., 8-9
[34] Salisbury mentions the example of a bat: a combination of a bird and a mouse. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, 139-40.
[35] Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in English Medieval Literature*, 144.
[36] Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in English Medieval Literature*, 4.
[37] *Ibid*., 5.

human or animal. Since monsters cannot be classified as humans or as animals, they pose a troubling new theoretical problem.

1.2 Monster theory: Cohen, Oswald and Camille

This section will explore two key theorists' ideas about monsters. As already noted, Cohen created a framework, consisting of seven theses, in which he proposes "a method of reading cultures from the monsters they engender".[38] It is therefore useful to briefly summarise some of Cohen's ideas, and discuss Oswald's more recent comments on his theses, because these ideas will function as the theoretical backbone for the analyses of the monsters in the Sir Gawain Cycle.

Cohen argues that a monster always signifies something other than itself and that its body is a construct. He states that the monster is "an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a place".[39] As the monster is a construct created in a specific time, it is important to interpret the monstrous body against its own historical background in order to find out what the monster signifies. In the case of the monsters of the Sir Gawain Cycle, each monstrous body should be interpreted against a backdrop of political upheaval and class struggles, in order to find out which anxieties and feelings their bodies project.

He also states that the monster cannot be placed into any existing ontological category.[40] In other words, the monster cannot be categorised as a human, nor as an animal. According to Cohen, the hybrid body of a monster "demand[s] a radical rethinking of boundary and normality".[41] Oswald agrees with Cohen that the monster's body escapes categorisation; she argues that "monstrosity is primarily a physical and visible category".[42] Focussing on medieval monsters, she states that the body of a monster can be different in three ways: "[it] can be more than human, less than human, and human plus some other element not intrinsic to the individual human body".[43] In the Sir Gawain Cycle all of these types of medieval monsters are present. Furthermore, Oswald builds further upon Cohen's theory by taking the behaviour of the monster into

38 Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," 3.
39 *Ibid.*, 4.
40 *Ibid.*, 4-6.
41 *Ibid.*, 6.
42 Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, 5.
43 *Ibid.*, 6.

account. According to Oswald, though the monster is primarily physical, "deviant behaviour can serve to emphasise or exaggerate monstrosity".[44] In keeping up with Oswald's approach, this thesis will focus not only on the physical body of the monster, but also on the behaviour of the monster.

Even though the monster is portrayed as 'Other' through its physical appearance, the monster is actually a projection of fears and anxieties that originate within.[45] According to Cohen, the monstrous body can reflect differences between the centre and the periphery which for instance can be cultural, political, or sexual. So these differences seem to separate the monster from humans initially. However, the differences that are embodied by the monster actually originate from within or from within a society. For instance, the monsters in the Sir Gawain Cycle may be represented as outsiders, but actually reflect differences that originate from within the Round Table itself. Oswald agrees with Cohen's statement that the monstrous body functions as a displacement of human fears and anxieties.[46] However, where Cohen argues that the monstrous body can represent any type of concern (i.e. political, racial, economic and so on), Oswald holds that in medieval English literature sexuality is the main anxiety represented by the monstrous body. Nevertheless, she adds that this does not mean that other issues do not play a role. Instead, she argues that "sexuality can be a focal point at which these various concerns meet".[47]

Oswald also comments on Cohen's idea that "the monster always escapes". Cohen states that a monster always leaves a trace behind, and that whenever a monster is repressed, it always seems to reappear in time. Oswald argues that a better formulation of this idea might be "the monster always returns".[48] She argues this based on the claim that the monster is never really absent. She explains that a monster never disappears from the text, but keeps haunting the text through the trace that it left. She uses the term erasure to describe this process, drawing the term from the work of the famous art historian Michael Camille. Camille describes erasure as an act that is purposely carried out by the viewer.[49] The act of erasing, in his formulation, leaves a

[44] Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, 6.
[45] Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," 7.
[46] Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, 8.
[47] *Ibid*., 8.
[48] *Ibid*., 13.
[49] Michael Camille, *Obscenity Under Erasure: Censorship in Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 139.

trace, and this trace can reveal something about the fears and anxieties of the medieval audience.[50]

Oswald applies this theory to literature, arguing that parts of a narrative can also be erased. Such erasures can take different forms; for instance, a passage can be scraped away from a text, or a monster in a narrative can be killed in a way that leaves a void in the narrative.[51] Oswald argues that all types of erasure have one thing in common: they leave a trace for the interpreter. This trace, according to Oswald, represents what was feared the most and which monstrous differences were repressed by the audience.

The monsters in the Sir Gawain Cycle undergo erasure and leave traces of the nature described by Oswald. As this thesis will show, these traces can indicate the aspects that caused the most anxiety among the fifteenth-century audiences in the Anglo-Scottish border regions. Overall, monsters, according to Cohen, ask us to "reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance towards its expression".[52] By analysing the monsters of the Sir Gawain Cycle, this thesis aims to explore certain fears and anxieties that existed within the fifteenth century Anglo-Scottish border culture at a time of conflict and the civil war.

1.3 Middle English monsters: metamorphosis and hybridity

When analysing Middle English monsters and the traces they leave, it is important to discuss two phenomena often associated with monsters in the Middle English Period: hybridity and metamorphosis. Oswald argues that the monstrous body becomes more complex in the Middle English Period. Physical and/or spiritual transformations become more and more frequent; the transformations erase the monstrous body which then fails to be a "primary indicator of identity".[53]

According to Caroline Walker Bynum, in the mid to late-twelfth century, literary works increasingly started to explore the phenomena of hybridity and metamorphosis due to a growing interest in change.[54] People started to become interested in radical

[50] Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature,* 15.
[51] *Ibid*., 16
[52] Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," 20.
[53] Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature,* 23.
[54] Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, 22.

change—also called replacement change by Walker Bynum.[55] Walker Bynum defines this as a type of change "where an entity is replaced by something totally different".[56] While this kind of change became important in the twelfth century, there was a resistance to replacement change. This resistance was caused by the fear of the nature of this change, because replacement change meant that categories of species could be defied, and identities could be destroyed.[57] Medieval thinkers were aware of cases of replacement change but had problems categorising this type of change. For example, a frog emerging from a tadpole would have posed problems, because this type of change defies the typical categories of species. As a consequence, radical change was often explained by hybridity rather than metamorphosis.[58] Hybridity can be explained as an entity consisting out of two parts or more. According to Walker Bynum, hybridity refuses change, whereas metamorphosis constitutes change; they are, therefore, opposites. Walker Bynum argues that hybridity and metamorphosis must be understood as two different phenomena and that these concepts cannot be used interchangeably. Yet the two concepts share one aspect in common: they both, in their own way, destabilise world views and refuse categorisation.[59]

Oswald builds on Walker Bynum's ideas and applies them to monsters in medieval literature. As opposed to Walker Bynum, though, she argues that hybridity and metamorphosis are not independent categories.[60] Oswald states that when metamorphosis takes place the creature always becomes a hybrid of some form: "when a creature transforms from one thing to another, the transformed creature *becomes* a hybrid – the former identity is never entirely abandoned and replace by the new identity".[61] So when the monster transforms into a human it will still carry part of the

[55] Walker Bynum notes that stories about vampires, werewolves and fairies revived. Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, 25. Also, Salisbury argues that there was an increase of copies of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*: "between the twelfth and the fourteenth century there was an explosion of popularity of the text, shown both in the numbers of new manuscripts and in the many commentaries on the work". Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, 161

[56] Walker Bynum exemplifies this with a few examples including the study of alchemy and theologians asserting that growth is caused by food changing into bile and blood. Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, 29.

[57] *Ibid*., 28.

[58] *Ibid*., 29.

[59] *Ibid*., 31.

[60] Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, 24.

[61] *Ibid*., 24.

monstrous identity and vice versa. Furthermore, it can be argued that transformations make monstrosity far more dangerous: if (part of the) monstrous identity remains, but is removed from the physical, it becomes invisible.[62] This danger of transformations is also important to the discussion of the narratives of the Sir Gawain Cycle as two of the three monsters manage to infiltrate into the Arthurian society.

This thesis discusses three Middle English monsters that are hybrids and/or undergo metamorphosis. According to Oswald, there is a crucial change with regards to the monstrous body from Old English to Middle English literature and art. In the Old English period the monstrous body was erased in a quite literal way: i.e. illustrations or descriptions of monstrous bodies were scraped away, and literary monsters were killed off.[63] As previously mentioned, Oswald suggests that the monstrous body always leaves a trace. In the Middle English period, this trace was not solely caused by erasure in a literal sense, but by transformation of the monstrous body.[64] This transformation could be either physical or spiritual.[65] This then also means that the body can be deceiving, as the body is not the sole indicator of identity. The mind of the monster or human could still be monstrous, even if the body is not.[66] Lastly, Oswald also argues that the monsters become more dangerous because in Middle English literature they "not only affect but also enter human communities".[67] The monsters in the Sir Gawain Cycle enter the Arthurian community in transformed states, as well as untransformed states, as will be explained in the literary analyses in chapters two, three and four. Because of the phenomena of metamorphosis and hybridity, the monstrous bodies in the Middle English Period become more complex and so they require careful analysis.

1.4 Medieval hybridity and metamorphosis in Gerald of Wales, Marie de France's lais and Arthurian Literature

[62] Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature,* 24.
[63] For instance, Oswald notes that "the threat of Old English monstrosity can only be removed by death in the case of Grendel and his mother, or by artistic or narrative erasure in case of *Wonders of the East*". *Ibid*., 23
[64] *Ibid*., 23.
[65] *Ibid*., 23.
[66] *Ibid*., 23.
[67] Oswald argues that in Old English literature, monsters dwell outside of human society and have their own community. Furthermore, they can never become part of the human community because of their physical monstrosity. I.e. in *Beowulf*, Grendel and Grendel's mother only go to Heorot (human community) to murder/avenge people and afterwards they return back to their lake. *Ibid*., 117.

This section will provide some examples of hybridity and metamorphosis in literary sources that precede the narratives of the Sir Gawain Cycle. These examples show that people in the mid-twelfth century became increasingly interested in the phenomena of metamorphosis and hybridity. At the same time, these examples show that the popularity of these themes was inspired not only by fascination, but also by fear.

The first example comes from a travel account by Gerald of Wales called *Topographia hibernie* which is dated to around the year 1187. This work was copied many times in the medieval period, which suggests that it was a popular work and can be taken, with some reservations, as representative of people's thoughts at the time. It records various cases of hybridity, and this feature suggests that there was a growing interest in borderline creatures as a result of the animal-human boundary breaking down. The first example of a case of hybridity is Gerald's encounter with a creature that is described to be half-ox and half-man:

> In partibus de Wikingelo, tempore quo Mauricius Giraldi filius terram illam et castrum obtinuerat, visus fuit homo prodigiosus, si tamen eum hominem dici fas est. Habetat enim totum corpus humanum præter extremitates, quæ bovinæ fuerant. A juncturis namque quibus et manus a brachiis, et pedes a tibiis porriguntur, ungulas bovis expressas præferebat. Caput ei sine crine totum; tam in occipite, quam anteriori parte, calvitio deforme; raras tantum lanugines per loca pro capillis habens. Oculi Grossi; tam rotunditate quam colore bovini. Facies oretenus subinde plana; pro naso, præter duo narium foramina, nullam eminentiam habens. Verba ei nulla. Mugitum enim tantum pro sermone reddebat.[68]

As is clear from this passage, Gerald of Wales and presumably the people in Maurice Fitzgerald's court were not sure whether to consider him a man or an animal. His body

[68] In Wicklow (Gwykingelo), at the time Maurice Fitzgerald held possession of that territory and castle, there was seen a man-monster, if he may be called a man, the whole of whose body was human, except extremities, which were those of an ox; they having the shape of hoofs, from the joints by which the hands are connected with the arms and the feet with the legs. His whole head was deformed by baldness, there being no hair either behind or before; but instead of it there was down in a few places. He had large eyes, round and of the colour of those of an ox. His face was flat down to the mouth, there being no protuberance of the nose, but only two orifices to serve the nostrils. He could not speak, the sounds he uttered resembling the lowing of an ox. *Topographia hibernie*, Distinctio II, Cap. XXI, 108. All quotations of *Topographia Hibernica* are from *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, eds. J. S Brewer, J. F. Dimock, and G. F. Warner (Reprint, London: Kraus 1966). All translations are from Thomas Forester, trans., *Giraldus Cambrensis: The Topography of Ireland* (Cambridge (Ontario): In Parentheses Publications, 2000)

is human, but he appears to have many deformities, which makes his body different from the average human body. Salisbury believes that this case of hybridity represents a monstrous birth, and that due to the concern of the animal-human boundary in the twelfth century, people would see such a birth as the result of blending species.[69] The divergent features are described as physical features of an ox. The creature thus cannot be categorised as any species, and instead is interpreted as a hybrid of an ox and a man by Gerald of Wales, and presumably also by the audiences that read his works.

He also records an encounter with werewolves, which gives an interesting perspective of how metamorphosis was perceived. Gerald writes that a priest was travelling from Ulster to Meath and spent the night in a forest near Meath. When he was sitting by the fire with another young man, a wolf came up to him and started talking. The priest prayed in the name of God not to hurt him and his companion, to which the wolf replied the following:

> "De quodam hominum genere sumus Ossiriensium. Unde, quolibet septennio, per imprecationem sancti cujusdam, Natalis scilicet abbatis, duo, videlicet mas et femina, tam a formis quam finibus exulare coguntur. Formam enim humanam prosus exuentes, induunt lupinam. Completo vero septennii spatio, si forte superstites fuerint, aliis duobus ipsorum loco simili conditione subrogatis, ad pristinam reduent tam patriam quam naturam."[70]

So the wolves are half-man and half-wolf; in other words, they seem to be werewolves. However, these creatures are quite different from our modern understanding of werewolves. This can be drawn from Gerald's description of how one of the wolves turns back into her human state: "Pellem totam a capite lupæ retrahens, usque ad umbilicum replicavit: et statim expressa forma vetulæ cujusdam apparuit".[71] From this description, it becomes clear that the creature is in fact a wolf and a human at the same time: a human covered in a layer of wolf skin, which can be removed. According to Walker Bynum, this explanation of the nature of the werewolf caused anxieties.[72] In

[69] Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, 145.
[70] "There are two of us, a man and a woman, natives of Ossory, who, through the curse of one Natalis, saint and abbot, are compelled every seven years to put off the human form, and depart from the dwellings of men. Quitting entirely the human form, we assume that of wolves. At the end of the seven years, if they chance to survive, two others being substituted in their places, they return to their country and their former shape." *Topographia Hibernica*, Distinctio II, Cap. XIX, 102.
[71] He tore off the skin of the she-wolf, from the head down to the navel, folding it back. Thus she immediately presented the form of an old woman. *Topographia Hibernica*, Distinctio II, Cap. XIX, 102.
[72] Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, 25.

other words, the nature of a werewolf is explained by hybridity, since the idea of metamorphosis was seen as particularly scary.

