THE DEPERSONALIZED DREAM:
The Significance of the Archetypal Images
and Motifs in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)
by
Julia Heater

Thesis Director
Dr. Richard G. Brown

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana
February, 1976
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Hero Archetype and Color Symbolism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream Symbolism and the Process of Individuation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Shadow</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persona</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anima</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Anima</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference Notes</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Works Cited</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

The Hero Archetype and Color Symbolism

Wilfred Guerin, in *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, defines the concept of Archetypal images and motifs, and also defines the Jungian use of these terms in relation to myth criticism. He states that,

myth is, in a general sense universal. Furthermore, similar motifs or themes may be found among many different mythologies, and certain images that recur in the myths of peoples widely separated in time and place tend to have a common meaning or, more accurately, tend to elicit similar psychological responses and to serve similar cultural functions. Such motifs and images are called "archetypes." Stated simply, archetypes are "universal symbols."\(^1\)

Dr. Carl Jung was one of the first to apply this "universal symbol" to myth criticism. Guerin further adds:

Jung's primary contribution to myth criticism is his theory of racial memory and archetypes. In developing this concept Jung expanded Freud's theories of the personal unconscious, asserting that beneath this is a primeval, collective unconscious shared in the psychic inheritance of all members of the human family. . . . Therefore, what Jung called "myth-forming" structural elements are ever-present in the unconscious psyche; he refers to the manifestations of these elements as "motifs," "primordial images," or "archetypes."\(^2\)

Jung believed that "myths are the means by which archetypes, essentially unconscious forms, become manifest and articulate to the conscious mind. . . . archetypes reveal themselves in the dreams of individuals, so that we might say that dreams are 'personalized myths' and myths are 'depersonalized
These "depersonalized dreams" or archetypes, when applied to a piece of literature, can reveal the common primordial basis of man, by which one culture far removed in time and space can communicate with another. I think that this common primordial basis can be found in the work *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the projection of various archetypal images and various motifs onto this work will prove it to be one which contains these "primordial images." It is one which can communicate these images even today.

The color of the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, who, "At his hue most strange to see, / For man and gear and all/ Were green as green could be," appears to be a symbol of the life-force of nature. His green hue carries the connotation of nature and growing plants and bears the image of the grave and the corruption of death. J. E. Cirlot, in *A Dictionary of Symbols*, says "this green is a colour of antithetical tendencies: it is the colour of vegetation (or of life, in other words) and of corpses (or of death)." The force of nature with its rhythmic seasons of birth (spring), death (harvest), and rebirth (spring) is symbolized by the Green Knight, who receives a mortal blow, but is in a sense reborn when he "laid hold his head and heaved it aloft" (1.432). In his introduction to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, E. Talbot Donaldson states "The motif of the green man's decapitation originates in very ancient folklore, probably in a vegetation myth in which
the beheading would have been a ritual death that insured the return of spring to the earth and the regrowth of the crops. The Green Knight can be viewed as the life-force of nature which man attempts to dominate, as in Sir Gawain's beheading of the Green Knight; yet, in the end this life-force exacts the submission of man, as in the Green Knight's mocking attempt to behead Sir Gawain. Man can attempt to establish his dominion over the harvest but finds himself humbled by the grave.

One can also find apparent color symbolism in the appearance of Sir Gawain, who is first arrayed in golden armour, "When he had on his arms, his harness was rich, / The least lachet or loop laden with gold" (1.590-1) and carries a shield "that shone all red" (1.619). His steed, Gringolet, is also arrayed in golden armour "That glittered and glowed like the glorious sun" (1.604). This vision of a golden knight bearing a red shield riding atop a gilt-armoured steed can be seen, in the Jungian sense, as the symbol of the sun bearing the symbol of life—blood. Cirlot believes this archetypal figure to be symbolic of the ultimate victor, the sun, and also symbolic of the life-force of blood:

It [red] is also the colour of blood, and for this reason prehistoric man would stain with blood any object which he used to bring to life . . . It is for this reason too that when a Roman general was received in triumph he was carried in a chariot drawn by four white horses which were clad in gilt armour [as a symbol of the sun], and his face was painted red.

When Sir Gawain takes his ease at his host's fire, he is clad in a blue robe with white fur: "He wore a rich robe
of blue, that reached to the earth/ and a surcoat lined softly with sumptuous furs;/ A hood of the same hue hung on his shoulders;/ With bands of bright ermine embellished were both" (1.1928-31). The symbolic value of the blue robe is expressed by Cirlot as being: "'Blue is the darkness made visible.'" Sir Gawain, by placing his faith in the powers of the green girdle, has tarnished his image of the ideal courteous knight, for he betrays his vow with his host by not relinquishing this gift and by placing his trust in the girdle's supposed power of protection; he has betrayed his trust in the protection of the Higher Powers. This darkness or doubt in Sir Gawain makes a mockery of his image as the ideal knight.

When Sir Gawain sets off to find the Green Knight, he wears "That girdle of green so goodly to see/ That against the gay red showed gorgeous bright" (1.2035-6). The red apparel, which Cirlot describes as "the colour of the pulsing blood and of fire, for the surging and tearing emotions," is connotative of the spiritous quest for the Green Knight and symbolic of "blood, wounds, death-throes and sublimation" the end with which he might meet. The green girdle, symbolic of life and death, is indicative of both the realization of Sir Gawain's possible fate of the corruption of the grave and his possible victory over nature and the continuation of his life-force.

Significance can also be found in viewing the progression of these colors as a spiritual descension:
The opposite or descending series can be seen in the scale beginning with yellow (that is, gold in the negative sense of the point of departure or emanation rather than the point of arrival), blue (or heaven), green (nature, or immediate natural life), black (that is, in the sense of the neo-platonic "fall").

Sir Gawain's cloak of red denoting the passion of his quest replaces the black of the "neo-platonic" fall, for he is saved from this fall by the symbolic color green--the life-force of the Green Knight. This salvation or rebirth by the Green Knight results in Sir Gawain's final self-awareness of his spiritual deficiencies: "Now am I faulty and false, that fearful was ever/ Of disloyalty and lies, bad luck to them both!" (1.2382-4). This experience of rebirth has arrested Sir Gawain's state of spiritual descension and transformed this descension into a state of redemption, as symbolized by Sir Gawain's red cloak. The color red now can be seen as the symbol of "death-throes and sublimation" through which Sir Gawain must pass and "die." The red cloak then symbolizes the "rebirth" of Sir Gawain as "the colour of pulsing blood and fire" and purification.

The image of Sir Gawain searching for the mystifying Green Knight and through this quest becoming aware of the transitoriness of his idealized courteousness can be seen as the Archetypal Hero-figure. Because of this realization of his transitoriness, Sir Gawain transcends from his original state of glorified, "knighted innocence to a state of realization of his imperfections. In following his quest Sir Gawain passes through a state of Initiation or transformation.
which becomes a testing of his true worth as the ideal courteous knight of Arthur's court. This quest also exposes his limitations as an individual, and through this recognition of his faults, he is reborn as a knight of a more temperate reality. In *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*, Maud Bodkin expresses this conception of the Archetypal Hero who is glorified and yet limited in a human scope:

The archetypal hero-figure stands poised between height and depth, between the Divine and the Devilish, swung forward and upward in reflection of imagination's universal range, hurled back and downward in expression of individual limitation and the restraining censure of the whole upon the part. \(^{12}\)

Sir Gawain's quest is symbolic of the Archetypal Quest of the Hero during which, as Guerin states, "The Hero (Savior or Deliverer) undertakes some long journey during which he must solve impossible tasks, battle with monsters, solve unanswerable riddles, and overcome insurmountable obstacles." \(^{13}\) Sir Gawain, in his journey to find the Green Knight, meets with numerous monsters: "'Twere a marvel if he met not some monstrous foe, / And that so fierce and forbidding that fight he must. / ... Now with serpents he wars, now with savage wolves, / Now with wild men of the woods, that watched from the rocks" (1.716-21). He must overcome the insurmountable obstacles of weather and frightening, untraveled paths: "Had he not born himself bravely, and been of God's side, / He had met with many mishaps and mortal harms / And if the wars were welcome, the winter was worse" (1.724-6). This arduous quest, which Sir Gawain undertakes while fearful of
the final outcome of finding the Green Knight, can easily be
seen as a parallel of the Archetypal Quest of the Archetypal
Hero.