Unease surrounding metamorphosis appears to have been a broader cultural phenomenon in the twelfth century, since it appears in not just travel writing but also in literary texts, such as Marie de France's *The Lay of Bisclavret*. This narrative is contemporary with that of Gerald of Wales, and tells the story of a wife whose husband is a werewolf. He keeps this secret from his wife, but she gets suspicious because every once and a while her husband disappears for a few days, so she thinks he is having an affair. After begging him many times to tell her the truth, the husband tells her that he is in fact a werewolf:

> "Dame, jeo devienc besclavret:
> En cele grant forest me met,
> Al plus espés de la gaudine,
> S'i vif de preie e de ravine." [73]

His wife decides to take away his clothes, which prevents the man from transforming back into his human state:

> "Kar si jes eüsse perduz
> E de ceo feusse aparceüz,
> Bisclavret sereie a tuz jurs;
> Jamés n'avreie mes sucurs,
> De si k'il me fussent rendu."[74]

Bisclavret needs his clothes to switch between the different states of being animal and human. In this case, it seems that Bisclavret undergoes metamorphosis; he is not just a human underneath a layer of fur like Gerald's werewolf. Nevertheless, as Walker Bynum argues, the narrative stresses the idea of a "werewolf as a rational soul trapped in a animal body".[75] So even though he is trapped in the body of a wolf, his behaviour remains human.[76] His human behaviour then challenges the animal-human boundary, because he is not a human, nor a wolf.

[73] "My dear, I become a werewolf: I go off into the great forest, in the thickest part of the woods, and I live on the prey I hunt down." *The Lai of Bisclavret,* ll. 63-6. All quotations of *The Lai of Bisclavret* are from *Lais de Marie de France,* ed. L. Harf-Lancner (Paris: LDP, 1990). All translations are from R. Hanning and J. Ferrante, trans., *The Lais of Marie de France* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995)

[74] "For if I were to lose them, and then be discovered, I'd stay a werewolf forever. I'd be helpless until I got them back." *The Lai of Bisclavret*, ll. 73-7.

[75] Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, 95.

[76] Walker Bynum believes that the tamed werewolf can also be seen as "a warping or repression of the idea of metamorphosis". *Ibid*., 95.

Furthermore, when the king gives Bisclavret back his clothes, the werewolf does not initially transform back to his human state, because he is ashamed. A wise fellow then advises the king to have him change in a private space:

> "sire, ne fetes mie bien:
> cist nel fereit pur nule rien,
> que devant vus ses dras reveste
> ne mut la semblance de beste.
> ne savez mie que ceo munte:
> mut durement en ad grant hunte.
> en tes chambres le fai mener
> e la despoille od lui porter;
> une grant piece l'i laissums.
> S'il devient hum, bien le verums.[77]

After leaving him in the room for some time alone, the king enters the space and finds Bisclavret in his human form. The fact that the transformation happens 'off stage' suggests that the narrative itself is trying to cover over it, which would suggest unease about this transformation. The discourse surrounding the nature of the body of a werewolf by different writers in the twelfth century indicates that metamorphosis was a topic of interest and fascination.

The unease surrounding the animal-human boundary was particularly pronounced with respect to chivalric behaviour, and since this is a key theme of the discussion that follows it merits further investigation here. *The Lay of Tyolet*, dated to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, is about Tyolet's encounter with a knight. Tyolet is raised in exclusion in the forest by his mother. His father died as a knight and therefore his mother does not want him to grow up as one, and raises him in a place far removed from chivalry. He hunts in the woods every day, and one day he chases a stag which changes into a man on horseback when crossing the river:

> Endementres qu'il l'escorcha
> Et li cers se tranfigura
> Qui outre l'eve s'estoit mis.
> [La forme d'homme a tantost pris]
> Et .I. chevalier resembloit;
> Tot armé sor l'eve s'estoit,

[77] "My lord, you're not doing it right. This beast wouldn't, under any circumstances, in order to get rid of his animal form, put on his clothes in front of you; you don't understand what this means: he's just too ashamed to do it here. Have him led to your chambers and bring the clothes with him; then we'll leave him alone for a while. If he turns into a man, we'll know about it." *The Lai of Bisclavret*, ll. 283-92.

Sor .I. cheval detriés comé,
S'estoit com chevalier armé.[78]

This narrative seems to revolve around the question whether a knight can be considered to be human or whether a knight has more in common with animals.[79] Tyolet asks the knight what kind of beast a knight is, where it comes from, and where it lives.[80] So Tyolet seems to think the knight is a beast rather than a human, which might have to do with Tyolet's upbringing in a remote environment. The following passage in which the nature of a knight is described underlines the uneasy boundary between humans and animals at the time:

"C'est une beste molt cremue;
Autres bestes prent et menjue,
El bois converse molt souvent
Et a plainne terre ensement."[81]

This passage suggests that there is not a clear difference between a knight and an animal. The knight suggests that a man who engages in too much violence descends to a state of bestiality and the passage stands as a powerful example of medieval fears surrounding a perceived overlap between the expectations of knightly violence and animalistic behaviour. Tyolet, on the other hand, lives in the forest, excluded from society and survives by hunting animals on a daily basis. [82] The knight and Tyolet both seem to portray behaviour that is not up to the human standard, and so this text plays with the idea that there is no clear difference between humans and animals, especially when it comes to knightly violence.

Lastly, it is worth discussing the case of metamorphosis in Marie de France's *The Lai of Yonec*, because this lai contains a witness who sees a creature transform into something else. This lai tells the story of a rich lord who possessed a big area of land.

[78] "The stag which had crossed over the river changed shape. [It soon took on human form] and assumed the appearance of a knight; he was fully armed at the water's edge and mounted on a horse with flowing mane, he sat like an armed knight." *The Lai of Tyolet*, ll. 106-12. All quotations and translations of *The Lai of Tyolet* are from *Doon and Tyolet: Two Old French Narrative Lays*, eds. L. C. Brook and G. S. Burgess (Liverpool: The University of Liverpool, 2005).
[79] It is important to note that Tyolet has been raised in exclusion from society and has never seen a knight or anyone else aside from his own mother.
[80] *The Lai of Tyolet*, ll. 130-3.
[81] It is a beast which is much dreaded; It captures and eats other beasts. For much of the time it dwells in the woods [a]s well as on open land. *The Lai of Tyolet*, ll. 141-4.
[82] For a more in-depth analysis about this case of metamorphosis, see Miranda Griffin, *Transforming Tales: Rewriting Metamorphosis in Medieval French Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 103.

He marries a lady because he wants to have children who can become his heir. He locks the lady up in a tower, because she is very beautiful and he wants to protect her. The lady becomes unhappy and wishes for her husband to die. One day a bird flies into her window and the following occurred:

> Ele ne seit quei ceo pout estre.
> en la chambre volant entre;
> gez ot as piez, ostur sembla,
> de cinc mues fu u de sis.
> quant il i ot un poi esté
> e ele l'ot bien esgardé,
> chevaler bel e gent devint.[83]

As in *The Lai of Bisclavret* and *The Lai of Tyolet*, this lai does not contain any description of the process of metamorphosis either. However, unlike in the other narratives, there is a witness of the transformation. The lady lives in the tower with another old lady who is supposed to protect her. When the wife of the lord starts to take care of her appearance, the lord gets suspicious. He tells the old lady to hide in the lady's room to find out what causes this change in behaviour. Then the hawk arrives and transforms into his human shape right before the old lady's eyes:

> cele le vit, si l'esgarda,
> coment il vient e il ala;
> de ceo ot ele grant poür
> que hume le vit e pus ostur.[84]

It is not an extensive description, but the lady is said to experience *grant poür* 'great fear' when she witnesses the metamorphosis. This reaction then suggests that metamorphosis, or radical change, was feared by the medieval people.

So from these narratives, it can be concluded that people were interested in exploring the nature of in-between creatures that challenged the animal-human boundary. The examples in Gerald's account suggest that he was more or less comfortable with the idea of the human-animal boundary breaking down, or at least he

[83] She didn't know what it was. It flew into the chamber; its feet were banded; it looked like a hawk of five or six moultings. It alighted before the lady. When it had been there awhile and she'd stared hard at it, it became a handsome and noble knight. *The Lai of Yonec*, ll. 108-15. All quotations of *The Lai of Yonec* are from *Lais de Marie de France*, ed. L. Harf-Lancner (Paris: LDP, 1990). All translations of *The Lai of Yonec* are from R. Hanning and J. Ferrante, trans., *The Lais of Marie de France* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1995).

[84] But the old woman watched him, saw how he came and went. She was quite frightened, when she saw him first a man and then a bird. *The Lai of Yonec*, ll. 275-8.

was interested in exploring this topic. The examples in his account also discuss metamorphosis but this change is explained by hybridity, which could imply that he was uncomfortable with the idea of metamorphosis.[85] Furthermore, in the literary examples in which metamorphosis occurs, the process of is never described. In the last case in *The Lai of Yonec*, there is a spectator who witnesses the phenomenon of metamorphosis and is said to have experienced "grant poür". So while different writers showed an interest in hybridity and metamorphosis and started exploring these phenomena, the examples also indicate that there was resistance and fear towards hybridity, and especially metamorphosis. These phenomena bring questions to mind about human nature, changing identities, and crossing boundaries, and therefore probably created unease among medieval people. These questions surrounding identity, humanity and boundary-crossing that are raised by hybridity and metamorphosis destabilise the medieval world view. This destabilisation of the world view will be important to the discussion of the monsters in the Sir Gawain Cycle. Monsters in these narratives transform and enter human communities, or come back in transformed states to haunt people.

1.5 Monstrosity at the Anglo-Scottish border: three monsters in the Sir Gawain Cycle

The three narratives of the Sir Gawain Cycle that are studied in this present work are all dated to the third quarter of the fifteenth century, which makes them contemporary with each other.[86] Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that these narratives circulated orally and might be older than the language or hand of their manuscript copies indicates. All three narratives were produced in the North-West Midlands, and circulated in this region. The narratives are also set in the same area as they were produced. They share the literary setting of Inglewood forest.[87] Inglewood forest is located in the North-West Midlands in the county of Cumbria, near the Scottish border. In the medieval period,

[85] There is a fine line between fear and interest. The concern around in-between creatures and radical change could also have the opposite affect and cause people to become interested in this topic.
[86] For more information on the dating of these texts and their provenance see Hahn's edition on the Sir Gawain Cycle. *The Awntyrs off Arthure* is arguably a later text than the other ones.
[87] *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* are both set in Inglewood forest. *The Awntyrs off Arthure* is set at Tarn Wadling, which used to be a real lake in Inglewood forest.

Inglewood forest was located in the middle of the Anglo-Scottish marches.[88] As these narratives were produced in the North-West Midlands and are set here as well, it seems that the narratives could potentially provide more information about fears and anxieties behind events that took place in this specific region.

The Anglo-Scottish marches were rife with conflict and instability in this period, and it is important to recognise this when exploring the cultural-historical context in which these narratives circulated. According to Bruce and Terrell, this border culture was complex; "[d]rawn together by cultural similarities and common economic and judicial interest, while simultaneously driven apart by opposed political allegiances and a growing discourse of national enmity, English and Scottish borderers had more complicated allegiances and more multifaceted identities than has often been recognised".[89] The Scottish and English borderers shared a common culture, but at the same time they belonged to different nations and considered each other enemies. This lead to alliances being made as well as to enmity. Moreover, there was no central power in the Anglo-Scottish border regions and instead there were local authorities with different ideologies that competed for local power. So the Anglo-Scottish marches were an area of great complexity with many issues involving politics, identity, and power.

Furthermore, next to the complex relationships between English and Scottish borders, the English noble houses also started to become more hostile towards each other. The Percies and the Nevilles were two noble families who ruled the northern parts of England and also controlled parts of the Anglo-Scottish marches. Because the areas were not clearly demarcated, there were many land disputes that lead into conflicts. Their fights for more local power in the north and on the Anglo-Scottish marches eventually has been argued to have led to the Wars of the Roses.[90] The Wars of the Roses, and the tensions and anxieties that came with them, also play an important role in these narratives. These tensions at the border of Scotland and England are notably present in the literature of this region in the Late Medieval Period.[91]

[88] Terrell and Bruce, *The Anglo-Scottish Border and the Shaping of Identity, 1300–1600*, 2.
[89] *Ibid*., 4.
[90] Griffiths, *King and Country England and Wales in the Fifteenth Century*, 321.
[91] For more literature on the Anglo-Scottish border identity in the late medieval period, see Terrell and Bruce, *The Anglo-Scottish Border and the Shaping of Identity, 1300–1600.*

Aside from these local issues, people on the border would have been familiar with other cultural and social issues that were impacting the North more generally. At the time when the three narratives were being written and were circulating, there was a growing tension between social classes and a questioning of who 'deserved' to be part of the aristocracy. From the fourteenth century onwards the nobility started to attach more importance to status. As Chris Given-Wilson argues, "social distinctions which had in practice been a part of the English scene for a long time became more rigidly defined, more blatantly advertised, and more jealously guarded".[92] These concerns surrounding social distinctions suggest that there were no clear rules anymore for what it meant to be noble. People from middle-classes were able to climb the social ladder and so noble birth failed to be a requirement to become part of the aristocracy. Coming back to Cohen's view that the monster is "born as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment", the monsters in the Sir Gawain Cycle could provide more information on the specific fears and anxieties on class-tensions and the political unrest at the Anglo-Scottish border region in the mid-fifteenth century.

As mentioned above, this thesis will analyse three monsters in the Sir Gawain Cycle in order to find out what they signify. By analysing their monstrous bodies, their physical and spiritual transformations, and the traces they leave, this work aims to gain more insight into the tensions and anxieties that existed at the Anglo-Scottish border area in the second half of the fifteenth century. These narratives all reflect a distinct unease about the conflict between a type of nobility based on wealth and status and one based on virtue. So this thesis will argue that the monsters embody concerns regarding the question of what it means to be noble. The monsters then help the Arthurian knights, as well as the medieval audience, to reflect on the difference between these two types of nobility. For instance, they pose questions such as; is noble status decided by birth? Can people from lower classes climb the social ladder and become noble as well? Does ignoble behaviour make one less noble? Can one lose one's noble status? Since the bodies of the monsters are all significantly different from each other, they reflect different fears and anxieties related to noble status. As Bruce and Terrel have noted recently, various border identities in the British Isles have been studied, but few studies have been conducted that focus on the Scottish 'Other'. This thesis aims to provide

[92] Chris Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages: The Fourteenth-Century Political Community* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 57.

more insight on the tensions that were present in this specific region in the mid fifteenth century through studying the monsters.