When Sir Gawain finds the object of his quest—the Green
Knight—, he enters into the Initiation or Transformation
process of the Hero Archetype. His experience with the
Green Knight, who like a juggler plays with his life,
culminates in an experience of rebirth—Sir Gawain's
Phoenix arises from the ashes of his loss of innocence. Professor
Bodkin, quoting Middleton Murry, examines the essence of
this experience:

He presents the essential experience . . . as the
passage through a state of such isolation and aban­
donment as can only be described as the darkness of
death, upon which follows a rebirth into a new
attitude or way of life. This new attitude is
characterized by a higher degree of unity, both
within the self, and between the individual man
and the universe beyond him. 14

Sir Gawain achieves this state of unity by now wearing the
girdle of green as a symbol of his "death" and redemption or
"rebirth." The former object of his downfall and shame is
transformed into a manifestation of this condition. Sir
Gawain has transcended from his former state of desolation
and disgrace in the Green Chapel to a new plateau of accept­
ance and maturity—Sir Gawain has been reborn. Bodkin,
quoting Jung on the concept of rebirth, states:

According to his [Jung's] view the regression or
backward flow of libido, that takes place when
conscious or habitual adaptation fails and frus­
tration is experienced, may be regarded as a recurring
phase in development. It may be felt by the
sufferer as a state of compulsion without hope or aim, as though he were enclosed in the mother's womb, or in a grave—and if the condition continues it means degeneration and death. But if the contents which during the introverted state arise in fantasy are examined for the hints or "germs," they contain "of new possibilities of life," a new attitude may be attained by which the former attitude, and the frustrate condition which its inadequacy brought about, are "transcended." 

The archetypal image of one man passing through a state of spiritual descension to a higher state of consciousness through the archetypal motif of rebirth is one which strikes a deep primordial basis by which every man attempts to find the "symbolic projections" of the "inner meaning of the universe and of human life." Guerin further mentions: "The great artist is the man who possesses 'the primordial vision,' a special sensitivity to archetypal patterns and a gift for speaking in primordial images, which enable him to transmit experiences of the 'inner world' to the 'outer world' through his art form." The unknown author of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight surely possessed this gift "for speaking in primordial images" and transmitted these images either consciously or unconsciously through his art. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a work which communicates with man on a common primordial basis; and because of its ability to speak in unconscious images to man's conscious mind, the work has survived through time and will continue to survive.
CHAPTER 2

Dream Symbolism and the Process of Individuation

An important aspect of Jungian psychology is the process of individuation, and by applying this process to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* one can find a revealing of Sir Gawain's transformation. This transformation occurs when integration with the persona, the shadow, and the anima take place and form a whole personality—the Self. Dr. Carl Jung points out in *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* the importance and the necessity of integration:

As civilization develops, the bisexual primordial being turns into a symbol of the unity of personality, a symbol of the self, where the war of opposites find peace. In this way the primordial being becomes the distant goal of man's self-development, having been from the very beginning a projection of his unconscious wholeness. Wholeness consists in the union of the conscious and the unconscious personality.17

Only by recognizing the validity of his unconscious components, the persona, shadow, and anima, can Sir Gawain hope to become more than simply the "most courteous" knight—only then can he become a person aware of his true Self.

The persona is the compulsive mask that one wears to hide from oneself and others, aspects of the personality that one feels are best left hidden. Only with an admittance by the individual that the mask is only a mask, and not the true self can integration take place. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* the persona can be identified with Sir Gawain himself,
who is a "perfect, most courteous knight" that must learn that he possesses human failings as well as potentially great human qualities.

The shadow, which is the darkest component of the unconscious, must be met in a face-to-face encounter, which hopefully brings about recognition of the evil within oneself. The recognition is one of the more important steps in individuation, for only by recognition and acceptance of one's evil can the better qualities of the shadow, hidden within the darkness be seen. The shadow in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is represented by the Green Knight who through his dark motives is able to bring about the rebirth of Sir Gawain. The rebirth must take place on the shadow's terms and in his territory--within the ever-consuming and creating unconscious of the mother archetype.

The anima, which is the most dangerous and the most wily component of the unconscious, is as Jung says, "the masterpiece of individuation." Like the shadow, she can be evil and appear to be of holy form at the same time. She is frequently paired with the shadow and together they form the initiation of the hero. The darkness and mutability of these two aspects of the unconscious is well-stated by Jung:

The darkness which clings to every personality is the door into the unconscious and the gateway of dreams, from which those two twilight figures, the shadow and the anima, step into our nightly visions... Only after recognition and integration has occurred do these
"twilight figures" return to the darkness of the psyche through the door of the unconscious. Sir Gawain's Anima is represented by both Morgan Le Faye and the lovely lady.

Professor Whitmont in *The Symbolic Quest* presents an excellent account of the individuation process:

The hero or heroine's quest and his or her encounter with mythological antagonists can be summarized in psychological language as the ego's encounter with the ever-recurring typical form elements of the psyche. For everyone who works with the unconscious therewise the problems of initial adaptation to the outer and inner worlds (psychological types); the containing collective group (persona); the conflict with the repressed or unacceptable part of one's personality (shadow); the necessity to establish a relationship with the contrasexual background elements in the psyche-male (anima) or female (animus); and finally the encounter with supra-personal core of one's total personality and life-meaning (Self). In the sense that persona, shadow, anima, animus and Self are typical psychic configurations which express themselves as personalized complexes and have mythological cores, they may be regarded as archetypes. In actual dreams and fantasies they are represented in either personal or mythological images, depending upon the aspect stressed. Thus the anima may appear as Mary Jones or as a vegetation goddess, the shadow as a cruel king or the corner druggist. Always, however, their integration requires the assimilation of both the specifically personal and the generally religious, or mythological dimension. 19

These "typical psychic configurations" occur within Sir Gawain's tale and prove his tale to be more than simply one of the romance and dragon-slaying variety. His tale is a psychic tale of the "most courteous" knight becoming human.

The process of individuation cannot only be seen within the context of the plot and the actions of Sir Gawain, the Green Knight, and the lovely lady but also by interpretation of the hunting scenes and Green Chapel in terms of dream
symbolism. As Jung points out in *Aion*, dream symbolism is significant in the process of individuation.

The dream sums up in condensed form the whole symbolism of the individuation process in a person who was totally unacquainted with the literature of the subject. Cases of this kind are by no means rare and ought to make us think. They demonstrate the existence of an unconscious "knowledge" of the individuation process and its historical symbolism.²⁰

By use of this symbolism and its projection onto the tale of Sir Gawain, further exploration can be made into the process of individuation.

The first hunting scene begins with the chase of the deer. At the same time, paralleled with this scene, is a hunt of a different sort—the lovely lady has begun tracking a nobler quarry, Sir Gawain. This hunting scene and the two to follow always begin at dawn and continue till the setting of the sun. The time pattern also can be expressed in the terms of the unconscious: "Time is thus defined by the rising and setting sun, by the death and renewal of libido, the dawning and extinction of consciousness."²¹

The unconscious elements in the form of the Green Knight and the lovely lady both begin with the first rays of consciousness and end with the setting of it.

The fact that the hunting takes place either in woods or in fields—"Hunting the barren hind over the broad heath" (1.1320) and "by the dim light of dawn they were deep in the woods" (1.1415)—carries the significance of the maternal aspect. Only within the realm of the mother archetype does
rebirth occur. Jung states in regard to the maternal aspect of the wood:

A wood appears, with trees and bushes. . . . the meaning of the forest coincides essentially with that of the tabooed tree. The sacred tree is generally found in a wood or in a paradisalike garden. Sometimes the forbidden grove takes the place of the tabooed tree and is invested with all the attributes of the latter. The forest, like the tree, has a maternal significance.