2. THE CARL OF CARLISLE

Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle tells the story of Gawain, Kay and Baldwin and their overnight stay at the castle of the Carl of Carlisle. The host of this castle, the Carl of Carlisle, is known for his violent nature and inhospitality. He tests the knights on their courtesy and only Gawain passes all the tests. Gawain's perfect behaviour breaks the curse that the Carl was under (to act violently towards every guest that did not obey his rules). At the end of the narrative, Arthur makes the Carl of Carlisle a member of the Round Table. *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle* survives in two versions. The first version can be found in the MS Brogynton II and is dated to the third quarter of the fifteenth century.[93] The second version is preserved in the Percy Folio MS from the seventeenth century but survives as merely a fragment.[94] The main difference between the two versions, aside from length, is the transformation of the Carl. In version B, the Carl is beheaded. This action breaks the curse and leads to the Carl's physical transformation. In version A, the Carl undergoes an exclusively spiritual transformation and remains a monster. This analysis will however focus on the A text, as this version is contemporary with the other narratives discussed in this work.

This narrative from the Sir Gawain Cycle has received relatively little scholarly attention as compared to the other two narratives under discussion here. According to Taco Brandsen, this narrative offers an important political message surrounding class differences.[95] Glenn Wright compares *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle* to *The Taill of Rauf Coilear* and argues that they contain similar folktale plots in which a nobleman and a commoner "sample each other's hospitality".[96] He draws a comparison between Charlemagne and Rauf on one hand, and Gawain and the Carl on the other. Wright notes that in both narratives, the 'commoners' provide lodging to a nobleman as well as a lecture on courtesy. As Taylor mentions, most scholars writing on *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle* have focused on the class conflict that is present in the narrative. More recent readings of this narrative, including Taylor's and Sean Pollack's, have focused on specific topics that are connected with the Anglo-Scottish border such as sovereignty

93 Hahn, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, introduction to *The Carl of Carlisle.*
94 Taco Brandsen, "*Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*," *Neophilologus* 81.2 (1997): 299.
95 Brandsen, "*Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*," 299.
96 Wright, "Churl's Courtesy: *Raul Coilȝear* and its English Analogues," 648.

and identity politics.[97] For instance, Taylor argues that the narrative reflects how people in northern England competed for regional autonomy in a period of centralizing power.[98]

These scholarly debates have focused on the Carl of Carlisle and his role in the narrative, but not on the Carl as a monster and what his projection can tell us about the Anglo-Scottish border. According to Lindsay, it is the Carl's physical appearance and his behaviour that challenges the boundaries of chivalry.[99] The monstrosity of the Carl thus plays a fundamental role in this narrative—one that is worthy of further exploration. In this chapter, the primary focus is on the monster in order to find out what anxieties the monstrous body of the Carl projects surrounding the question of what it meant to be noble.

2.1 The monster: the Carl of Carlisle

At the beginning of the narrative, Gawain, King Arthur, Kay and Baldwin chase after a huge stag from morning until late afternoon. They find that they are lost, which suggests that they are far removed from their hunting stations. In fact, their unfamiliarity with the region might imply that they are outside of Arthur's domains.[100] So they find themselves beyond the border of society—the perfect place for a monster to appear. Moreover, the environment is described as haunting, "myst gan ryse in a mor".[101] As it is getting dark, Baldwin suggests that they lodge at the Castle of Carlisle. However, the knight also mentions that the Carl is known to beat his guests. Nevertheless, the knights decide to go to the Castle of the Carl, because the forest seems more threatening than an aggressive host. When they arrive at the castle gate, the knights ask the porter if they could lodge at the Carlisle's castle. The porter says the following: "My lorde can no

[97] Pollack, "Border States: Parody, Sovereignty, and Hybrid Identity in *The Carl of Carlisle*," 10-26.; Taylor, "Sovereignty, Oath, and the Profane Life in *The Avowing of Arthur*," 182-208.
[98] Taylor, "Arthurian Biopolitics: Sovereignty and Ecology in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*,"185.
[99] Lindsay, "The Courteous Monster: Chivalry, Violence, and Social Control in *The Carl of Carlisle*," 401.
[100] Taylor, "Arthurian Biopolitics: Sovereignty and Ecology in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*," 187-8.
[101] *The Carl of Carlisle,* l. 121. All Quotations of *The Carl of Carlisle* are from *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales,* ed. T. G. Hahn, (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 1995).

corttessye; [y]e schappyth notte wyttout a vellony, [t]ruly trow ye mee" (ll. 193-95).[102] Yet they still decide to stay at the castle of the Carl.

When the knights enter the castle, they find that the Carl, previously described to be an aggressive host, turns out to be a giant:

> Nine taylloris yerdus he was hyghtht
> And therto leggus longe and wyghtht,
> Or ellus wondor hit wer.
> Ther was no post in that hall,
> Grettyst growand of hem all,
> But his theys wer thycker.
> His armus wer gret, wyttoutyn lese,
> His fyngeris also, iwys,
> As anny lege that we ber.[103]

His body is described as that of a human. However, each body part is larger than that of an average human being: i.e. he has extremely long legs, and his fingers are as long as a human's legs.[104] Also, his length is measured in tailor's yard, which is a fundamentally human form of measurement. [105] Describing the giant with this measurement works to humanise him at the same time as the excessive height and strength would make a medieval audience interpret him as odd. His body creates ambiguity because it bears resemblance with the human body, but the Carl cannot be categorised as a human, because of his giant-like features. According to Oswald, the body of giants are therefore "both human and more than human".[106]

The deviant behaviour of the Carl of Carlisle emphasises his monstrosity. As mentioned previously, Baldwin and the porter characterise the Carl as an aggressive host. These warnings prove to be true when he tests the knights on their chivalric behaviour. When they do not live up to his standards, the Carl beats them. For instance, he beats Kay so hard that he passes out: "[t]he Carll gaffe hym seche a boffett [t]hat

[102] *The Carl of Carlisle*, ll. 193-95.
[103] *Ibid.*, ll. 249-62.
[104] This description of the Carl of Carlisle resembles the description of the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* who is also depicted as a giant: "half etayn in erde I hope þat he were". *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight*, l. 140. *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* ed. and trans. Elaine Treharne, in Old and Middle English c.890- c.1450: An Anthology, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), l. 140.
[105] A tailor's yard be converted to three feet, or almost a metre. So the Carl is twenty-seven feet tall; or taller than eight meters.
[106] Oswald, Monsters, *Gender and Sexuality in English Medieval Literature*, 165.

smertly onn the grond hym sett".[107] The fact that he beats his guests suggests that he might be violent. Furthermore, the Carl lives with four wild animals: a boar, a lion, a bull, and a bear. When the knights enter the house, the animals are about to attack them, but then the Carl commands them to lay down.[108] These are not the type of animals one would expect in a medieval household. Gail Ashton and Pollack have argued that these wild animals represent monstrous pets that have been domesticated.[109] It could be argued that these animals are behaving in a domesticated way, but having tamed wild animals is another example of how the Carl is 'extra' human. His physical appearance, behaviour, and his animal companions depict the Carl as 'Other'.

Scholars have agreed that the Carl of Carlisle is a commoner, since 'Carll' is the Middle English word for commoner, or countryman.[110] His monstrous appearance and class then place him on the periphery, while Gawain, Kay and Baldwin, the members of the Arthurian Court, represent the centre. The Carl does not seem to meet the standards of the nobility on the first sight. However, it is worth mentioning that the narrative contains some ambiguity with regards to his social status. First of all, he lives in a castle and he welcomes his guests by serving them wine in golden cups, so he seems to have sense of hospitality. Furthermore, he has his own servants. As Brandsen notes, "it is clear that despite his lack of nobility Sir Gawain's host is a man to be reckoned with".[111] Moreover, according to Lindsay, his wife and daughter are described in courtly terms and their beauty is up to the standards of the Arthurian Court.[112] Also, Gawain ends up marrying the Carl's daughter which suggests that she meets the standards of the Arthurian table. So while his monstrous appearance and his non-noble birth characterise him as an outsider, his life-style seems to share obvious similarities with that of the Arthurian knights.

2.2 The Carl vs. Kay and Baldwin

[107] *The Carl of Carlisle,* ll. 325-6.
[108] *Ibid.,* l. 235.
[109] Gail Ashton, *Medieval English Romance in Context* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010), 42.; Pollack, "Border States: Parody, Sovereignty, and Hybrid Identity in *The Carl of Carlisle*," 18.
[110] Brandsen, "*Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*," 300.
[111] *Ibid*., 301.
[112] Lindsay, "The Courteous Monster: Chivalry, Violence, and Social Control in *The Carl of Carlisle*," 412.

The Carl of Carlisle is depicted as a violent and animalistic giant, which leads the knights to believe that he does not have any courtesy. However, throughout the narrative it becomes clear that his monstrous body is not representative of his identity.[113] In fact, the knights of the Round Table are actually the ones who are associated with unchivalrous and violent behaviour. According to Brandsen, the bad behaviour of Kay and Baldwin is contrasted with Gawain's good behaviour.[114] However, one might argue that it is not as black and white as Brandsen suggests because all of the knights engage in unchivalrous behaviour at one point.

When the knights arrive at the castle, the porter tells them that the Carl does not have any courtesy. This would suggest that the knights are the civilised ones and the Carl is the 'Other'. However, when the knights meet the Carl, the Carl tells them the following: "For her no corttessy thou schalt have, [b]ut carllus corttessy – [f]or serttus I can non".[115] So rather than the Carl not having any courtesy at all, he lives by his own set of rules. It is important to note that the Arthurian knights often come into contact with another value system that is alien to them.[116] So it seems that they have crossed the border of Arthur's realm and that they have come into contact with another house that follows a different ideology. It is important to give a definition of the term 'courtesy', because this specific aspect of the different ideologies of the Carl and the Arthurian knights is compared throughout the narrative. Sarah Lindsay defines courtesy as an aspect of chivalry that governs and promotes "harmonious social interactions, such as observing the rules of hospitality and treating others with respect".[117] The knights and the Carl then seem to have different rules regarding hospitality and treating outsiders. Furthermore, the knights are not told what code of conduct the Carl follows – if any, and at this point in the narrative, it is left a mystery to the audience as well. One could therefore argue the Carl's unknown ideology makes him 'Other'.

Kay's violent behaviour at the beginning of the narrative suggests that he is actually not that different from the Carl of Carlisle. As in many other Arthurian narratives, Kay is described as a bad character who easily loses his temper. When

113 Lindsay, "The Courteous Monster: Chivalry, Violence, and Social Control in *The Carl of Carlisle*," 411.
114 Brandsen, "*Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*," 300.
115 *The Carl of Carlisle,* ll. 277-9.
116 Wright, "Churl's Courtesy: *Raul Coilɔear* and its English Analogues," 656.
117 Lindsay, "The Courteous Monster: Chivalry, Violence, and Social Control in *The Carl of Carlisle*," 403.

Baldwin says to Gawain and Kay that the Carl beats his guests and nobody has ever escaped alive unless it were for God's will, Kay responds as following:

> "Be the Carle never so bolde,
> I count hym not worthe an har.
> And yeyf he be never so stoute,
> We woll hym bette all abowt
> And make his beggynge bar.
> Suche as he brewythe, seche schall he drenke."[118]

Kay suggests that they could beat the Carl, which would allow them to stay at his place. This suggestion shows that Kay is associated with violence, even though he is not a monster, but a nobleman. Such unprovoked physical violence was likely considered unchivalric behaviour. As Lindsay argues, Kay is never an idealised figure in Arthurian romances.[119] Kay's violent behaviour is potentially worse than that of the Carl, because Kay, as a guest, should be respectful to his host. So the Carl and Kay are both depicted as violent, but the Carl is characterised as an outsider and Kay is not.

Furthermore, Baldwin and Kay fail the first test because they think that they are better than the Carl. When Baldwin goes to check on his horse, he sees that his horse is in the stable with the Carl's foal. He releases the foal because he thinks that the foal is not worthy of standing next to his noble horse: "Thow schalt not be fello wytt my palfray / [w]hyll I am beschope in londe".[120] Baldwin releases the foal of the Carl because he does not want the Carl's foal to be cast as equal to his palfrey. His motif for releasing the Carl's foal then suggests that Baldwin sees his horse as more valuable than the Carl's foal, and concomitantly, that he thinks he is superior. As Lindsay notes "Kay and Baldwin assume that their noble status excuses them from interacting harmoniously with those outside of the noble world".[121] The Carl does not accept this type of behaviour because it is not courteous for a guest to behave like this, and he punishes Baldwin by beating him. Then, Kay goes into the stable and tries to take the foal outside as well. It seems that Kay and Baldwin are holding up an idea of courtesy based on wealth and class and not based on more ethical values of knightly courtesy. The Carl does not accept their kind of courtesy and decides to punish Kay's behaviour by beating

[118] *The Carl of Carlisle,* ll. 155-60.
[119] Lindsay, "The Courteous Monster: Chivalry, Violence, and Social Control in *The Carl of Carlisle*," 408.
[120] *The Carl of Carlisle,* ll. 305-6.
[121] Lindsay, "The Courteous Monster: Chivalry, Violence, and Social Control in *The Carl of Carlisle*," 410.

him until he passes out. The Carl then confronts Gawain and tells him the following: "Evyll-taught knyghttus […] I schall teche the or thou wend away [s]um of my corttessye".[122]

The Carl's hope that the knights will conform to a certain code of behaviour suggests that he is familiar with courtesy but lives by a different type of courtesy than that of the Arthurian knights—one that clashes with the knights' courtesy. As Lindsay argues, the Carl's decision to punish his guests for their unchivalrous actions implies that the Carl "shows the ability to recognise courtesy".[123] It is important to note that the Carl's idea of courtesy is not related to class; the Carl's actions, according to Lindsay, imply that "courtesy begets courtesy, while discourteous behaviour, regardless of a person's rank, merits a discourteous response".[124]

Although both parties seem to be following a code of courteous, chivalric behaviour, it is worth noting that both also seem to engage in unchivalrous behaviour: the knights behave uncourteously towards the host and the Carl beats his guests. However, when the Carl's actions are examined more closely, the situation becomes more complicated. The Carl's decision to punish his guests for disobedient behaviour might have been read as a bit ambiguously by medieval audiences. While repugnant to us today, corporeal punishment of this nature was used in educational settings in the medieval period as a means of helping people learn. The Carl's violence might therefore have been understood by medieval audiences as somewhat acceptable, and certainly as more acceptable than the knights' unchivalric behaviour. So at this point the knights and the monstrous 'Other' are not that different anymore in terms of their adherence to an ideal of courteous behaviour. If anything, the Carl seems to behave more courteously than Baldwin and Kay, because he seems to live by a type of courtesy that is based upon obedience and mutual respect.