And also in regard to fields: "The [mother] archetype is often associated with things and places standing for fertility and fruitfulness: the cornucopia, a ploughed field, a garden."23

The mother archetype is an important factor in dream symbolism and most of the symbolism in the hunting scenes and the rebirth aura of Green Chanel rightfully carries this maternal significance. Jung writes of the mother archetype:

The qualities associated with it [the mother archetype] are maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility. The place of magic transformation and rebirth, together with the underworld and its inhabitants, are presided over by the mother.24

When the mother archetype is projected upon nature the mother archetype assumes greater authority as the Great Mother or Mother Nature. All that is contained within this vast realm, including animals, belongs to the Great Mother. The unconscious significance of the slaying of these "children" of the Great Mother is explained by Jung:
The animal is a representative of the unconscious, and the latter, as the matrix of consciousness, has a maternal significance, . . . All animals belong to the Great Mother and the killing of any wild animal is a transgression against the mother. Just as the mother seems a giantess to the small child, so the attribute of size passes to the archetypal Great Mother, Mother Nature. Whoever succeeds in killing the "magic" animal, the symbolic representative of the animal mother, acquires something of her gigantic strength.25

One should notice that the slayer of the "children" is the Green Knight or Sir Gawain's Shadow. So as the shadow gains in strength so in a sense does Sir Gawain for his shadow is as much a part of him as is his persona lying in the Green Knight's bedchamber.

If the hunting scene is taken on the wider scale as representative of Sir Gawain and his struggle of rebirth, then one can see the irony of his shadow gaining in power by killing the animalistic part of Gawain (represented by the deer, the boar, and the fox) against the backdrop of the Great Mother. This notion of the shadow and the animalistic side of man not as one component but as two different aspects of the unconscious can be seen in the fact that the Green Knight is mounted throughout all the hunting scenes. The importance of the steed and man is pointed out by Jung as not only a matter of maternal significance but also as two aspects of the unconscious:

The mother-image is a libido symbol and so is the horse; at some points the meaning of the two symbols overlapped. But the factor common to both is the libido. In the present context, therefore, the hero and his horse seem to symbolize the idea of man and the subordinate sphere of animal instinct.26
If one continues to view the hunting scene on this wider scale, then the fact that arrows are often used in bringing about the death of the animal sphere can be seen as not only part of the "death" of Sir Gawain but as a self-wounding act:

At each bend under boughs the bright shafts flew
That tore the tawny hide with their tapered heads
Ah! they bray and they bleed, on banks they die (1.1161-3)

This important act of self-harm results in a state of introversion in which the rebirth of the hero can be brought about.

Jung writes of wounding oneself with one's own weapon:

The deadly arrows do not strike the hero from without; it is himself who hunts, fights, and tortures himself. In him, instinct wars with instinct. . . .

As we know that the arrow is a libido-symbol, the meaning of this "piercing" is clear; it is the act of union with oneself, a sort of self-fertilization, and also a self violation, a self-murder. . . .

Being wounded by one's own arrow signifies, therefore, a state of introversion. . . .the libido sinks "into its own depths". . . . and discovers in the darkness a substitute for the upper world it has abandoned—the world of memories. . . ., the strongest and most influential of which are the earliest ones. It is the world of the child, the paradisal law of time. In this subterranean kingdom slumber sweet feelings of home and the hopes of all to be. . . . Yet 'the danger is great', as Mephistopheles says, for these depths fascinate. When the libido leaves the bright upper world, whether from choice, or from inertia, or from fate, it sinks back into its own depths, into the source from which it originally flowed, and returns to the point of cleavage, the navel, where it first entered the body. This point of cleavage is called the mother, because from her the current of life reached us. Whenever some great work is to be accomplished, before which a man recoils, doubtful of his strength, his libido streams back to the fountainhead—and that is the dangerous moment when the issues hang between annihilation and new life.27

The relation of the self-wounding and the maternal significance of this act verifies the importance of the mother archetype.
in the integration and rebirth of the individual. It is only at Green Chapel when the "issues hanging between annihilation and new life" are resolved in Sir Gawain's rebirth.

During the first hunt, the animals that are slain are deer. One can find significance that they are killed after being driven to the streams, "When they were harried on the heights and herded to the streams." (1.1169). When Jung writes of the symbolism of Hiawatha, there also is a deer driven to water and then slain:

 Whatever he [Hiawatha] kills generally lies by or in the water, or better still, half in water and half on land. . . . Therefore the roebuck killed at the ford. . . . points to the "animal" and other such powers of the unconscious. That is why it was killed at the ford, i.e., at the crossing, on the border-line between conscious and unconscious. . . . In killing his first roebuck, therefore, Hiawatha was killing the symbolic representative of the unconscious, i.e., his own "participation mystique" with animal nature, and from that comes his giant strength.

Besides the fact that water signifies the unconscious it also connotes the maternal aspect of the unconscious:

The maternal aspect of water coincides with the nature of the unconscious, because the latter (particularly in men) can be regarded as the mother or matrix of consciousness. Hence the unconscious, when interpreted on the subjective level, has the same maternal significance as water.

Thus, the slaying of the animalistic nature of Man within the unconscious (water) is performed by a "twilight figure" of the unconscious, the shadow, in the maternal realm.
During the second hunt, a boar is the prey for the Green Knight. The boar is at first surrounded, "Between a mire in the marsh and a menacing crag/ To a rise where the rock stood rugged and steep/ And boulders lay about, that blocked their approach. Then the company in consort closed on their prey/ They surrounded the rise and the rocks both." (1.1430-4). The fact that the boar must descend from the rise to meet the hunters indicates a return to the unconscious level. Also, the notion that the boar is protected from the hunters by the rock and boulders indicates the maternal, saving aspect of the Great Mother, for a Jung states, "It [the mother archetype] can be attached to a rock, a cave, a tree..." It is when the boar leaves the protected area and descends the rise that it is killed. "Then they beat on the bushes and bade him appear/ And he made a murderous rush in the midst of them all." (1.1437-8). Again, the beast is slain in a stream, "Straight into the stream he strides toward his foe/ The wild thing was wary of weapon and man... The boar makes for the man with a mighty bound/ So that he and his hunter came headlong together/ Where the water ran wildest--the worse for the beast/... And he falls in his fury and floats down the water/ ill-sped." (1.1585-96). Apart from the maternal significance of water, which has already been stated earlier, water, according to Jung, also signifies the cyclic nature of the life/death/rebirth pattern:
All living things rise, like the sun, from water, and sink into it again at evening. Born of springs, rivers, lakes, and seas, man at death comes to the waters of the Styx, and there embarks on the "night sea journey." Those black waters of death are the water of life, for death with its cold embrace is the maternal womb, just as the sea devours the sun but brings it forth again.\footnote{31}

Again the animal instinct is "dead" and flees back to the dark world of the unconscious through the path provided by the coursing stream.

The third hunt contains much of the same symbolism of the other two hunts with the "leafy wood" (1.1697) and the rocks (1.1698). Part of the chase occurs on the mountains, indicating a higher spiritual state, but again death occurs on lower ground: "Reynard comes racing out of a rough thicket and all the rabble in a rush, right at his heels." (1.1898-9). The remainder of the exploit is centered around the foxskin which the Green Knight describes: "... this foul fox pelt, the fiend take the goods!/ Which but poorly repays those precious things/ That you have cordially conferred, those kisses three/ so good." (1.1944-7). The sacrifice of the animalistic, instinctive nature of Sir Gawain has not been enough to exact the toll, for nothing less than the sacrifice of Gawain himself will suffice. The "foul fox pelt" is simply a reminder of a minor skirmish with the unconscious and the Great Mother, while "those kisses three/ so good" portend the major battle to come.

The symbolism of the Green Chapel and the rebirth are the culminating point of the symbolism of the hunt. As Sir Gawain
guards himself well with his newly-polished persona, "With pride he wears each piece/ New furbished for his need," (1.2021-2) he forgets not the girdle of green--soon to be the major factor in his "death" and rebirth. When Sir Gawain approaches Green Chapel, the very landscape enforces the feeling of hesitation and danger,

Under bare boughs they ride, where steep banks rise
Over high cliffs they climb, where cold snow clings
The heavens held aloof, but heavy there under
Mist mantled the moors, moved on the slopes
Each hill had a hat, a huge cape of clouds
Brooks bubbled and broke over broken rocks
Flashing in freshets that waterfalls fed
Roundabout was the road that ran through the wood
Till the sun at that season was soon to rise that day. (1.2077-86)

The notion of time again enters with the sun "soon to rise" and the process of the unconscious becoming conscious about to begin. One should notice the road upon which Sir Gawain approaches Green Chapel:

ride the narrow road down yon rocky slope
Till it brings you to the bottom of the broad valley
Then look a little ahead, on your left hand
And you will soon see before you that self-same Chapel. (1.2144-7)

The narrowness and rockiness of the approach typify the dangerousness of his symbolic death and rebirth. The fact that Green Chapel is on the left also signifies its unconscious aura for the left denotes the emotional and unconscious side of man. Sir Gawain must pass through a valley to enter Green Chapel, again denoting a descent to the unconscious,
"He puts his heels to his horse, and picks up the path/ Goes in beside a grove where the ground is steep/ Rides down a
rough slope right to the valley." (1.2170-3). Again recurs the wood or "grove" as it is called. In Jung's interpretation of a dream involving the rebirth motif of another hero, Chiwantopol, the hero must enter a wood to arrive at the scene of the symbolic death and rebirth ritual:

   The forest, like the tree, has mythologically a maternal significance. In the vision which now follows, the forest furnishes the stage upon which the dramatic representation of the end of Chiwantopol is played. This act, therefore, takes place in or near the mother.  

The landscape is further described as being "wild" with "high banks on either hand hemmed it about/ With many a ragged rock and rough-hewn crag/ The skies seemed scored by the scowling peaks." (1.2165-8). The sense of enclosure that the passage gives is in accordance with the maternal aspect and the womb image of rebirth. The hero must cross a stream to reach the hillock where the actual rebirth takes place: "A hillock high and broad, hard by the water/ Where the stream fell in foam down the face of the steep/ and bubbled as if it boiled on its bed below/ The knight urges his horse, and heads for the knoll." (1.2172-5). This crossing of the river, so to speak, corresponds to what Jung describes in regard to the mother archetype and water:

   The water represents the maternal depths and the place of rebirth; in short, the unconscious in its positive and negative aspects. But the mystery of regeneration is of an awe-inspiring nature; it is a deadly embrace. There is an allusion to the terrible mother of heroes, who teaches them fear.  

Sir Gawain is in the realm and the power of the Terrible Mother.
He comes to the place of rebirth, the hillock, which denotes spiritual ascent: "The mountain means ascent, particularly the mystical, spiritual ascent to the heights, to the place of revelation where the spirit is present." A revelation of a spiritual nature is about to take place as Sir Gawain meets his evil and his death.

The idea of rebirth is further suggested by the Green Knight's abode being described as a cavern: "It had a hole at one end, and on either side,/ And was covered with coarse grass in clumps all without,/ and hollow within, like some old cave" (265). In The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, Jung examines the idea of the cave as a symbol of rebirth:

The cave is the place of rebirth, that secret cavity in which one is shut up in order to be incubated and renewed. Anyone who gets into that cave, that is to say into the cave which everyone has in himself, or into the darkness that lies behind consciousness, will find himself involved in an--at first--unconscious process of transformation. By penetrating into the unconscious he makes a connection with his unconscious contents. This may result in a momentous change of personality in the positive or negative sense. This transformation is often interpreted as a prolongation of the natural span of life or as an earnest of immortality.

The Green Knight's cavern can also be seen as an archetypal womb image. Jung further states, "The mother archetype is often associated with things and places standing for fertility and fruitfulness . . . It can be attached to a rock, a cave . . . ." The rebirth cycle of transformation has been completed and Sir Gawain has entered the womb of the
earth and has been born again into a higher state of spiritual acceptance of his human condition.

One finds it worth noting that after the Green Knight comes from the cave in the rocks (1.2221) he does not cross through the stream but rather vaults over it, "When he came to the cold stream, and cared not to wade/ He vaults over on his ax, and advances amain." (1.2231-2). Rather than descending into the unconscious state, the Green Knight, who is himself a component of the unconscious, must face Gawain on a conscious level while Gawain must descend to the unconscious (by wading across the stream) to face his shadow.

After Sir Gawain has seen his "own blood bright on the snow" (1.2315), and he reacts in a way in which he has "Not since he was a babe born of his mother/ Was he once in the world one-half so blithe," (1.2320-1). The rebirth ritual has begun in a physical sense but is not climaxed in a psychic sense until Sir Gawain is aware of his fault of "loving his life" (1.2368). The rebirth is completed in both the physical and psychic sense only after Sir Gawain acknowledges his wrong and the Green Knight ceremoniously states: "I hold you polished as a pearl, as pure and as bright/ As you had lived free of fault since first you were born." (1.2393-4).

The symbolic course of Sir Gawain's rebirth and its motif have been revealed through a thorough interpretation of the dream symbolism involved.
The Shadow

Professor Whitmont, in *The Symbolic Quest*, describes the term "shadow" in relation to psychoanalysis:

the term [shadow] refers to that part of the personality which has been repressed for the sake of the ego ideal. Since everything unconscious is projected, we encounter the shadow in projection—in our view of "the other fellow." As a figure in dreams or fantasies the shadow represents the personal unconscious. It is like a composite of the personal shells of our complexes and is thus the doorway to all deeper transpersonal experiences.

Although being a familiar term in the field of psychoanalysis, it can also be applied to a piece of literary art and prove its worth as an expression for the archetypal sense of projected evil. Jung himself uses the term "shadow" in relation to literary criticism:

Another, no less important and clearly defined figure is the "shadow"... the figure has often been portrayed by poets and writers. I would mention the Faust-Mephistopheles relationship and E. T. A. Hoffman's tale *The Devil's Elixir* as two especially typical descriptions. The shadow personified everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself and yet thrusting itself upon him directly or indirectly—for instance, the inferior traits of character and other incompatible tendencies.

This projection of evil that conceals a repression of complexes can be seen in the depiction of the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Through the facade of the demi-god exists the transcending/rebirth experience which
culminates in Sir Gawain's acceptance of his necessary "evil" and the integration of his individuation process.

The existence of or necessity for a shadow is a general human archetypal fact, since the process of ego formation—the clash between collectivity and individuality—is a general human pattern. The shadow is projected in two forms: individually, in the shape of the people to whom we ascribe all the evil; and collectively, in its most general form, as the Enemy, the personification of evil. Its mythological representations are the devil, archenemy, tempter, fiend or double; or the dark or evil one of a pair of brothers or sisters.

The Green Knight is not merely a figure of nature with remarkable survival qualities; he is the mythological "shadow" of Sir Gawain—he is the denied darkness of Sir Gawain's soul. Professor Whitmont further states:

The antagonist in describing dream is not merely the personal shadow, the personal vices; it is a demonic, mythological figure corresponding rather to the archetype of the opposing protagonist of man in the tradition image of the dark angel or Satanic demon. It corresponds to what Jung has called the dark aspect of the Self, namely the obscure, dangerous, obstructive, apparently evil element that is part of life in general, of everybody's life and of human nature, that irrational aspect of natural existence that always slips away and evades our grasp and has not become civilized or moral; it is untouched nature, for better or for worse—and it is for worse while it remains unconscious.

This sudden emergence of the Green Knight from the realms of unconsciousness as a necessary emergence for the Green Knight symbolizes the vindictive reality of Sir Gawain's repressed dark qualities. This harsh reality pummels the brittle, idealized image of the ever-courteous knight. The Green Knight is the image of Sir Gawain which has been locked away in the
darkness of the unconscious but has now broken away and has come to face the idealized image of Sir Gawain. The process of individuation has begun as has Sir Gawain's death and rebirth.

The reaction of Arthur's court to this unknown being was a reaction of cautious curiosity: "All the onlookers eyed him, and edged nearer, and waited in wonder what he would do. For many sights had they seen, but such a one never, so that phantom and faerie the folk there deemed it." (1.237-40).

The cataloguing of the Green Knight's strangeness supports this concept of the shadow as is defined by Professor Whitmont:

The shadow is the archetypal experience of the "other fellow," who in his strangeness is always suspect. It is the archetypal urge for a scapegoat, for someone to blame and attack in order to vindicate oneself and be justified; it is the archetypal experience of "the enemy," the experience of blameworthiness which always adheres to the other fellow, since we are under the illusion of knowing ourselves and of having already dealt adequately with our own problems. In other words, to the extent that I have to be right and good, "he", "she", or "they" become the carriers of all the evil which I fail to acknowledge within myself.41

The Green Knight is most assuredly the personification of "the carriers of all the evil" which Sir Gawain refuses to acknowledge. This very refusal is the reason for the personification. The face-to-face encounter within the walls of King Arthur's stronghold--the safest place in which Sir Gawain can ever reside--is filled with the resistance of many of the King's finest knights to this strange demi-god: "Therefore chary of answer was many a champion bold,/ And stunned at his strong
words stone-still they sat/ In a swooning silence in the
stately hall/ As all were slipped into sleep, so slackened
their speech / apace." (1.241-45). Professor Whitmont comments
on the necessity to materialize the terror representing the shadow.