2.3 Gawain's obedience and the reintegration of the monster

In contrast to Kay's violent behaviour, Gawain behaves in a more virtuous way towards the Carl. Gawain does not act violently, but instead uses courtesy to interact with the

122 *The Carl of Carlisle,* ll. 328-30.
123 Lindsay, "The Courteous Monster: Chivalry, Violence, and Social Control in *The Carl of Carlisle*," 410.
124 Lindsay, "The Courteous Monster: Chivalry, Violence, and Social Control in *The Carl of Carlisle*," 410.

outsider. For instance, Gawain tells the other knights that he would not want to sleep at the castle against the Carl's will: "I woll not geystyn ther magre ys, [t]how I myght never so well".[125] This courteous behaviour is placed in direct contrast with Kay's behaviour, when Kay intends to get into the Carl's castle by using violence. Another example occurs when the knights meet the Carl for the first time. They stand face to face with a monstrous giant who lives with four wild animals and they are terrified. Rather than fighting this monster though, Gawain decides to kneel for the Carl.[126] Gawain's response here is contrasted not only with Kay's violent response, but also with the typical behaviour of Gawain's father.[127] As noted by Lindsay, Gawain's father, Ironside, is known for seeking and fighting the monstrous. Ironside's activities, then, celebrate violence against the monstrous.[128] However, Gawain's act of courtesy proves to be more successful than Kay's because it is through Gawain's courtesy that the knights receive shelter, and not through violence.

Furthermore, where Kay and Baldwin are beaten for failing the Carl's first test, Gawain passes the test by showing kindness to the animal. When Gawain goes to check on his horse and he notices the foal standing outside in the cold and the rain, he decides to lead him inside and he gives the animal his mantle. Gawain is rewarded for his act of courtesy, which suggests that this is the right behaviour in the eyes of the Carl. Furthermore, the Carl thanks him several times, which shows that the Carl approves of his actions. However, as noticed by other scholars, the second and third test seem to ask Gawain to deviate from the courteous and virtuous behaviour that he is associated with in the English Arthurian tradition. According to Lindsay, Gawain has to behave with discourtesy in order to pass the tests: he has to use violence and an acquisitive attitude to women.[129] For the second test his host asks him to shoot a spear at his face, which requires violent behaviour. Though he has to engage in violence, at the same time he is obeying his host.

125 *The Carl of Carlisle,* ll. 164-5.
126 *Ibid.,* ll. 271-5.
127 *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle* devotes an entire section to the character of Ironside (*The Carl of Carlisle,* ll. 73-102). For further discussion on Gawain and Ironside this, see Lindsay, "The Courteous Monster: Chivalry, Violence, and Social Control in *The Carl of Carlisle*," 406-9.
128 Lindsay, "The Courteous Monster: Chivalry, Violence, and Social Control in *The Carl of Carlisle*," 407.
129 *Ibid*., 414.

In the third and last task, Gawain's sexuality is put to the test, and this proves to be the most difficult and challenging test. Indeed, some scholars even argue that he partly failed this test.[130] Gawain is asked to kiss the Carl's wife. In this test, it seems that Gawain is forced to choose between two types of courtesy: he either has to choose Christian courtesy and not kiss the host's wife, or choose a type of courtesy based on obedience and follow the Carl's request. In the end, the softness of the lady's skin makes him give into his desire:

> For softnis of that Ladys syde
> Made Gawen do his wyll that tyde;
> Therof Gawen toke the Carle goode hede.
> When Gawen wolde have doun the prevey far,
> Then seyd the Carle, "Whoo ther!
> That game I the forbade".[131]

The host has to intervene to prevent Gawain from having intercourse with his wife. The request of the Carl was to kiss his wife, and Gawain seems to have done more than kissing. Nevertheless, the Carl seems to be content with Gawain's performance and rewards him for completing all of the tasks: "Thow schalt have wonn to so bryght [s]chall play wytt the all this nyghte [t]yll tomorrowe daye".[132] In order to reward Gawain for his obedience, the Carl has his daughter spend the night with Gawain, and at the end of the narrative, he gives his blessing for them to wed each other. The celebration of Gawain's behaviour seems questionable. However, scholars have argued that it is not Gawain's behaviour that is rewarded, but his obedience.[133] As Wright mentions: "the Carl makes no distinction between 'courtesy' and simple obedience to his will".[134] So by obeying his host and by adapting to his ideology, Gawain passes the tests.

It is through Gawain's obedience that the curse is broken, after which the monster is reintegrated within society. Gawain is the first guest who obeys the Carl's rules, which ultimately frees the Carl from his vow to kill all of his guests (whether Lord or commoner) who do not obey his orders:

130 According to Taylor, "Gawain cannot overcome his nature". Taylor, "Arthurian Biopolitics: Sovereignty and Ecology in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*," 198.
131 *The Carl of Carlisle,* ll. 463-8.
132 *Ibid.*, ll. 472-74.
133 Brandsen, "*Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*," 302.; Wright, "Churl's Courtesy: *Raul Coilɔear* and its English Analogues," 657.
134 Wright, "Churl's Courtesy: *Raul Coilɔear* and its English Analogues," 657.

"Nowe wulle I forsake my wyckyd lawys;
Ther schall no mo men her be slawe, iwys,
As ferthforthe as I may.
Gawen, for the love of the
Al schal be welcome to me
That comythe here by this way".[135]

Gawain's obedience breaks the curse that the Carl was under. The Carl then undergoes a spiritual transformation and leaves his violent nature behind. Furthermore, he promises that everyone who comes to his castle will be welcomed. This promise proves that the Carl believes that courtesy is preferred over violence: he is not forced to punish any guests that do not obey him, and he freely decides that he wants to welcome his guests instead of treating them in a violent way. However, even though he is released from his monstrous behaviour, his physical appearance does not change. According to Lindsay, the "absence of a physical change suggests that what has separated the Carl from Arthurian chivalry is not enchantment, his physical appearance, or his social class, but his exercise of excessive, monstrous violence against his guests".[136] However, the end of the narrative does not seem to entirely support this reading.

After the curse has been broken, the Carl invites King Arthur to come over to dine the next day. When the king arrives, a royal meeting is held; there is music, food, and the hall is richly decorated. The description of the feast puts great emphasis on the decorations of the hall and other aspects that prove that the Carl is an extremely wealthy commoner.[137] Furthermore, the king tells the Carl that he has never seen any greater courtesy and that he has never had such a good dinner in his entire life. The next morning, he decides to make the Carl one of his knights. Lindsay argues that in order for the Carl to ally himself with Arthur, "the carl need not to be noble or even human; he simply must only abandon his violent practices".[138] However, from the lengthy description of the Carl's lifestyle, it seems that Arthur's decision is based upon the Carl's possessions and wealth, rather than on his changed behaviour. Furthermore, through making him a member of the Round Table, Arthur also owns the Carl's lands

[135] *The Carl of Carlisle*, ll. 541-6.
[136] Lindsay, "The Courteous Monster: Chivalry, Violence, and Social Control in *The Carl of Carlisle*," 402.
[137] 23 lines are devoted to a detailed description of the feast and the decorations of the hall. The description contains detailed information about the music, the decoration of the hall, the food that was served and the tableware. *The Carl of Carlisle*, ll. 595-618.
[138] Lindsay, "The Courteous Monster: Chivalry, Violence, and Social Control in *The Carl of Carlisle*," 417.

and extends his own realm.[139] This act then suggests that while violence might have been the factor that separated the Carl from the Arthurian Court, it certainly is not the main factor that makes Arthur decides to make the Carl a member of the Round Table. After all, the Arthurian Court already has (had) members that engage in violent behaviour to prove their honour; like Kay and Ironside.

2.4 What does the monstrous body of the Carl of Carlisle symbolise?

Throughout the narrative it becomes clear that the question revolves around what it means to be courteous. As this chapter has shown, the Carl of Carlisle helps the knights to reevaluate their type of courtesy.

The knights of Arthur and the Carl have different views of courtesy; the Carl of Carlisle values a kind of courtesy based on obedience, while Arthur's court seems to value a kind of courtesy based on wealth and lineage. For instance, the Carl's violent and threatening appearance leads the knights to think that the Carl does not know how to behave in a courteous way. Their emphasis on a noble appearance indicates that the knights approach the Carl's court with an idea of virtue based on aristocratic values. Yet as discussed above, these values are ultimately challenged by the narrative when the Carl's behaviour is depicted as more courteous than that of the knights. This disconnect between the Carl's appearance and his courteous behaviour presents a challenge to the idea of aristocracy founded on inherent qualities like looks. Given Cohen's argument that the monster always signifies something other than itself and is a displacement of anxieties that originate within a culture, the Carl here can be said to reflect broader fifteenth century anxieties about an idea of aristocracy founded on appearance and aristocratic status alone.

Furthermore, the Carl challenges the knights to reevaluate their view that courtesy belongs to the aristocratic classes alone. For instance, Baldwin and Kay do not accept the Carl's courtesy; they are convinced that they are superior because they belong to a higher social class. The Carl tries to teach them that one can be courteous without being a member of the aristocratic class. Furthermore, he emphasises a type of courtesy that is based upon obedience, mutual respect and kindness. Kay and Baldwin do not pass the tests because they act too entitled and this is not tolerated by the Carl.

[139] Taylor, "Arthurian Biopolitics: Sovereignty and Ecology in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*," 183.

Gawain on the other hand, shows the right courteous behaviour in the eyes of the Carl because he obeys his host. Gawain thus seems to learn a valuable lesson from the outsider, because he is willing to see past his monstrous body and his social class status. The fact that the commoner seems to function as an example of courteous behaviour then suggests that courteous behaviour is not related to social class.

Even though Gawain seems to learn from the outsider, it becomes clear that Arthur's court as a collective still views nobility as fundamentally tied to wealth and a person's aristocratic social status. After the transformation of the Carl of Carlisle, Arthur shows up at the Carl's court and is impressed by the Carl's wealth and his courtesy. Because of the Carl's wealth and courtesy, Arthur decides to make him a member of the Round Table. While inviting the Carl to join the Round Table may seem like a generous act, Arthur actually gains through it; by accepting the Carl as a member of the court, Arthur gains power over the lands of the Carl and expands his realm. The acceptance of the Carl as a member of the Round Table, then, may not be a result of the monster's spiritual transformation. Instead, his decision seems to have been primarily motivated by a desire for power and other materialistic reasons. The reasons behind Arthur's decision then indicate that the Round Table as a collective has not learned anything from the monster and maintains a type of courtesy that is based upon wealth and status.

The monstrous body of the Carl does not undergo erasure because he physically remains a giant. Keeping up with Oswald's argument that monstrosity is a primarily visible category, the Carl remains a monster. He only undergoes a spiritual transformation and so his body does not reflect his new identity. The untransformed body of the Carl of Carlisle also functions as a trace of his monstrosity. His body will always serve as a reminder of his violent behaviour. Moreover, the untransformed body of the Carl would indicate that his violent appearance is not as threatening to the Arthurian Court. After all, his body was not threatening enough for it to undergo erasure. The resistance of erasure all the more suggests that the Round Table is familiar with violent behaviour and chooses to accept it.

In conclusion, the monstrous body of the Carl challenges a type of courtesy based solely on wealth and status. The Arthurian Court does not seem to have learned from the outsider because they accept him as a member of the Round Table for all the wrong reasons. They accept him mainly for his wealth, and not for his changed behaviour or his different type of courtesy that is focused upon mutual respect and

kindness. The trace of his monstrosity marks the persisting concern around the type of courtesy that is used by the Arthurian Court. Yet the threatening body of the Carl does not seem to have caused any anxieties because he only underwent a spiritual transformation. This absence of erasure suggests that the members of the Round Table, and the audiences, were all too familiar with violence. The acceptance of his violent body can be interpreted as a critique on the aristocratic classes in the fifteenth century border regions and an urge for them to reevaluate their codes of courtesy.

3. DAME RAGNELLE

The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle starts off with a land dispute between King Arthur and a mysterious figure named Gromer Somer Joure. Gromer accuses the king of unrightfully giving away his lands to Gawain and therefore Gromer threatens to kill Arthur. Instead of killing him, Gromer challenges King Arthur to find the answer to the question what women desire most. On his quest, Arthur encounters an old and ugly lady who tells him that she has the answer to the question, but in return for the answer, she wants to marry Sir Gawain. Gawain decides to marry the old hag, and Arthur's life is saved. Dame Ragnell then asks Gawain if he wants her ugly by day and beautiful by night or vice versa. Gawain decides to leave the decision up to her, and, when she hears this, she transforms into the most beautiful lady of the court. They have a happy marriage for five years, at which point Ragnell dies. Gawain marries many other women, but never stops mourning her. There are two versions of *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* that survive. The first version survives in Bodleian MS 11951 and has been dated to the mid-fifteenth century.[140] The B version can be found in the Percy Folio MS which was produced in the seventeenth century.

Various scholars have focused on the loathly lady motive and have drawn comparisons between this narrative and other texts, such as Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and Gower's *Tale of Florent*.[141] This analysis departs from existing approaches to the text by focussing primarily on what the monstrous body of Dame Ragnelle signifies. Donnelly has interpreted Dame Ragnelle (and Gawain) as representing "the true essence of nobility".[142] However, recent scholarship has proven that the character of Dame Ragnelle is more complex than Donnelly's interpretation suggests. For instance, Jean E. Jost argues that Dame Ragnelle still remains an Outsider after her physical transformation, because the members of the Arthurian Court cannot

[140] Hahn, "Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales," introduction to *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle.*

[141] Sheryl L. Forste-Grupp, "A Woman Circumvents the Laws of Primogeniture in *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell,*", *Studies in Philology* 99.2 (2002): 113-4.; Susan Carter, "Trying Sir Gawain: The shape-shifting desire of Ragnelle and Bertilak," *Reinardus. Yearbook of the International Reynard Society* 18.1 (2005): 39.; David Moses, "What a Boar! Animal Digression and Salvation in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*," *The Downside Review* 130 (2012): 29.

[142] Donnelly, "Aristocratic veneer and the substance of verbal bonds in *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* and *Gamelyn*," 333.

forget her monstrous body.[143] Furthermore, most recently, David Moses has focused on the character of Dame Ragnelle and paid particular attention to her animal side. He argues that Dame Ragnelle's monstrosity plays an important role in the narrative that needs to be understood in order to interpret the meaning of the text.[144]

This analysis will focus on Dame Ragnelle as a monstrous outsider and how her monstrous body projects major concerns about whether beauty and nobility go hand in hand. Previous readings came up with contrasting interpretations of her character, which proves that her character is complex. This chapter will provide an analysis of the various sides of her complex hybrid and dualistic nature by focusing on her noble side as well as her animalistic side. This way it will become clear how Dame Ragnelle helps the knights of the Round Table to reflect on the question of what it means to be noble on the mid-fifteenth century Anglo-Scottish border region.