As long as the shadow was a vague terror in the
night or a tree demon there was no possibility of
finding the central archetype in one's own person-
ality. The step to archetypal realization through
interpersonal relations needs to be taken away from
the vagueness of the "participation mystique" and
must be consciously experienced at simple face value
before it can be recognized as an outer expression
of an inner fate. \[42\]

The two-sided nature of Sir Gawain's shadow is apparent
in his image of the perfect host and yet as the omniscient evil
Green Knight. The Green Knight's first appearance as the
evil one belies his function as the master of rebirth. These
qualities of the Green Knight are also expressed by Jung:

\[43\]

The reactions of the members of the great hall vary as with
sommabulism of some (mentioned above), the readiness of King
Arthur to fight and have done with this interruption: "Arthur
answer gave/ And said, 'Sir courteous knight, / If contest here
you crave, / You shall not fail to fight'" (1.275-80) and Sir
Gawain's taking up of the challenge and in this action initiating
his individuation. These various reactions correspond with
the reactions which Professor Whitmont lists in regard to the
shadow figure:

There are several kinds of possible reactions to the shadow. We can refuse to face it; or, once aware that it is part of us, we can try to eliminate it and set it straight immediately; . . . or, we can "suffer" it in a constructive manner, as a part of our personality which can lead us to a salutory humility and humanness and eventually to new insights and expanded life horizons.

When Sir Gawain follows through on his reaction by obeying the command of the Green Knight, he attempts to destroy this alien being who is yet such a part of him and he discovers the futility of such an act:

Gawain grips to his axe and gathers it aloft
...Brought it down deftly upon the bare neck,
...And cut the flesh cleanly and clove it in twain,
...The head was hewn off and fell to the floor,
...Yet fell not the fellow, nor faltered a whit,
But stoutly he starts forth upon stiff shanks,
And as all stood staring he stretched forth his hand,
Laid hold of his head and heaved it aloft
...For the head in his hand he holds right up;
Toward the first on the dais directs he the face,
And it lifted up its lids, and looked with wide eyes,
And said as much with its mouth as now you may hear;
"Sir Gawain, forget not to go as agreed,
And cease not to seek till me, sir, you find,
As you promised in the presence of the proud knights.
To the Green Chanel come, I charge you, to take
Such a dint as you have dealt—you have well deserved
That your neck should have a knock on New Year's morn". (1.421-53)

Sir Gawain's resistance and attempt to destroy this dark side of his soul is in complete accordance with the reaction described here:

In order to protect its own control and sovereignty the ego instinctively puts up a great resistance to the confrontation with the shadow; when it catches a glimpse of the shadow the ego most often reacts with an attempt to eliminate it. . . . Then comes the final shattering shock, when we discover that, in part at least, this is impossible no matter how we try. For the shadow
represents energetically-charged autonomous patterns of feeling and behavior. Their energy cannot simply be stopped by an act of will. What is needed is rechannelling or transformation.45

It can be argued, then, that Sir Gawain's "rechannelling or transformation" is about to commence.

The first process of transformation which Sir Gawain embarks upon is his journey to find the Green Chapel; its color symbolism and the religious connotation point toward the culminating rebirth experience. Sir Gawain's journey can be compared to the journey through the unconscious which Jung describes:

Hence, it is generally believed that anyone who descends into the unconscious gets into a suffocating atmosphere of egocentric subjectivity, and in this blind alley is exposed to the attack of all the ferocious beasts which the caverns of the psychic underworld are supposed to harbour... The shadow is a living part of the personality and therefore wants to live with it in some form.46

Sir Gawain is attacked by various beastly beings during his journey:

Now with serpents he wars, now with savage wolves,
Now with wild men of the woods, that watched from the rocks,
Now with bulls and with bears, and with boars besides,
And giants that came gibbering from the jagged steps. (1.720-3)

Yet these physical beings are not the only ferocious beast he encounters for he finds the torment of the lovely lady as unbearable as those torments of any beast,

For were she never so winsome, the warrior had
The less will to woo, for the wounds that his bane must be.
He must bear the blinding blow
For such is fate's decree; (1.1283-7)
Sir Gawain does not recover from this unconscious "blinding blow," for this blow is in response to actions which could have easily been attributed to his shadow--Sir Gawain's mask of courtesy is slipping and his dark side is beginning to show.

Sir Gawain's transformation reaches its final stage when he again faces his shadow at Green Chapel. This confrontation leads to the final rebirth experience. The mock execution taking place in the womb of nature--Green Chapel--slays the idealistic courteous facade of Sir Gawain and brings recognition of his shadow's power of rebirth. This is pointed out by Whitmont:

The confrontation of one's own evil can be a mortifying deathlike experience, but like death it points beyond the personal meaning of existence. . . . The shadow, when it is realized, is the source of renewal; the new and productive impulse cannot come from established values of the ego. When there is an impasse, a sterile time in our lives. . . we must look to the dark, hitherto unacceptable side which has not been at our conscious disposal.

Sir Gawain learns as he must through the painful and humiliating rebirth experience that he owes his dark side recognition and acceptance. His facade has fallen from his reach and Sir Gawain has found that acceptance of his true reality is the only solution. Such an experience can be explained in this way:

After shadow and anima or animus have been realized in all their implication every analyst attempts to deal with them through an effort of will and discipline. Only slowly and painfully does he come to the realization that he cannot deal with them in
This fashion only. His reaction then tends to be one of sheer hopelessness, a "dark night of the soul." We all live under the illusion that we can control everything, or at least that we should be able to control everything, that wherever there is a will there is also a way and that nothing can ever happen to us unless we do it ourselves. The ego seemingly cannot renounce this illusion until we have suffered so long through conscious trials and failures that the weapons fall out of our hands. When we are thus at the point of giving up and finally feel that it is no use, that we cannot do it--then transformation begins. Then we become the object rather than the subject of an inner change. This point of utter despair is the turning point. The entrance to purgatory in the Divine Comedy is found at the lowest, deepest point of hell.

Sir Gawain's final acceptance of his shadow and his integration of this dark side into his conscious psyche are portrayed by his words to the Green Knight after becoming aware of his Self-Betrayal:

The first words that fell from the fair knight's lips:
"Accursed by a cowardly and covetous heart!
In you is villainy and vice, and virtue laid low!"
Then he grasps the green girdle and lets go the knot,
Hands it over in haste, and hotly he says:
"Behold there my falsehood, ill hap betide it!
Your cut taught me cowardice, care for my life,
And coveting came after, contrary both
To largesse and loyalty belonging to knights.
Now am I faulty and false, that fearful was ever
Of disloyalty and lies, bad luck to them both!
And greed." (1.2373-85)

Sir Gawain has learned that "the shadow cannot be eliminated and that "it is the ever-present dark brother or sister."

Jung, in Civilization in Transition, concludes the importance of the recognition and acceptance of this dark side of the soul which Sir Gawain has come to realize:

Recognition of the shadow... leads to the modesty we need in order to acknowledge imperfection. And it is just this conscious recognition and consideration that are needed whenever a human relationship is to
be established. A human relationship is not based on differentiation and perfection, for these only emphasize the difference or call forth the exact opposite; it is based, rather, on imperfection, on what is weak, helpless, and in need of support—the very ground and motive for dependence. The perfect has no need of others, but weakness has, for it seeks support and does not confront its partner with anything that might force him into an inferior position and even humiliate him. This humiliation may happen only too easily when high idealism plays too prominent a role. 49

Sir Gawain's high idealism has become the tarnished green girdle he now wears as a remembrance of his transformation experience: "And the bright green belt on his body he bore, / Oblique, like a baldric at his side, / Below his left shoulder, laced in a knot, / In betokening of the blame he had borne for his fault." (1.2485-88). Sir Gawain's acceptance of his Self as an imperfect being with weaknesses has resulted in a humbler and yet more perfect knight— one aware of his dark side as well as his bright side.
CHAPTER 4

Persona

Sir Gawain's role as a knight of King Arthur's court and his perfecting of this role in becoming the most noble, courteous knight is perhaps an instance of over role-playing--Sir Gawain has become infatuated with his image. This infatuation with one's role results in what Jung would call a "persona-possessed person." Whitmont defines the term "persona" as:

The term "persona," taken from Latin, refers to the ancient actor's mask which was worn in the solemn ritual plays. Jung uses the term to characterize the expressions of the archetypal drive toward an adaptation to external reality and collectivity. Our personas represent the roles we play on the worldly stage; they are the masks we carry through this game of living in external reality. The persona, as representational image of the adaptation archetype, appears in dreams in the images of clothes, uniforms, and masks. 50

The image of Sir Gawain is so much a part of him that his true self is never found until he himself recognizes his human element as separate from the impersonal, glorious knight whose role he plays. This upholding of his role results in his direct confrontation with the Green Knight, for in his abject way he paints his fellow knights' cowardice with words of excusable honor and presents himself as the humblest and the most readily-available sacrificial lamb of the lot.
When such a boon is begged before all these knights, 
Though you be tempted thereto, to take it on yourself 
While so bold men about upon benches sit, 
That no host under heaven ishardier ofwill,
No better brothers-in-arms where battle is joined; 
I am the weakest, well I know, and of wit feeblest; 
And the loss of my life would be least of any; 
That I have you for uncle is my only praise; 
My body, but for your blood, is barren of worth...(227)

Sir Gawain's stereotyped reaction to the situation is
defined by Whitmont:

... a role-identified nonpersonality fails to
develop a personal, moral responsibility; he has no
ethical principles or personal feelings and values of
his own but hides behind collective morality and
prescribed manners. He has no conflicts of conscience
because everything is settled beforehand in a stereotyped
fashion.

It is hard for this kind of a person, who usually
thinks of himself as abiding by the highest moral prin-
ciples, to realize that he is really immoral. It is
rather shocking to discover that something deep within
oneself may demand individual decision as the price
of individual risk. There is such a universal tendency
to confuse one's clothing with one's skin that this
differentiation becomes a crucial ethical problem.51

It is this union of Sir Gawain's persona and his reality
which results in his facing his true Self. Jung speaks of this
recognition of one's Self:

True, whoever looks into the mirror of the water will
see first of all his own face. Whoever goes to himself
risks a confrontation with himself. The mirror does
not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into
it; namely, the face we never show to the world because
we cover it with the "persona," the mask of the actor.
But the mirror lies behind the mask and shows the
true face.52

Sir Gawain with the help of his Shadow shall yet find his
reflection. He has fallen into the insidious trap which exists
for anyone who plays a fulfilling social role—he has confused
his role with his Ego. These two complimentary processes of individuation have become contradictory and their dead-locked forces result in Sir Gawain’s impasse with his fellow-knights, his king and himself. Whitmont writes of this impasse:

When individuality is thus confused with the social role, when the reality adaptation is not sufficiently individual but is wholly collective, the results may also often be a state of inflation. Its victim feels great and powerful because he is a fine public figure, but he fails to be a human being or even to make the first steps toward becoming human. Such as inflated over-reliance upon the persona, or identity with it, results in rigidity and lack of genuine responsiveness.53

To capture this over-illusive Self which his persona is denying, Sir Gawain must become aware of the reality of his armor/persona and the reality of his "Self":

This first persona pattern is made up of collective cultural codes of behavior and value judgments as they are expressed and transmitted through the parents; at this point parental demands and the demands of the outside world in general seem identical. In the course of adequate psychological development it is necessary for a differentiation between ego and persona to occur. This means that we have to become aware of ourselves as individuals apart from the external collective expectations and standards, though of course these standards must be given due regard. We have to discover that we can also use our representational clothes for protection and appearance but that we can also change into something more comfortable when it is appropriate and can be naked at other times.54

The armor of Sir Gawain represents more than simply functional clothing for role-playing. Though his armor reflects his status as the archetypal hero/knight, it has come to reflect his feelings and his reactions as well. The light reflected from his polished, golden armor has become confused
with the all-encompassing yet ever illusive light, which is hidden by the darkness of man's soul. Sir Gawain's physical appearance is described as: "When he had on his arms, his harness was rich;/ The least latchet or loop laden with gold/

...That glittered and glowed like the glorious sun." (232). And his moral appearance as: "Was Gawain in good works, as gold unalloyed,/ Devoid of all villainy, with virtues adorned/in sight" (233). Sir Gawain's apparent "virtues" are synonymous with his golden armor. His confusion of his armor and his "self" is one characteristic of an overly-identified persona:

...An inadequate relationship to the persona archetype may range from a fixation in its purely collective aspect to a rebellious refusal or inability to accept any collective adaptation or demand. Examples of dreams that express the former condition are those of being unable to take off one's clothes, of being stuck in heavy armor, of being over-dressed or of wearing heavy, over-decorated, gawdy clothes.

Sir Gawain's armor has become his golden window through which he views his society and himself; this is also a characteristic of the persona:

One of the most important forms is the phenomenon of possession: some content, an idea or a part of the personality, obtains mastery of the individual for one reason or another. ...A common instance of this is identity with the persona, which is the individual's system of adaptation to, or the manner he assumes in dealing with, the world.

In order to overcome the state of the persona, Sir Gawain must first physically remove his armor, enabling him to differentiate between the unconscious, spiritual armor of his
persona and his real “Self”. Jung expresses this need of spiritual nakedness:

The garment of Deianeira has grown fast to his skin, and a desperate decision like that of Hercules is needed if he is to tear this Nessus shirt from his body and step into the consuming fire of the flame of immortality, in order to transform himself into what he really is. One could say, with a little exaggeration, that the persona is that which in reality one is not, but which oneself as well as others think one is.27

Sir Gawain’s stripping of his golden armor can only come about through conscious realization of his real “Self”, which can only occur through the integration of his Shadow and his Persona. The contrast of Sir Gawain’s armor which “glitters and glows like the glorious sun” and the brilliant, natural greenness of the Green Knight is similar to the contrast discussed by Whitmont:

Collectivity and individuality are a pair of polar opposites; hence there is an oppositional and compensatory relationship between persona and shadow. The brighter the persona, the darker the shadow. The more one is identified with one’s glorified, wonderful social role, the less it is played and recognized as merely a role, the darker and more negative will be one’s genuine individuality as a consequence of its being thus neglected.58

Also interesting is the contrast between the armorless Green Knight who proclaims, when he comes to seek his slayer,

You may be certain by the branch that I bear in hand
That I pass here in peace, and would part friends,
For had I come to this court on combat bent,
I have a hauberk at home, and a helm beside,
A shield and a sharp spear, shining bright,
And other weapons to wield, I ween well, to boot,
But as I willed no war, I wore no metal (1.264-70)
and the well-protected Sir Gawain who is clad in His plate-armor of proof, polished with pains,
The rings of his rich mail rid of their rust
... Then twice with that token he twined him about
Sweetly did he swathe himself in that swatch of silk,
That girdle of green so goodly to see. (1.2017-35)

Sir Gawain leaves on his journey of transformation well-protected by his persona; only when he is without his armor, the process of transformation occurs.

The vulnerability of Sir Gawain as he lay caught in that state of dreamlessness, half between the unconsciousness of sleep and the awareness of waking, is the beginning of his persona's battle with the lovely lady. As he

Lingered late alone, till daylight gleamed,
Under coverlet costly, curtained about.
And as he slips into slumber, slyly there comes
A little din at his door, and the latch lifted
... Lo, it was the lady, loveliest to behold,
That drew the door behind her deftly and still
And was bound for his bed. . . (1180-9)

As Sir Gawain attempts to maintain his role as the most courteous knight without the aid of his armor, he finds himself failing in certain respects, for he cannot resist the beauty of the lady or her wiles. Sir Gawain's devotion to the nicety of his phrasing and not to the search of the reason for the lovely lady coming to his chamber allows the lovely lady the upper hand.

"But our guest is not Gawain--forgot is that thought."
"How so?" said the other, and asks in some haste,
For he feared he had been at fault in the forms of his speech.
But she held up her hand, and made answer thus:
"So good a knight as Gawain is given out to be,
And the model of fair demeanor and manners pure,
Had he lain so long at a lady's side,
Would have claimed a kiss, by his courtesy,
Through some touch or trick of phrase at some tale's end."
Said Gawain, "Good lady, I grant it at once!" (1293-1302)
Through the few exchanges and laughter is the transformation undertaken, for the most courteous knight's armor has developed a hairline crack which shall soon split asunder.