3.1 The monster: Dame Ragnell

The first encounter with the monster, Dame Ragnelle, takes place in Inglewood forest. Arthur goes to the forest in order to find the answer to the question of what women desire most, and then meets the monster:

> Kyng Arthoure rode forthe on the other day
> Into Yngleswod as hys gate laye,
> And ther he mett with a Lady.
> She was as ungoodly a creature
> As evere man sawe, withoute mesure.
> Kyng Arthure mervaylyd securly.[145]

Dame Ragnell is first referred to with the word "lady" and she is described as an "ungoodly a creature as evere man sawe, withoute mesure".[146] The use of two different ways to refer to Dame Ragnelle causes ambiguity, as it is hard to establish if Arthur encounters a lady (so a human) or in fact a creature which can be anything that the

[143] J. E. Jost, "Margins in Middle English Romance: Culture and Characterization in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*," in *Meeting the foreign in the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Classen (New York: Routledge, 2002), 139.
[144] Moses, "What a Boar! Animal Digression and Salvation in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*," 29.
[145] *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, ll. 225-30. All Quotations of *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* are from *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. T. G. Hahn, (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 1995).
[146] *Ibid.*, l. 227; l. 228.

reader imagines her to be. By leaving out details of her descriptions at the first moment of their encounter, the narrative marginalises her, and classifies her as the 'Other'.

Then the narrative provides a detailed description of Dame Ragnelle's monstrous appearance. Many of her physical features are described as ugly: i.e. she has a red face, yellow teeth, a big mouth, big breasts, and wide shoulders.[147] Furthermore, she is not only ugly; her body is described as that of a human with body parts like those of a boar. For example, she has two tusks on each side of her mouth:

> She was so fowlle and horyble.
> She had two tethe on every syde
> As borys tuskes, I wolle nott hyde,
> Of lengthe a large handfulle.
> The one tusk went up and the other doun.
> A mowthe fulle wyde and fowlle igrown,
> With grey herys many on.[148]

So she has a dualistic nature: that of a boar and a human.[149] In other words, she is a hybrid monster. According to Oswald, the hybrid monster "shows the instability of categories and organizational principles that drive human societies".[150] As Moses argues, the animal imagery in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* gives information about the nature of the monster.[151] He argues that "the text's literal sense provides the instantly recognisable human type whose correlative is the pig and its lust".[152] Moses draws analogies with Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *The Parson's Tale* which also use pig imagery to refer to the 'animal lust' in humans.[153] So Dame Ragnelle's monstrosity seems to provide commentary on human lust in Arthurian society.

Although Dame Ragnelle behaves like a civilised person most of the time, her behaviour is quite animalistic. Dame Ragnelle is portrayed as civilised in different

147 *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, ll. 231-45. These features are all opposite of the ideal beauty features as described in for instance Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars Versificatoria*.
148 *Ibid.*, ll. 547-53.
149 This is not the only description of her which contains a boar feature: i.e. *ibid.*, l. 597: "So fowlle a sowe sawe nevere man."; l. 235: "Her tethe hyng overe her lyppes."
150 Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, 6.
151 Moses, "What a Boar! Animal Digression and Salvation in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*," 35.
152 *Ibid*., 35.
153 Moses quotes *TWP* and makes the following observation: "Jankyn, lecturing Alison, declares that '"A fair womman, but she be chaast also, Is lyke a gold ryng in a sowes nose"' (*WBP* 784-5)". *Ibid*., 35.

ways. For instance, she rides a beautiful horse and wears expensive clothes which would suggest that she is a noblewoman. However, her uncivilised behaviour is described in great detail. This behaviour emphasises her monstrosity that is linked to that of a boar. For instance, during the dinner of their wedding, she eats as much as six people would eat, and she uses her nails to break the bread in pieces.[154] Furthermore, while the other guests were already finished, she kept eating until the tablecloth was taken away by the servants. Her gluttonous and animalistic behaviour does not match the standards of the people of the Arthurian Court.

Moreover, Susan Carter suggests that by behaving this way, Dame Ragnelle is "making the most of a bad situation".[155] According to Carter, Dame Ragnelle could have tried to act more courteously during the wedding dinner in order to live up to the standards of the Arthurian Court, but instead she acts like a beast in order to humiliate Gawain.[156] However, one could argue that Dame Ragnelle's animalistic behaviour creates a divide between her and the Arthurian Court. The disapproval of her behaviour during the dinner portrays the Arthurian Court as superficial, because they judge the lady on her looks and deviant behaviour. Dame Ragnelle's animalistic behaviour highlights her monstrous nature, which is in opposition with the etiquette of the members of the Round Table. As Jost argues, her appearance and behaviour "place the lady on the aesthetic and hence social margins".[157]

It is difficult to determine to which social class the monster belongs because of various ambiguities in her character. Though her monstrous body and animalistic behaviour classify her as an outsider, she seems to be a member of the nobility class. The ugliness of her body and her animalistic behaviour place her on the margins. However, at the same time, she seems to be wealthy. For instance, she rides a beautiful horse that is richly draped and adorned with precious stones.[158] Furthermore, Donnelly has suggested that she is in fact a noblewoman. She introduces herself to King Arthur as

[154] *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, ll. 604-9.
[155] Carter, "Trying Sir Gawain: The shape-shifting desire of Ragnelle and Bertilak," 39.
[156] Carter argues that her behaviour is contrasted with that of the Chaucer's prioress who portrays "well-preformed femininity in her fastidious care avoidance of morsels falling from her lips, drops on her breast, or grease rings in her drink". *Ibid*., 39
[157] Jost, "Margins in Middle English Romance: Culture and Characterization in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*," 138.
[158] *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, ll. 246-8.

a ‘dame’, a title which is equal to that of a lady.[159] It becomes clear that Dame Ragnelle is an outsider, or a marginalised character, because of her physical appearance and her behaviour. However, at the same time she also is a noblewoman who keep her vows, which will be further explored in the next section.

3.2 Dame Ragnell vs. Arthur and the other members of the Round Table[160]

Moses has focused specifically on comparing Gawain and Dame Ragnelle to one another. He believes that Gawain is defined against Dame Ragnelle who represents “the uncourtly ‘Other’”.[161] He argues that Dame Ragnelle possesses all kinds of features that are in contrast with the knight’s features. However, Dame Ragnelle’s character is also contrasted with other members of the Arthurian Court. Analysing these contrasts will provide more insight into her monstrous nature as well.

Dame Ragnelle is an ugly woman, which in the medieval period would have been interpreted as her also being foul from the inside. However, throughout the narrative there are signs that she is not as foul from the inside as her physical appearance might suggest. When the king tells her that he is not sure whether Gawain will marry her and that he would first have to ask him in person, Dame Ragnelle says “Thoughe I be foulle, yett am I gaye; [t]hourghe me thy lyfe save he maye [o]r sewer thy dethe to have”.[162] She tries to convince the king that he should trust her, even though she is an ugly and old woman. The king is not convinced and says that it makes him sad that he should force Gawain to marry such a foul woman:

> “Nowe woo is me
> That I shold cause Gawen to wed the,
> For he wol be lothe to saye naye.
> So foulle a Lady as ye ar nowe one
> Sawe I nevere in my lyfe on ground gone;
> I nott whate I do may”.[163]

[159] Donnelly, “Aristocratic veneer and the substance of verbal bonds in *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* and *Gamelyn*,” 328.
[160] Jennifer E. Jansen “Shame and Honour in Late Medieval English Literature: An analysis of two narratives from the Sir Gawain Cycle: The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle and The Avowing of Arthur.” Bachelor's thesis, University of Utrecht, (2017). I have analysed Dame Ragnelle’s behaviour in my previous work.
[161] Moses, “What a Boar! Animal Digression and Salvation in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*,” 27.
[162] *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, ll. 300-2.
[163] *Ibid.*, ll. 303-8.

It becomes clear that King Arthur judges her on her foulness and refuses to see who she is inside. This is also apparent when the king asks her if he can tell him her name, and Dame Ragnelle says: "Syr Kyng, I highte Dame Ragnelle, truly, [t]hat nevere yett begylyd man".[164] She says that she has never deceived anyone, but the king simply ignores her, which implies that he is superficial and judges people on base of social class and appearance, rather than actions.

Dame Ragnelle is portrayed as chivalrous, because she keeps her vows. According to Donnelly, "a person's word was his contract".[165] She argues that in the narrative of *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, keeping one's word is the "sole gauge of nobility".[166] For instance, Dame Ragnelle tells King Arthur that she wants to marry Gawain and in return she will give him the answer to the question of what women desire most. She keeps her vow because when the king tells her that Gawain will marry her, she gives Arthur the answer to the question which saves his life. A contrast is drawn between the king and Dame Ragnelle here; the king swore an oath with Sir Gromer Jour to keep their encounter a secret, however, Arthur broke this oath by telling Gawain about the encounter, because he was afraid to lose his life.[167] So Dame Ragnelle is presented as more chivalrous than the king, because she keeps her vows and the king does not. The episode suggests that physical appearances can be deceiving.

In the court scene, the Arthurian Court is represented as superficial because they judge Dame Ragnelle by her monstrous appearance. As Donnelly argues, the Arthurian Court is characterised by their "aristocratic veneer".[168] Their reputation is all that matters to them and the most important objective for them is to uphold this reputation. When Dame Ragnell enters the Court, she is shamed by all of the members, instead of being welcomed courteously. Nevertheless, Dame Ragnelle does not give into the court's harsh and superficial judgement. While entering the court on horseback with King Arthur, she starts riding next to him, which could symbolically mean that she sees

164 *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, ll. 319-20.
165 Donnelly, "Aristocratic veneer and the substance of verbal bonds in *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* and *Gamelyn*," 324.
166 *Ibid*., 324.
167 Donnelly argues that Arthur does not break his verbal bond by telling Gawain about his encounter in confidence. *Ibid*., 327.
168 *Ibid*., 343.

herself as equal to the King.[169] As Jost mentions, the king is so "appearance-conscious" that he gets embarrassed.[170] However, Ragnelle simply ignores the king's disapproval and keeps riding next to him "[f]or no man wold she spare, securely".[171]

Moreover, the members of the Arthurian Court do not see her as an equal. In fact, the court has never seen such a foul creature which makes them wonder where she came from:

> Alle the contraye had wonder greatt
> Fro whens she com, that foule unswete;
> They sawe nevere of so fowlle a thyng. (ll. 521-4)

This passage suggests that the Arthurian Court consists only out of people that look beautiful. The court presents themselves as a group of perfect members based on their physical appearance. This is confirmed by all the ladies in the court lamenting Gawain for having have to marry such an ugly hag: "The daye was comyn the daye shold be; [t]herof the ladyes had greatt pitey".[172] Because of her physical appearance, the ladies believe that the two are not a good match. The entire court is saddened because Gawain, the most perfect knight of all the court, has to marry this ugly lady. So based on her physical appearance, Dame Ragnelle is seen as unworthy of being Gawain's wife.

Another clear contrast is drawn between Dame Ragnell and Queen Guinevere. As previously mentioned, the king is embarrassed of the old lady's physical appearance. Guinevere even advises Dame Ragnelle to have the wedding take place as early and as secretly as possible. She explains to Dame Ragnelle that it would be better for her to get married early to protect her honour: "[b]utt me wold thynk more honour [a]nd your worshypp moste", which implies that her physical appearance is not up to the standards of the Arthurian Court.[173] Dame Ragnell refuses the idea of a private wedding, because she does not want to adapt to the court's superficial standards that are based on physical appearances and status. Jost even argues that by refusing a private marriage she confirms her "social non-conformity with a bit more aggressive rebellion".[174] She tells

[169] *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, l. 518.
[170] Jost, "Margins in Middle English Romance: Culture and Characterization in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*," 137.
[171] *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, l. 519.
[172] *Ibid*., ll. 566-7.
[173] *Ibid*., ll. 582-3.
[174] Jost, "Margins in Middle English Romance: Culture and Characterization in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*," 138.

Guinevere that marrying in public will not affect her honour. Dame Ragnelle's decision to marry in public shows that both women have different views of what is honourable and what is not. Guinevere's view of honour is superficial, which is contrasted with that of Dame Ragnell, whose honour is not related to physical appearance, but to inner qualities, such as keeping her oath.

3.3 Gawain and Dame Ragnelle's marriage

Gawain proves to be the most honourable knight of the Arthurian Court because he marries the ugly hag and saves his uncle's life. As previously mentioned, Arthur was not allowed to tell about his meeting with Gromer in the forest, however, he ends up telling Gawain. Gawain reassures Arthur that he will keep his secret because he would rather die than betray his uncle. He even helps his uncle to find the answer to the question, which proves his loyalty towards his King. As Sheryl L. Forste-Grupp also notes, "[h]is role in this episode demonstrates Arthur's absolute trust in him and his own loyal character.[175] Secondly, Gawain offers himself up to save the life of his uncle by marrying the ugly hag:

> "I shalle wed her and wed her agayn,
> Thowghe she were a fend;
> Thowghe she were as foulle as Belsabub,
> Her shalle I wed, by the Rood,
> Or elles were nott I your frende.
> For ye ar my Kyng with honour
> And have worshypt me in many a stowre;
> Therfor shalle I nott lett." (ll. 343-50)

As Donnelly notes, "[s]ince Arthur is both Gawain's lord and revered uncle, society, in effect, sanctions his role as marriage broker".[176] So in other words, he is forced to say yes to his uncle's request that he marry the old hag. However, one might add that in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Gawain volunteers to take the challenge and takes the place of his uncle.[177] This parallel suggests that he values the life of his king and uncle. In both situations, Gawain seems to feel obligated to save his uncle's life, and more importantly, to keep the reputation of the Arthurian Court high.

175 Forste-Grupp, "A Woman Circumvents the Laws of Primogeniture in *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell*," 113-4.
176 Donnelly, "Aristocratic veneer and the substance of verbal bonds in *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* and *Gamelyn*," 330.
177 "*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. and trans. Treharne, ll. 359-61.

When Dame Ragnelle and Gawain are together for the first time after their wedding, Gawain is also tested individually on his sexuality. After they are married, Dame Ragnelle demands Gawain to become intimate with her: "[s]hewe me your cortesy in bed".[178] It is important to note that there is a significant difference between attitudes towards intercourse in the medieval period and modern day. Ruth Mazo Karras states that intercourse in the medieval period was a transitive act, in the sense that something was done to someone else.[179] She argues that "the line between active and passive partner in the Middle Ages was very sharp, and closely related to gender roles.[180] Dame Ragnelle can thus be said to take Gawain's masculinity away for a moment as she takes control of the situation by asking him to have sex with her. There is some irony in this, because Gawain has a reputation of being a ladies' man, and sometimes even a rapist, in the Arthurian tradition.[181] Moreover, as Moses argues, this bedroom scene seems to differ significantly from those in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where lengthy conversations take place between Gawain and the lady.[182]

Nevertheless, Gawain seems to be the only person who does not judge Dame Ragnelle by her monstrous appearance, and he is rewarded for this behaviour at the end of the narrative. When they are married, Dame Ragnelle tells him that he should at least kiss her. Even though he might have been hesitant towards kissing the old hag, he still tells her the following: "I wolle do more [t]hen for to kysse, and God before!".[183] It is important to acknowledge that scholars have come up with other interpretations of Gawain's courteous behaviour during the wedding night. Carter, Moses, and Donnelly have argued that the oath that Gawain makes with Arthur to marry the old lady is the

178 *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, l. 630.
179 Karras, Ruth Mazo. *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 27.
180 *Ibid*., 27.
181 Joseph Turner argues that the medieval audience interpreted the rapist knight in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* to be Gawain, which suggests that while he was mostly depicted as a courteous knight in the English tradition, he was also associated with rape. J. Turner, "Lady Bertilak and the Rhetoric of Women in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," in *Later Middle English Literature, Materiality, and Culture: Essays in Honor of James*, eds. *M. Dean*, B. Castle and E. Kelemen (Lanham: University of Delaware Press, 2018), 63.
182 Moses, "What a Boar! Animal Digression and Salvation in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*," 30-1.
183 *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, ll. 638-9.

primary reason for Gawain's decision to physically please the monster.[184] As Donnelly argues, "Gawain's actions are determined by the promise that he made to his king, and Ragnelle uses his knowledge, in the privacy of the bedchamber, when she asks him 'for Arthours sake kysse me'."[185] This could explain Gawain's decision to do more than just kiss the monster with her tusks hanging out of her wide mouth.

Even though Gawain might have consumed the marriage with the monster for the sole sake of keeping his promise, he is rewarded for his honourable action. After having performed his deed, he turns around and sees that Dame Ragnelle has changed into a beautiful woman. She then asks him if he wants to have her ugly at night and beautiful by day or the other way around. Gawain tells her that he leaves the decision up to her. By putting the decision into her hands, Gawain has given her sovereignty, which according to Dame Ragnell is what women desire most. Gawain giving Dame Ragnelle sovereignty breaks the curse that Dame Ragnelle's stepmother had put on her, and she then transforms into the most beautiful woman of the court. So it is through his courteous behaviour to leave the decision to the monster that the curse is lifted. The monster then teaches the audience that virtue and honourable behaviour are more important than beauty and noble birth, and that beauty does not equal inner virtue.

After her transformation has taken place, Dame Ragnelle seems to be fully accepted as a member of the Arthurian Court. This change characterises the Round table as superficial. When she has transformed into a beautiful lady, King Arthur tells the other members of the court with pride how Dame Ragnell has saved his life.[186] By talking about Dame Ragnelle in a positive light, King Arthur seems to fully accept the beautiful lady as an official member of the Round Table. Guinevere also accepts Dame Ragnelle now that she meets the superficial standard of beauty:

> "She is the fayrest nowe in this halle,
> I swere by Seynt John!
> My love, Lady, ye shalle have evere
> For that ye savid my Lord Arthoure,
> As I am a gentilwoman."

[184] Carter, "Trying Sir Gawain: The shape-shifting desire of Ragnelle and Bertilak," 43.; Donnelly, "Aristocratic veneer and the substance of verbal bonds in *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* and *Gamelyn*," 332.; Moses, "What a Boar! Animal Digression and Salvation in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*," 38-9.
[185] Donnelly, "Aristocratic veneer and the substance of verbal bonds in *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* and *Gamelyn*," 332.
[186] *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, ll. 760-3.

So King Arthur and Queen Guinevere only validate her heroic action after she has transformed into a beautiful lady. This validation highlights the hypocrisy and superficiality of the Arthurian Court, for whom status and beauty remain more important than honourable behaviour such as keeping one's vows.

Even once Dame Ragnelle seems to be accepted by the members of the Round Table, she does not seem to get rid of her monstrous identity. According to Oswald's theory, the transformations of monsters are doomed to be incomplete and the monster always leaves a trace.[187] As Jost argues, members of court still view Dame Ragnelle as an 'Other' because "her grotesque body resists erasure".[188] The court seems to have accepted Dame Ragnelle now that she is a beautiful lady. However, her body will always serve as a reminder of her monstrosity. This can also be concluded from her early death; Dame Ragnelle only lives for five years. Her death then functions as the erasure of her monstrosity that is still present in the minds of the members of the Arthurian Court and the medieval audiences.

Even though her body is not threatening to most of the members of the Arthurian Court, Dame Ragnelle presents a great danger to Gawain. As previously mentioned, Dame Ragnelle seems to offer an individual challenge to Gawain by testing him on his sexuality in the bedroom scene after the wedding night. Dame Ragnelle and Gawain refuse to sleep after the transformation has taken place because they "made joye oute of mynde".[189] Although this sexual activity would not have been considered sinful behaviour because they are married, they seem to engage in lecherous behaviour. For instance, throughout the rest of their marriage "as a coward he lay by her bothe day and nyghte".[190] Furthermore, Gawain does not joust as much anymore, because he stays at home with his wife to have intercourse. So in other words, he seems to be consumed with excessive sexual desire. The transformation of the monster seems to have been incomplete because she remains a "sexual predator", which makes Gawain give in to his sin of lust.[191] Furthermore, now that she is not a physical monster anymore, she does not

[187] Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, 16.
[188] Jost, "Margins in Middle English Romance: Culture and Characterization in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*," 139.
[189] *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, l. 706
[190] *Ibid.*, l. 808.
[191] Moses, "What a Boar! Animal Digression and Salvation in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*," 40.

have to repress her lecherous nature, and there is space for her monstrous behaviour to take over without anybody noticing. This way her monstrosity has infiltered the Arthurian Court.

3.4 What does Dame Ragnelle signify?

Dame Ragnelle challenges the Round Table's conviction that outward appearances reflect the extent of one's value. Through her combination of virtuous behaviour and ugly and monstrous exterior, she prompts the knights to reflect on their belief that honour and outward appearances are connected.

Dame Ragnelle and the knights of the Round Table have different beliefs and values with respect to what it means to be noble. The Arthurian Court seems to live by a type of nobility that is based solely on status and physical appearances, while Dame Ragnelle values a type of nobility that is based on honour and virtue. Her hybrid nature (a human with the physical features of a boar) classifies Dame Ragnelle as a monster. The members of the Round Table do not accept her because her physical appearance does not meet the standards of the Arthurian Court. This casts the Arthurian Court as superficial, because their honour seems to be based on physical appearances. However, even though she is a monster, she proves to be more honourable in her actions than most of the members of the Round Table because she keeps her vows. For instance, she proves to Guinevere that physical appearances do not reflect honour; even though she is ugly, she saves Arthur's life by keeping her vow and by giving him the answer to the question of what women desire most. Dame Ragnelle, then, challenges the knights of the Round Table to reevaluate their views of honour by demonstrating that virtuous behaviour, rather than physical beauty, is the true mark of honour.

Gawain is the only member of the Arthurian Court who is honourable enough to overlook Dame Ragnelle's ugly appearance and her animalistic behaviour to marry her. He keeps the vow that he made with Arthur to marry Dame Ragnelle and he also consummates the marriage. Gawain does not break his vows unlike the other members of the Round Table, and he does not judge the outsider by her appearance like the rest of the court. These qualities cast Gawain as a knight who values honour and virtue, rather than wealth and status.

Yet as the discussion above has shown, the Arthurian Court, as a whole, does not learn from the monster. For instance, it is only after her transformation into the most

beautiful woman that Dame Ragnelle is fully accepted by the Arthurian Court. This indicates that even at the end of the narrative, the Arthurian Court is still focused on a type of nobility that is based upon physical appearances and status, rather than virtue. Apart from Gawain, the Arthurian Court learns little from the outsider, and Arthur's knights continue to live by a type of nobility that is based upon wealth and status.

However, this reading suggests that Dame Ragnelle's monstrosity is more complex. Her hybrid nature seems to comment on the concern of excessive sexuality as well. This side of Dame Ragnelle's character plays an important part after her transformation too. Dame Ragnelle is accepted as a member of the Round Table, because her new body does not seem dangerous anymore. Nevertheless, as Jost argues, nobody of the court could forget her monstrous appearance.[192] So her new body functions as a reminder of the boar-human hybrid body that preceded it. Furthermore, as Oswald argues, in Middle English literature bodies fail to be a "primary indicator of identity".[193] Dame Ragnelle's physical boar elements might be erased by means of a physical transformation, but the erasure of these physical elements does not mean that she is not a monster anymore.

One could argue that Gawain is affected by Dame Ragnelle's monstrosity that has now become invisible as a result of her transformation. As discussed above, at the end of the narrative Gawain gives in to his sin of lust; he only spends time with his wife having intercourse and does not take part in any of his chivalric activities like jousting anymore. Their sexual relationship seems excessive and prevents him from his knightly duties as a member of the Round Table. This monstrous behaviour goes unnoticed because her boarish nature is only expressed in the private space of the bedroom. So it could be argued that Dame Ragnelle remains dangerous; the boarish nature of Dame Ragnelle is still part of her new identity, and affects Gawain to commit the sin of lechery.

In conclusion, Dame Ragnelle challenges the Arthurian Court as a collective to change their superficial belief that physical appearances are a primary indicator of the social class of an individual. The Round Table has failed to learn from the monster because they do not accept Dame Ragnelle for her honourable behaviour, instead they

192 Jost, "Margins in Middle English Romance: Culture and Characterization in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*," 139.
193 Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, 23.

only accept her after her physical transformation, on the basis of her physical beauty. Their decision to accept her only after her physical transformation indicates that they have not changed their beliefs and values. Although she transforms into the most beautiful lady of the Round Table, at the end of the narrative, her body still poses problems to the members of the Arthurian Court who cannot forget her previous monstrous body. Lastly, the erasure of the boar elements of her monstrous body suggests that lust and excessive sexuality were major concerns among the aristocratic classes during the fifteenth century.

4. The Ghost of Guinevere's Mother

The Awntyrs off Arthure survives in four manuscripts. The narrative used for this analysis can be found in Oxford MS Douce 324 (Bodleian MS 21898), and has been dated to the third quarter of the fifteenth century.[194] Much of the scholarship on this narrative focuses on the question of whether the narrative should be considered as a whole or as two separate parts.[195] Those who split the narrative in half do so on the basis that the two halves diverge significantly from each other. [196] At present, most scholars follow Anthony C. Spearing's theory which suggests that part A and B depend on one another as a diptych.[197] Part A is about Guinevere and Gawain meeting the ghost of Guinevere's mother. The mother warns her daughter not to commit adultery and other sins, and she warns Gawain to leave his prideful behaviour. The behaviours she warns against are notably among the flaws that ultimately lead to the downfall of the Round Table. Also, at the end of Part A, she gives a prophecy about the downfall of the Round Table. This prophecy would probably have been familiar to audiences of *Alliterative Morte Arthure* and earlier Arthurian narratives based upon Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*.[198] Part B is about a battle between Gawain and the Scottish knight Sir Galeron. Sir Galeron visits Arthur's court with his lady to reclaim the lands that he had lost to Sir Gawain. The two knights then fight a long and violent battle that nearly results in both of their deaths.

In keeping with current scholarship, this chapter will treat *The Awyntyrs off Arthure* as one work. However, since the focus here is on monsters and what they signify, part A of *The Awntyrs off Arthure* will be the main focus of this reading, because this part of the narrative features the ghost of Guinevere's mother. Some

194 Hahn, "Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales," introduction to *The Awntyrs off Arthure.*
195 For a summary of this debate, see M. Robson, "Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *Awntyrs off Arthure*," in *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, eds. A. Putter and J. Gilbert. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 219-21.
196 Ralph Hanna, "*The Awntyrs Off Arthure* an Interpretation." *Modern Language Quarterly* 31.3 (1970): 277.
197 A. C. Spearing, "The Awntyrs off Arthure," in *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*, eds. B. S. Levy and P. E. Szarmach (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1981), 183-202.
198 Taylor observes that this text is a companion text to *The Awntyrs off Arthure* in the Thornton MS. Taylor, "Arthurian Biopolitics: Sovereignty and Ecology in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*." 198.

reference will be made to part B as well. As Spearing argues, the poem works as a diptych, and so the second part offers interesting contrasts and complements that contribute to a better and more complete understanding of the first part.[199] Part B be will be used to analyse Gawain's interpretation of the ghost's message.

The monster of *The Awntyrs off Arthure* has been the topic of various scholarly papers. This analysis will specifically focus on two points. Firstly, this analysis will discuss the ghost's function as a monster that comments on the concern of what it meant to be noble in the mid-fifteenth century Anglo-Scottish border region. Secondly, this reading will also discuss the trace, because the trace has not yet been part of the scholarly discussions that analyse the monstrous body of the ghost of Guinevere's mother.

4.1 The monster: the ghost of Guinevere's mother

The ghost of Guinevere's mother first appears when the knights and Guinevere are hunting in Inglewood forest at 'Turne Wathelan'. At one point Gawain and Guinevere are cut off from the group. They decide to take some rest. Then, all of a sudden, it becomes very dark. The weather becomes terrible and a creature appears from the lake "in the lyknes of Lucyfere, laytheste in Helle".[200] The timing and place are important factors to discuss in order to understand the appearance of the monster. Not only do they find themselves in Inglewood forest, a liminal space, the narrative specifically mentions Tarn Wadling. Tarn Wadling used to be a small lake (now drained) near Carlisle and is mentioned in other Arthurian narratives as well. As Ralph Hanna argues, the tarn should be understood as a place "with spectral and magical connotations".[201] In other narratives where this place is used as a setting spiritual creatures appear and the place is considered dangerous. For instance, in *The Avowing of Arthur*, another narrative from the Sir Gawain Cycle, Gawain vows to keep watch at Tarn Wadling throughout

[199] Hanna, "*The Awntyrs off Arthure* an Interpretation," 183–202. Also, Henson notes that: "Despite the ghost's revelation that a life of excess and ostentation can have ramifications, a closer look at the feast [in part B of *The Awntyrs off Arthure*] shows us a court that has not absorbed the message". Chelsea S. Henson, "'Under a holte so hore': Noble Waste in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*." *Arthuriana* 28.4 (2018): 10.
[200] *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, l. 84. All Quotations of *The Awntyrs off Arthure* are from *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. T. G. Hahn, (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 1995).
[201] Hanna, "*The Awntyrs Off Arthure* an Interpretation," 281.

the night.[202] This vow seems to suggest that the tarn is a dangerous place where one would rather not be at night.[203] According to Hanna, the timing of the appearance of the ghost is significant as well. The ghost appears at noon which was considered dangerous because in various traditions demons appear on this part of the day.[204] So, the setting and timing work together to create an atmosphere well-suited to the appearance of a ghost.