The hairline crack finally widens and opens when Sir Gawain accepts the gift of the green girdle. He accepts this gift not merely as a token but for its presumed powers of invulnerability:

That girdle of green so goodly to see,
That against the gay red showed gorgeous bright
Yet he wore not for its wealth that wondrous girdle,
... But to keep himself safe when consent he must
To endure a deadly dint, and all defense
Denied. (2035-42)

The protective powers of his armor/persona have diminished, and Sir Gawain finds he must turn against his own persona standards by relying on another form of protection, i.e., the green girdle. Whitmont speaks of this form of rebellion:

The conscious, wishful self-image of myself as a "good" person who always behaves properly, that is, "is good," continues to be determined by the persona ideals and sabotaged by the repressed "badness" (Shadow); or if I see myself as a rebel against parental standards, I still inadvertently acknowledge and adhere to these unconscious standards, in that I must react against them.39

The rebellion of Sir Gawain is a major instance in his transformation. Without this first crack in the armor the true Self cannot escape.

To achieve the vital balance between the persona and the shadow of Sir Gawain, he must unconsciously mature to the point of conscious recognition and acceptance of his shadow and also recognize the limiting effect of his inflated persona.
Until the recognition and acceptance are realized, Sir Gawain shall remain an unconscious child behind a facade of golden armor. Jung's point about this maturation process can be applied here:

Conscience becomes crystallized in those terms in which it happens to be experienced during the childhood stage and these will be predominantly persona values, since it is the external adaptation to parental values and demands and to the cultural standards of what is considered appropriate behavior that establishes the first sense of right and wrong. (Sometimes this outer standard can take rather grotesque forms in relation to the inner predisposition of the individual.) Conscience seems at first to be identical with persona and super-ego; a more individual conscience can be developed when the senses of one's identity becomes identical with the rational judgements of the ego as we reach middle life.

Sir Gawain does mature to this level of conscious recognition and his acceptance of the green girdle as both the symbol of his persona's death and individuation's rebirth can be interpreted as the key to his maturation:

"Behold, sir" said he [Sir Gawain], and handles the belt. "This is the blazon of the blemish that I bear on my neck; this is the sign of sore loss that I have suffered there for the cowardice and coveting that I came to there this is the badge of false faith that I was found in there." (2505-10)

Through the power of the rebirth of Sir Gawain's shadow, his persona has retreated and his mask has been dropped. Sir Gawain has found himself capable of cowardness and covetness; he has found himself capable of human error. This final shame of Sir Gawain has become his emblem of his recognition and of his true "Self"—Sir Gawain's symbol of weakness, the
green girdle, has become his symbol of his new-found strength, his individuation as Self instead of Persona.
Anima

For She is Earth Mother
holding man in her
psychic womb;
Siren, Lilith, Virgin Eve
Ever-birthing Yin
creating and killing
Yang in the
same spasm.

For She is the black hole
in eternity
Spinning worlds from
Non-Existence
all unconsciously.

For She is that soul of Man
which he desperately
turns from
And finally must turn to...
"Within each Adam is
his Eve."
Within each Soul
is She.

--Julia Heater
CHAPTER 5

The Anima

The role of the wife of Bercilak de Hautdesert is an important one in the terms of Sir Gawain's transformation, for she is the one in whom the ability lies to truly test Sir Gawain in that realm in which he has not been as aptly trained—the boudoir. Sir Gawain cannot face the test of seduction with the protection of his armor and lance; he must face this test with only his wits and his renowned courtesy. The seductive power of this comely lady and her testing of Sir Gawain when paralleled with Jung's description of the anima and her role in the integration of the personality reveal the true aspect of the seduction and its outcome. Without this testing and triumph of the anima the complete "wholeness" of the self cannot be achieved:

It belongs to him, this perilous image of Woman; she stands for the loyalty which in the interests of life he must forego; she is the much needed compensation for the risks, struggles, sacrifices that all end in disappointment; she is the solace for all the bitterness of life. And, at the same time, she is the great illusionist, the seductress, who draws him into life with her Maya—not only into life's reasonable and useful aspects, but into its frightful paradoxes and ambivalences where good and evil, success and ruin, hope and despair, counterbalance one another. Because she is his greatest danger she demands from a man his greatest, and if he has it in him she will receive it. This image is "My Lady Soul," as Spitler called her. I have suggested instead the term "anima," as indicating something specific, for which the expression "soul" is too general and too vague.
The seduction of Sir Gawain is a necessary part of integration and not until the final confrontation with the Green Knight does the importance of the seduction come into play with the symbolic reminder of the anima—the green baldric.

The unfaithfulness of Bercilak’s wife and her apparent interest in the knight of "comeliness and courtesies and courtly mirth" (1.1273) correspond with Jung’s description of the prowess of the anima:

She comes upon us just as a nixie might; she sits on top of us like a succubus; she changes into all sorts of shapes like a witch, in general displays and unbearable independence that does not seem at all proper in a psychic content. Occasionally she causes states of fascination that rival the best bewitchment, or unleashes terrors in us not to be outdone by any manifestation of the devil. She is a mischievous being who crosses our path in numerous transformations and disguises, playing all kinds of tricks on us, causing happy and unhappy delusions, depressions and ecstasies, outbursts of affect, etc. Even in a state of reasonable introjection the nixie has not laid aside her roguery. The witch has not ceased to mix her vile potions of love and death; her magic poison has been refined into intrigue and self-deception, unseen though none the less dangerous for that... With her cunning play of illusions the soul lures into life the inertness of matter that does not want to live. She makes us believe incredible things, that life may be lived. She is full of snares and traps, in order that man should fall, should reach the earth, entangle himself there, and stay caught, so that life should be lived; as Eve in the garden of Eden could not rest content until she had convinced Adam of the goodness of the forbidden apple.62

Her three attempts to "entangle" Sir Gawain are not simple seduction scenes for the sake of the courtly love tradition but rather for the sake of Sir Gawain and his necessary "fall." The fall must be brought about to enable recognition
of the shadow and recognition his own evil repressed behind a facade of courtesy:

Only out of disaster can the longing for the saviour arise—in other words, the recognition and unavoidable integration of the shadow create such a harrowing situation that nobody but a saviour can undo the tangled web of fate. In the case of the individual, the problem constellated by the shadow is answered on the plane of the anima, that is, through relatedness. In the history of the collective as in the history of the individual, everything depends on the development of consciousness. This gradually brings liberation from imprisonment in "a oia," 'unconsciousness,' and is therefore a bringer of light as well as healing. 

The role of the lady as "bringer of the light" or the one who brings recognition of the unconscious and admittance of its power is not realized until the "disaster" of Sir Gawain's psychic death and rebirth occurs at Green Chapel.

It is significant that the beautiful, young wife is introduced in the tale in the company of Morgan Lafay, the evil sorceress,

Then the lady that longed to look on the knight,
Came forth from her closet with her comely maids.
The fair hues of her flesh, her face and her hair
And her body and her bearing were beyond praise, and
excelled the queen herself, as Sir Gawain thought

... Another lady led her by the left hand
That was older than she— an ancient, it seemed
And held in high honor by all men about (1.941-49).

This obvious pairing off of the "fresh and faded," the seductress and the sorceress can be explained in terms of the nature of the anima:

By her very nature the anima exerts this arousing and numbing fascination; the lovely siren and the dreadful witch are inseparable. One or the other of these
qualities is likely to be accentuated, depending upon the nature of the personal actualization; but its opposite is rarely absent, it merely operates in a more concealed fashion.64

The role of Morgan Lafay is not as obvious as that of her younger counterpart but it is as important. The evil side of the anima exists, and even though it is often hidden by the seductress it still exerts tremendous power and in Sir Gawain's case provides the motivation for the Green Knight's journey to King Arthur's court. The nebulous nature of the unconscious and its projection in the form of the lovely lady can also be seen in the fact that Morgan Lafay led her by the left hand. Besides the "sinister" nature with which the left hand is regarded in medieval literature, it also represents the unconscious. As Jung, in Aion, points out,

The right, so to speak, is ruled by conscious reason: the right is "right" in all senses (upright, downright, forthright, etc.). The left is the side of the heart, the emotions, where one is affected by the unconscious.65

The husband and wife relationship of the Green Knight and the lady is also important in terms of the roles of the shadow and anima:

The shadow can be realized only through a relation to a partner, and anima and animus only through a relation to the opposite sex, because only in such a relation do their projections become operative.66

Though this pairing also provides a pivot for the seduction scenes and the duties of a guest toward his host, the special relationship of the anima and shadow should not be ignored.
The dangerousness and sense of inescapelessness of Sir Gawain's predicament are emphasized in a literal fashion by the seating arrangement during the feast of St. John's Day, "The old ancient lady, highest she sits;/ The lord at her left hand leaned, as I hear/ Sir Gawain in the center, beside the gay lady." (1001-4). Sir Gawain is trapped at the top by the evil aspect of his anima, who indeed has the upper hand, at the left side by his shadow, and on the right side by the siren aspect of his anima. The only means of escape is descent which Sir Gawain follows in his descent in "death" and "resurrection" at Green Chapel.