The narrative contains a lengthy description of the physical appearance of the ghost of Guinevere's mother. The body of the ghost is dehumanised and causes great fear, which can be drawn from the following passage:

> 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.[205]

The body is described as though it is decaying. Yet it does not seem to consist of anything except bones and clay. [206] As a result of the ghost's dehumanisation, Gawain and Guinevere cannot identify the creature and it is only when Gawain confronts the ghost that he finds that it is the ghost of Guinevere's deceased mother.[207] In keeping with Oswald's theory, the ghost is a "monster of lack"; she is less than a human.[208] Oswald argues that the "monster of lack" could indicate "the vulnerability of the human body."[209] So in this case, the body of the ghost would indicate what happens to the body and soul after death.

[202] *The Avowing off Arthur*, ed. T. G. Hahn. (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 1995), ll. 131-2.
[203] For more examples that prove that the Tarn is a dangerous place where monsters can be found, see Hanna, "*The Awntyrs Off Arthure* an Interpretation," 280-2.
[204] *Ibid*., 287.
[205] *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ll. 105-110
[206] Robson argues that it is in fact the decomposed body of Guinevere, rather than her spirit. Robson, "Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *Awntyrs off Arthure*" 226-8.
[207] Jost, "Margins in Middle English Romance: Culture and Characterization in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*," 130.
[208] Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, 6.
[209] *Ibid*., 6.

Moreover, the ghost is described using bestial imagery which, in several ways, links this spectral figure to decay.[210] This imagery includes the snakes and toads on her body:

> On the chef of the cholle,
> A pade pikes on the 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 all aboute the sides -
> To tell the todes theron my tonge wer full tere.[211]

The snakes and toads have been interpreted in various ways. They have been associated with the *momento mori* tradition, which links the body of the monster to the dissolution of the body and the idea of transience.[212] Toads and snakes are also found in narratives on the 'adulterous mother' type where they symbolise "illicit kisses and illegitimate children".[213] For instance, the adulterous mother in *The Trental of Gregory* is also accompanied by toads and snakes. Lastly, as Helen Phillips argues, these creatures can also "represent the fiends of Hell who, held at bay by baptism, have reclaimed the sinner after death".[214] The bestial imagery of the toads and snakes enhance the message that the monster is trying to convey to her daughter which will be further explained in the next sections.

4.2 Guinevere vs. her mother's ghost

When Gawain confronts the ghost to see what it wants, the ghost specifically asks him to see the queen. The ghost then reveals to them that she is in fact Guinevere's mother, after which the narrative focuses mainly on the conversation between mother and daughter. This section will focus on this conversation, because the ghost's monstrosity is established, in part, through contrast between her and her daughter.

210 Though as opposed to the Carl of Carlisle and Dame Ragnelle, the behaviour of Guinevere's mother is not animalistic.
211 *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ll. 114-21
212 Helen Phillips. "The Ghost's Baptism in 'The Awntyrs off Arthure'," *Medium aevum* 58.1 (1989): 51.; Robson. "Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *Awntyrs off Arthure,"* 227.
213 Helen Phillips. "The Ghost's Baptism in 'The Awntyrs off Arthure'," 227.
214 *Ibid*., 227.

In *The Awntyrs off Arthure,* Guinevere is portrayed as caring solely about wealth, appearance and reputation. At the beginning of the narrative, Guinevere is described as wearing the most expensive clothes:

> In a gleterand gide that glemed full gay -
> With riche ribaynes reversset, ho so right redes,
> Rayled with rybees of riall array;
> Her hode of a hawe huwe, ho 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.[215]

The lengthy description of the rich materials of her clothing characterise her as materialistic. As Chelsea S. Henson notes, this hunt is an "opportunity for display".[216] It is not surprising that Guinevere is characterised like this. After all, the idea that she is materialistic stems from a long tradition. As Hanna argues, "the description of Guinevere's clothing continually suggests the extent of her indifference to the natural and elemental, her bored disinterest in the physical world around her".[217] Other than her raincoat, her clothes do not seem to serve any practical function.[218] In other words, she seems to be more concerned with her physical appearance. The description of the expensive materials of her clothes and the unpracticality of her clothes, suggest that Guinevere mainly cares about status and wealth. The lengthy description of Guinevere's attire stands out significantly against that of her deceased mother. Guinevere is described as perfectly well dressed and wealthy, while the mother's body is described as consisting only of bones and clay.[219]

While Guinevere and her mother's ghost are depicted as having wholly different bodies, their behaviour—at least when Guinevere's mother was alive—is depicted on

[215] *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ll. 15-26.
[216] Henson. "'Under a holte so hore': Noble Waste in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*." 8.
[217] Hanna, "*The Awntyrs Off Arthure* an Interpretation," 284.
[218] *Ibid*., 284.
[219] Robson argues that it is in fact the decomposed body of Guinevere, rather than her spirit. Robson, "Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *Awntyrs off Arthure*" 226-8.

similar terms. As Leah Haught argues, "each is a version of the other".[220] Guinevere's mother once was living a similar life to that of Guinevere's:

> "Quene was I somwile, brighter of browes
> Then Berell or Brangwayn, thes burdes so bolde;
> Of al gamen or gle that on grounde growes
> Gretter then Dame Gaynour, of garson and golde,
> Of palaies, of parkes, of pondes, of plowes,
> Of townes, of toures, of tresour untolde,
> Of castelles, of contreyes, of cragges, of clowes."[221]

She even seems to claim that she was a worse version of her daughter while she was alive. The ghost warns that if Guinevere does not change her behaviour and values she will end up like her mother-like a demon in Hell. The monstrous body of her mother, then, is the physical proof of what awaits Guinevere after death if she does not listen to her mother's message. So even though their bodies are contrasted at this specific moment, they are in fact the same person, but in different periods of their lives.

The ghost of the mother tries to warn her daughter not to repeat her mistakes and commit the same sins as her.[222] The ghost explains to Guinevere that she is in this state because she committed adultery. As a consequence of committing this sin, she is spending her afterlife in Hell. This warning might function as a warning to Guinevere not to have an affair with Lancelot. As the audience would have known, this is Guinevere's fate and it is, in many versions of the Arthurian legend, a key factor in the downfall of the Round Table. Scholars have identified parallels between this warning and the aforementioned *The Trental of Gregory*, which also features the adulterous mother topos.[223] In the *The Trental of Gregory*, the mother of Gregory appears during a mass to ask him for a favour. Like Guinevere's mother, the mother of Gregory was an adulterer as well and so she asks her son to arrange masses to save her soul. After a while, his mother reappears in normal form and thanks her son for his help. However, the appearance of the ghost is slightly different in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, since the

220 Haught. "Ghostly Mothers and Fated Fathers: Gender and Genre in "The Awntyrs off Arthure"," 9.
221 *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ll. 144-50.
222 This is similar to *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*: when she tells Dame Ragnelle that she should be married in private and as early as possible, it becomes clear that Guinevere only cares about her own reputation.
223 Various scholars have recognised this, see for instance Jost, "Margins in Middle English Romance: Culture and Characterization in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*," 286-7.; and see Robson. "Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *Awntyrs off Arthure,"* 227-8.

ghost's warning is about the same sin that the ghost committed. Guinevere's mother is not hoping to help herself; instead her main goal is to warn her daughter not to commit the same sins she had herself committed.

Nevertheless, the warning does not seem to make an impression on Guinevere, because she fails to see a connection between her mother's sins and the way she is living her own life. As Hanna argues, "Guinevere remains entrapped and dazzled by the brilliance of the individual moments of her existence".[224] The monster again explains to her daughter that she once was a beautiful and rich queen herself, and now she is a graceless ghost. Her non-existent body seems to indicate that wealth and materiality are transient. She then says: "Thus am I lyke to Lucefere: takis witnes by mee!".[225] To catch her daughter's attention, the ghost even gives a description of her life in Hell:

> With riche dayntés on des thi diotes ar dight,
> And I, in danger and doel, in dongone I dwelle,
> Naxte and nedefull, naked on night.
> Ther folo me a ferde of fendes of helle;
> They hurle me unhendely; thei harme me in hight;
> In bras and in brymston I bren as a belle.[226]

This description of Hell is supposed to convince Guinevere to change her behaviour so that she does not end up there with her mother. But as Jost notes, "[h]er message is as alien as her presence".[227] Guinevere even starts wondering if the ghost is really her mother: "If thou be my moder, grete mervaile hit is That al thi burly body is broughte to be so bare".[228] Her doubt implies that Guinevere cannot imagine the consequences of sinful behaviour, because she does not understand that her mother has to pay for her sins, as will she.

Furthermore, the way Guinevere reacts to her mother's warnings casts her as ignorant and superficial. Guinevere does not realise that her mother warns her of her destined fate in Hell. Instead, Guinevere seems to think that her mother has come to her to ask for help. Guinevere asks her mother how she can help her and what might assist

[224] Hanna, "*The Awntyrs Off Arthure* an Interpretation," 289.
[225] *The Awntyrs off Arthure,* ll. 165.
[226] *Ibid*., ll. 182-7.
[227] Jost, "Margins in Middle English Romance: Culture and Characterization in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*," 130.; see also Robson. "Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *Awntyrs off Arthure*," 222; and Haught. "Ghostly Mothers and Fated Fathers: Gender and Genre in "The Awntyrs off Arthure"," 10-1.
[228] *The Awntyrs off Arthure,* ll. 202-4.

her to Paradise. By focussing exclusively on her mother's problems, Guinevere ignores the fact that she is living the same sinful life as her mother. Furthermore, Guinevere keeps ignoring her mother's warning to take care of the poor.[229] This message seems to be the most important message of all, because the last thing her mother tells her before she leaves is the following:

> "Fede folke for my sake that failen the fode
> And menge me with matens and Masse in melle.
> Masses arn medecynes to us that bale bides;
> Us thenke a Masse as swete
> As eny spice that ever ye yete."[230]

When Guinevere asks her mother what is the greatest sin of all, her mother says that pride is the greatest of the seven sins. She therefore advises Guinevere to pray for the poor as this will help her to save her soul after death.[231] The ghost emphasises that it is important to have sympathy for the poor, because prayers from the unfortunate are the only ones that bring peace in the afterlife. As Haught argues, "the rationale behind this advice is focused more on the advantages the queen will receive for behaving charitably than it is the act of charity itself".[232] So rather than helping the poor and sharing her possessions, she continues to take from the lower-classes. This rationale then suggests that the Arthurian Court is focused on themselves, and do not care for any people that are below them unless it is in their own interest.

4.3 The ghost of Guinevere's mother vs. Gawain

Even though the narrative focuses mainly on the interaction between Guinevere and the monster, Gawain's presence is worth considering here. Guinevere's mother came back primarily to deliver a message to her daughter, but the ghost also gives advice to Gawain. According to Haught, Gawain's choice to interrupt the conversation between Guinevere and her mother represents a "silencing the female voice as a prophetic source of knowledge".[233] However, it could be argued that this interruption has a formulaic purpose. As the other narratives of the Sir Gawain Cycle, Gawain is always the main

[229] Guinevere's mother tells her daughter to take care of the poor four times throughout the narrative, see *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ll. 170-82; ll. 230-4; ll. 251-3; ll. 319-23.
[230] *Ibid.*, ll. 319-23.
[231] *Ibid.*, ll. 239-47.
[232] Haught, "Ghostly Mothers and Fated Fathers: Gender and Genre in "The Awntyrs off Arthure"," 11.
[233] *Ibid.*, ll. 13.

person to interact with the monsters. When Gawain interrupts the conversation, he asks the ghost what will happen to people who engage in warfare and conquer lands:

> "How shal we fare", quod the freke, "that fonden to fight,
> And thus defoulen the folke on fele kinges londes,
> And riches over reymes withouten eny right,
> Wynnen worshipp in werre thorgh wightnesse of hondes?"[234]

Guinevere's mother tells Gawain that the king is too "covetous". She focuses mainly on sins that have to do with the military greed of the Arthurian knights. For instance, she prophesises that the king will conquer many lands but that everything will be lost at once which will eventually lead to the downfall of the Round Table. [235]

Part B of the narrative also indicates that Gawain has not listened to the ghost's prophetic message. Gawain usually learns something from his encounter with the monstrous, however, this does not seem to be the case here. Instead Gawain seems to behave just as ignorantly as the other members of the court. For instance, in the second part of the narrative, Gawain fights a battle against Sir Galeron, a Scottish knight who wants to win back the lands that he had lost in a battle against Arthur. Sir Galeron tells Arthur that Gawain rules the lands against his will: "Er he weld hem, ywys, agayn myn unwylles".[236] During the battle the two knights use extreme violence against each other. At the end of the battle both knights are so heavily wounded that they are close to the point of death:

> Kenely that cruel kevered on hight,
> And with a cast of the carhonde in cantil he strikes,
> And waynes at Sir Wawyn, that worthely wight.
> But him lymped the worse, and that me wel likes.
> He atteled with a slenk haf slayn him in slight;
> The swerd swapped on his swange and on the mayle slikes,
> And Gawayn bi the coler keppes the knight.[237]

As Henson argues, the battle between the two knights is stopped before "their excessive violence results in both their deaths".[238] This use of excessive violence implies that Gawain was ignorant of the message that the Ghost of Guinevere's mother tried to bring across in the first part of the narrative. As Hanna argues, "the Arthurian hero proves unable to see the value of the ghost's counsel, her statement that the life of violence is a

[234] *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ll. 261-4.
[235] For the ghost's prophecy of the downfall of the Round Table see: *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ll. 282-312.
[236] *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, l. 424.
[237] *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ll. 612-8.
[238] Henson. "'Under a holte so hore': Noble Waste in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*," 3.

life of impermanence".[239] So this fight between Gawain and the other knight seems to imply that Gawain does not learn from the monster because he keeps using excessive violence.

Furthermore, at the end of part B, it becomes clear that the members of the Arthurian Court do not change their behaviour, nor reconsider their values. Guinevere requests that the fight end, which might imply that she remembered the message that her mother gave to Gawain. However, as Henson suggests, the fact that she stopped the fight does not imply that another battle in which both knights fight until they are almost dead will be prevented in the future.[240] Henson's argument then implies that the violence will go on. Moreover, Galeron tells Gawain that he was not aware that Gawain was 'half so wight'.[241] He then gives the rights of his lands to Gawain and King Arthur. Only after Galeron has given the lands to them, King Arthur ends the battle officially, suggesting that Arthur's main objective remains to extend his realm. Like in the other narratives, King Arthur always seems the one who is the most flawed and never changes his behaviour. Nevertheless, even though the Arthurian Court does not seem to learn anything from the monster, one could argue that the monster still provides an important lesson for the audience. Haught observes that Guinevere keeps her promise to her dead mother because at the end of the narrative she orders masses to be sung in memory of her mother.[242] Nevertheless, Guinevere has failed to learn from the monster, since she does not doubt her own values or change her behaviour in any way.

4.4 What does the ghost of Guinevere's mother symbolise?

The ghost of Guinevere's mother is the embodiment of the concerns about the fate of members of a type of nobility that is based on status and wealth. She challenges Gawain, Guinevere, and the other members of the Arthurian Court to reconsider the values that their community is based upon and to live by a type of nobility that is more focused on virtue.

The monster is the embodiment of the consequences of an aristocratic life based upon wealth and status. The monstrous body of the ghost, decayed and black to the bone, shows that sinful behaviour is punished in the afterlife. Members of Arthur's

239 Hanna, "*The Awntyrs off Arthure* an interpretation," 292.
240 Henson. "'Under a holte so hore': Noble Waste in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*," 8.
241 *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ll. 630.
242 Haught, "Gender and Genre in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*," 17.

Round Table engage in sinful behaviour in various ways. For instance, Guinevere is portrayed as materialistic, and Gawain engages in violent behaviour when he fights Sir Galeron. The ghost appears to warn the members of the Arthurian Court to take care of their souls instead. She encourages Gawain and Guinevere to engage in acts of charity, distribute their wealth and help the poor. As Hanna argues, she asks the members of the Round Table to see that "personal development and especially spiritual understanding are ignored when external forms of activity are emphasised".[243] As the monstrous body is a construct created by culture, the ghost seems to embody real concerns surrounding the consequences of an aristocratic lifestyle that is based upon materialism and status in the fifteenth century border regions.

Nevertheless, as shown in the literary analysis, the message of the outsider does not seem to make any impact on the members of the Arthurian Court; they refuse to change their behaviour and values. The narrative thus emphasises the superficiality and self-centredness of Guinevere and Gawain—and, through them, of the Arthurian Court as a whole. The ghost seems to try to make the Arthurian Court aware that they could also live by a type of nobility that is focused on virtue, instead of wealth and status. Even though the monster tells them, multiple times, that they should focus more on the poor, acts of charity fail to be a priority of the Round Table. The warning of Guinevere's mother is not taken seriously. This is evident in the second part of the poem, where the Arthurian Court keeps engaging in violent behaviour. The monster then asks the Arthurian Court, but also the audience, to reflect on two different types of nobilities.

Unlike Dame Ragnelle and the Carl of Carlisle, the ghost of Guinevere's mother does not undergo any transformation in the narrative. Instead, she is erased from the narrative, because she disappears at the end of part A. However, according to Oswald and Cohen, the monster always leaves a trace. The monster in *The Awntyrs off Arthure* is no exception to this rule: the monster remains present through two different kinds of traces. First, the ghost remains present through her own absence.[244] After having have disappeared, the monster still haunts the second part of the narrative.

Secondly, Guinevere could arguably also function as a trace of the monstrosity of her mother. Her mother mentions that she is the mirror of her daughter. In other

[243] Hanna, "*The Awntyrs off Arthure* an Interpretation," 292.
[244] Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in English Medieval Literature*, 14.

words, they are essentially the same person but at different times of their lives. Guinevere is a member of the Arthurian Court at present, and so she functions as a representation of her mother. Also, Guinevere herself is the consequence of a sinful act, because according to her mother's message, she was conceived by an adulterer. In other words, Guinevere is a physical representation of her mother's sins. Furthermore, Guinevere will repeat her mother's sins by committing adultery with Lancelot. So Guinevere can be seen as a trace of her mother's monstrosity.

In conclusion, the monstrous body of the ghost of Guinevere's mother functions as a warning for the members of the Arthurian Court to focus on a type of nobility that focuses on virtue. Her body is the physical proof of what awaits the members of the Round Table if they continue with their sinful ways. In fact, she even gives a prophecy that these sins will lead to the downfall of the Round Table. Nevertheless, the members of the Arthurian Court do not learn from her message and they never change their ways. The monster is erased from the narrative, which suggests that the ghost's decayed body was perceived as a real threat. It seems to be repressed, because it disappeared but it is still present in the second part of the narrative through the unchanged behaviour of Gawain. The monster's body can be interpreted as a projection of a real fear of the consequences of leading a noble life that focuses solely on wealth and status in the fifteenth century border regions.

5. CONCLUSION

As shown in the literary analyses, the bodies of the three monsters offer valuable insight into different aspects of the question of what it means to be noble in the Anglo-Scottish border regions in the second half of the fifteenth century.

5.1 The monsters and the concerns they embody

The first chapter of this thesis examined monster theory and how monsters function as a projection of culture. It explored Oswald's claim that the monster is primarily a physical category.[245] Monsters' bodies are different from those of humans or animals, because the monstrous body escapes the categorisation of species.[246] As Yamamoto and Salisbury suggest, such in-between creatures posit questions about human identity, and in this case about noble identity.[247] Keeping up with Yamamoto's theory, the monsters in the *Sir Gawain Cycle* can be interpreted as the "periphery" and the knights are the "centre".[248]

As this thesis illustrated, the monsters in Arthurian literature destabilise the Arthurian community, and demand a rethinking, or even breakdown of, the conventions of the Round Table. More specifically, they prompt the knights to reflect on what it means to be noble. The monsters challenge the Arthurian knights to interrogate values and beliefs that are deeply grounded within their moral code. Also, as Cohen and Oswald argue, the monstrous body is a construct and it functions as a displacement of anxieties and fears that originate from within.[249] These monstrous bodies, then, register different kinds of concerns and fears over the question of what it means to be noble.

Though the outsiders call on the Arthurian Court to reflect on the flaws that are embedded within their society, the members of the Round Table do not learn anything from their encounters with the monsters. This is to say, the values and beliefs that these monsters challenge remain largely unchanged in these narratives. The monsters are then

[245] Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature,* 5.
[246] *Ibid*., 5.; Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," 3.
[247] Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in English Medieval Literature,* 144.; Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, 168.
[248] Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in English Medieval Literature,* 8-9.
[249] Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," 6.; Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in English Medieval Literature*, 8.

erased from the narrative in different ways; two of the monsters undergo transformations and integrate within the Arthurian society and the other monster physically disappears. Through erasing the monstrous bodies or having them undergo transformations the threat that the monster posed is removed. [250] Yet at the same time, the fear or concern is repressed. Though all three of the monsters in *The Sir Gawain Cycle* undergo erasure of some sort, they all leave traces of their monstrosity. According to Oswald, the trace that is left after the erasure that the monstrous bodies undergo or resist offer important insights into the fears and anxieties that existed in the Arthurian society.

The body of the Carl projects major concerns over a type of courtesy that is based upon wealth and status. Even though the Carl of Carlisle is a threatening giant and a commoner, he shows the members of the Arthurian Court that obedience and respect should be the core values of courtesy. Nevertheless, the court does not learn anything from the encounter with the monster. After the Carl's spiritual transformation, Arthur makes the Carl of Carlisle a member of the Round Table, but this acceptance is solely based upon wealth and status, and not upon the Carl's courteous behaviour. As a consequence, the monster and the fears that he embodied are essentially repressed. Also, the Carl does not undergo erasure and remains a threatening giant. This absence of erasure indicates that his violent body does not pose a threat to the Arthurian Court. In fact, his unchanged body could suggest that violence was accepted as a means of courtesy by the Round Table. This can also be drawn from the way Gawain's fight with the Scottish knight is described in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*; in this text great violence is used during battle in order to decide who the rightful land owner is.

Dame Ragnelle's boar-human hybrid body reflects concerns of the relationship between nobility and beauty. Although she is portrayed as a monstrous hybrid and therefore does not embody the physical features associated with nobility, Dame Ragnelle enacts the spirit of nobility by keeping her vows—behaviour which makes her more honourable than most of the members of the Round Table, who keep breaking their oaths. At the end of the narrative, it becomes clear that the Arthurian Court has not learnt much from the monster. After her physical transformation, Dame Ragnelle is accepted because of her beauty, and not because of her honourable behaviour. So their

[250] Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in English Medieval Literature*, 15.

beliefs that status and beauty are the most important aspects of nobility remain unchanged.

The monstrous body of Dame Ragnelle's undergoes erasure; the boar elements are removed. Since erasure, according to Oswald, points to the aspects that most concerned a society, this erasure suggests considerable concern over lust. Nonetheless, as mentioned by Jost, even though she now is the most beautiful lady of the court, the members of the Round Table could not forget about her monstrous body.[251] This is to say that Dame Ragnelle's new body functions as a reminder of the absence of her foul and monstrous body that preceded it. Also, she still retains part of her monstrous identity; her beautiful body makes Gawain give into his most vulnerable sin of lust. So while Dame Ragnelle's body does not present any real danger to other members of the Arthurian Court, the body remains dangerous to Gawain.

The ghost of Guinevere's mother is the embodiment of anxieties about the fate of members of a type of nobility based on status and wealth. Her body indicates what happens to the body and soul of a member of this type of nobility after death. The ghost bears human knowledge and attempts to help the members of the Arthurian Court to prevent further internal destruction. Nevertheless, like in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, the members of the Arthurian Court fail to learn from the outsider. Part B of *The Awntyrs off Arthure* suggests that the message of the ghost is not taken seriously. The fight between Gawain and the Scottish knight in the second part proves that excessive violence remains part of the Arthurian ideology. The ghost undergoes erasure in literal way, because she physically disappears. The complete erasure of her presence indicates that the Arthurian Court feared the consequences of their excessive lifestyles that mainly focused on transience. The trace of the ghost is present through the uncorrected behaviour of the members of the Arthurian Court in the second part of the narrative. Moreover, Guinevere is depicted as a copy of her mother and so functions as the trace of the monstrosity of her own mother.

5.2 How are the monsters related to conflicts on the Anglo-Scottish border?

[251] Jost, "Margins in Middle English Romance: Culture and Characterization in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*," 139.

The fictional monsters in the *Sir Gawain* Cycle embody real anxieties; these include concerns over the breakdown of the traditional social class system, over the tensions between different noble houses and over land disputes. These concerns were notably present in the Anglo-Scottish borderlands in the second half of the fifteenth century.

As discussed above, the monstrous form of Dame Ragnelle embodies anxieties that are linked to social class. She seems to be a member of the aristocratic class herself, and yet the members of the Round Table look down upon her. She becomes a member of the Round Table by marrying Gawain, but they do not fully accept her at first because she does not meet the norms of the Arthurian Court in terms of physical appearance. Dame Ragnell is only really accepted by the members of the Arthurian society when she has transformed into a beautiful lady. This final acceptance reflects issues surrounding the social class system that were present in Late Medieval England. The social distinctions between classes but also between different noble houses started to become unclear from the fourteenth century onwards. These distinctions started to become more "jealously guarded" and "status was becoming even more defined".[252] This breaking down of the social class system caused anxiety among the aristocratic classes, because traditional social positions were threatened. The court's final acceptance then shows that the belief that nobility and beauty depend on each other was still embedded within Anglo-Scottish societies. At the same time, Dame Ragnelle's integration into the Arthurian Court shows that this belief was questioned, as she became a member because she kept her vow. So these concerns that are projected by Dame Ragnelle were anxieties regarding social class that were present within fifteenth-century politics.

These narratives also reflect how the Anglo-Scottish border region in the second half of the fifteenth century is characterised by a complex dynamic of conflict and peace making. There were tensions and conflicts between different aristocratic classes in northern England. Aside from the conflicts between the upper classes on the English side of the border, there was also enmity between the English side and the Scottish side of the border.[253] The study of the monsters in these narratives contributes valuable insight into this complex dynamic.

[252] Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages: The Fourteenth-Century Political Community* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 57.
[253] Terrell and Bruce, *The Anglo-Scottish Border and the Shaping of Identity, 1300–1600*, 2.

Considering the political upheaval in the second half of the fifteenth century, the warning of the ghost of Guinevere's mother to not use excessive violence could reflect a real-life concern. For instance, the reaction of the Percies on the arranged marriage between the Nevilles and the Cromwells suggests that feuds were settled through violence, instead of diplomacy. The Percies were planning to assassinate various members of the Neville family as a means of revenge, which proves that excessive violence was a real concern. The monster's warning, then, reflects a real concern on violence that was used to set arguments in the area of the Anglo-Scottish border region before and during the time of the Wars of the Roses.

The acceptance of the Carl of Carlisle within the Round Table reflects a different type of relationship between the noble houses --one surrounding the alliances made between them. The Carl of Carlisle is accepted as a member of the Arthurian Court because of his wealth and so Arthur values him for the potential land gains offered through an alliance with the Carl. This type of alliance also represents real-life concerns surrounding land disputes and peace-making based solely on status and wealth. For example, the Percy-Neville feud revolved around a land dispute of the manors of Wressle (Yorkshire) and Burwell (Lincolnshire). The feud between these two families became more heated when former Percy estates were given to Cromwell. Henry VI rewarded Lord Cromwell's service, and gave him various estates, including two manors that had previously belonged to the Percies. Later the Percies had reclaimed these manors. Meanwhile, Cromwell was arranging the marriage between his heiress and Sir Thomas Neville. According to Griffiths, "at a time when the domestic and public concerns of the baronage revolved around marriages and enfeoffments, leases and bequests, Northumberland could justifiably feel aggrieved". [254] The unease surrounding alliances that the Carl represents was a powerful source of tension along the Scottish border at the time the poem was written. The Carl of Carlisle, then, registers significant social and cultural tension through its depiction of monstrosity.

The integration of the monsters Dame Ragnelle and the Carl of Carlisle as members of the Round Table also gives insight into the identity politics and struggles for identity on the border of the Anglo-Scottish marches. In the Late Medieval Period, groups who differed from the collective in costumes, class-differences, and language were often dehumanised. For instance, according to Cohen, the Scots were one of the

[254] Griffiths, *King and Country England and Wales in the Fifteenth Century*, 321-64.

subaltern groups; were portrayed as beasts, barbarians, and as monsters by the English.[255] In two of the three narratives, the outsider becomes a member of the Arthurian Court, but never entirely fits in; either the monster is too beautiful, or does not undergo any physical transformation at all which makes the monster stand out. Furthermore, the monstrosity leaves a trace, and so the monstrous body resists full integration. Also, even though they never become insiders, they are forced to change their identities, and become hybrids of two cultural backgrounds, whether it be a lower-class character who becomes a member of the nobility, or a noble character who becomes a member of another great house. These aspects are reminiscent of the border culture and the alliances and enmities that existed there.

In conclusion, the monsters in *The Sir Gawain Cycle* are projections of different concerns surrounding the question of what it meant to be noble in the fifteenth century. As outsiders, they warn the members of the Arthurian Table to focus on a type of nobility that is based upon virtue and honour, instead of one that is solely based upon wealth and status. Though these monsters are fictional, this present study of the monsters of the *Sir Gawain Cycle* has shown that these bodies could potentially reflect concerns that were present in this border area in the second half of the fifteenth century Anglo-Scottish borderlands. Terrell and Bruce have argued that few studies have been conducted on the Scottish 'Other'; the monsters prove to be an insightful research object as they offer valuable insight into underlying anxieties and tensions during a period of significant, long-lasting political upheaval.

[255] Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 5.

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