One can find it fitting that Sir Gawain's anima should be of such coyness and beauty enough to rival the queen, for as Sir Gawain is the "perfect" knight it only follows that his anima should be the perfect seductress, as indeed she is. Whitmont, in The Symbolic Quest, discusses the relation of the characteristics of the anima to the man:

A man may be partly aware of his full masculinity and a woman unaware of the full range of her femininity. Then the unconscious manifest personal characteristics may merge with, contaminate or modify animus or anima; the insufficiently masculine man is compensated by a masculine amazon-like anima, the mannish woman by an effeminate or weak animus. Since Sir Gawain is fully aware of his masculinity then so should his anima be a totally feminine being.

The three bedroom scenes which first appear to Sir Gawain as a case of simple seduction or temptation soon prove to be otherwise. Yet Sir Gawain's mistaken thoughts and his
inability to seek the true motivation of the lady are in accordance with the emotions elicited by the anima:

As a pattern of emotion the anima consists of the man's unconscious urges, his moods, emotional aspirations, anxieties, fears, inflations and depressions, as well as his potential for emotion and relationship. . . . In this form the anima represents a man's relatively unadapted, hence inferior, world of nature and emotional involvement, loves and hates. Consequently the objective psyche presents itself to the man at first as a totally irrational, dangerously primitive, chaotic temptation, as an enchanting seduction.68

Sir Gawain treats the lady with courtesy and yet is more concerned with a lapse in his moral conscience and duty to his host than with the unaparent true motivation of the lady, "His courtesy concerned him, lest crass he appear/ But more his soul mischief, should he commit sin/ And belie his loyal oath to the lord of that house" (1.1773-75). The lady's unconcern with any sort of moralistic behaviour puzzles Sir Gawain to some extent, but not to any serious length. This unmoralistic approach of the anima towards Sir Gawain is in keeping with the anima's character:

The anima is the serpent in the paradise of harmless man with good resolutions and still better intentions. It affords the most convincing foundation for the prejudice against dealing with the unconscious, according to which moral inhibitions will be destroyed and forces let loose that had better been left in the unconscious. For life in itself is not something good; it is more than that, it is also evil. In that the anima wishes life it wishes good and bad. In the domain of elfin being, these categories do not exist. Not only the bodily life, but psychic life as well, has the impudence to get along without current morality--often much better so--and even to become healthier and more beautiful without it.69
Sir Gawain's "better intentions" soon find themselves disposed for the green baldric and its magic portents.

Sir Gawain's unrecognition of his anima and the reckonings therein is shown in the blitheness of his courteous speech to the lovely lady during the first bedroom scene, "'Good morning, good lady,' said Gawain the blithe/ 'Be it with me as you will; I am well content!/ For I surrender myself, and sue for your grace,/ And that is best, I believe, and behooves me now.'" (1.1213-7). The irony of his words becomes apparent during his encounter with the Green Knight when he realizes how much he has indeed surrendered and if it is truly "for the best." During this emotional encounter recognition takes place, for as Jung points out, this recognition is of all importance to achieving Sir Gawain's wholeness of his Self:

This knowledge [or recognition of the unconscious] is an essential prerequisite for any integration—that is to say a content can only be integrated when its double aspect has become conscious and when it is grasped not merely intellectually but understood according to its feeling-value. Intellect and feeling, however, are difficult to put into one harness—they conflict with one another by definition. Whoever identifies with an intellectual standpoint will occasionally find his feeling confronting him like an enemy in the guise of the anima. . . . Therefore, anyone who wants to achieve the difficult feat of realizing something not only intellectually, but also according to its feeling-value, must for better or worse come to grips with the anima/animus problem in order to open the way for a higher union, a "coniunctio oppositorum." This is an indispensable prerequisite for wholeness.

While the anima is unrecognized by Sir Gawain, her true aim is perhaps revealed in the several ambiguous mentions of
her motives. During the first bedroom scene she says that "I direct you better:/ I shall hem and hold you on either hand/ And keep company awhile with my captive knight" (1223-5) and she does indeed exert a psychic hold upon her "captive knight." Though her directions lead to his "death," the lady does indeed "direct him better." One should also notice that during this same scene she is described as "languishing in the likeness of love" (1281) and it is the "likeness" which makes the difference. During the second bedroom scene she is described as "The lady, with guile in heart/ Came early where he lay/ She was at him with all her art/ To turn his mind her way" (1472-6) as she does attempt "to turn his mind" long enough to allow her role to play its part, not only as seductress but as saviour in Sir Gawain's own process of individuation. Another ambiguous reference is made toward her motivation in 1.1549-50, "Thus she tested his temper and tried many a time,/ Whatever her true intent, to entice him to sin," but in a Jungian light her intent is clear: if not the physical seduction of Sir Gawain then nothing less than his psychic seduction will do. Another ironic note can be found in 1.1660-3 during the second banquet scene when Sir Gawain attempts in his courteous-handed way to deal with his host's wife's advances: "That he was at his wit's end, and wondrous vexed/ But he could not in conscience her courtship repay/ Yet took pains to please her, though the plan might go wrong." The plan of Sir Gawain's in his attempt to soothe
both the lady and his conscience runs as an ironic under-
current to the plans of the lady— which do not go wrong.

A foreshadowing of the events at Green Chapel is revealed
in Sir Gawain's disturbed slumber filled with "black dreams"
(1756). And when he is awakened by the one who shall bring
about a reckoning between Sir Gawain and his dark dreams, she
exclaims "The morning is so clear!" (1747). The morning is
indeed clear for the lady, but shall grow successively gloomy
for Sir Gawain when he accepts his anima's "love"-gift. When
giving the green girdle, she understates the meaning of it
by remarking "you gain less thereby." (1829). Sir Gawain
does seem at first to have gained less glory and more trouble
in his acceptance of the baldric but perhaps for the purpose
of individuation he has gained more than he knows. Sir Gawain
accepts the token of the lady not as symbol of love but a
source of protection: "When he gains the Green Chapel to
get his reward/ Could he escape, the scheme were noble" (1857-8).
Ironically, it is the protective baldric with its hidden
"virtue" (1.1849) that prevents his escape and provides his
reward.

Carl Jung's description of the death motif and the role
played therein by the anima is echoed in the despair of Sir
Gawain in his venture at Green Chapel:

It is a moment of collapse. We sink into a final
depth—Apuleius calls it "a kind of voluntary death."
It is a surrender of our own powers, not artificially
willed but forced upon us by nature; not a volun-
tary submission and humiliation decked in moral
garb but an utter and unmistakable defeat crowned
with the panic fear of demoralization. Only when all props and crutches are broken, and no cover from threat offers even the slightest hope of security, does it become possible for us to experience an archetype that up till then had laid hidden behind meaningful nonsense played out by the anima. This is the "archetype of meaning," just as the anima is the archetype of life itself.71

Sir Gawain does surrender to nature in the form of the Green Knight and finally is forced to recognition of that danger which he early scoffed at: "Though he be a quarrelsome knave/ With a cudgel great and grim." (1.2136-7). It is only after Sir Gawain is without the slightest form of protection, with his neck bared, that he is able to comprehend the true essence of the lady's flirtation and how his courtesy has not saved him but instead his very human need of survival has brought him to recognition of his humanness, Sir Gawain finally makes a confession of all until he is absolved of the blame of his weakness and as "free of fault since first you were born" (1.2394). When Sir Gawain attempts to rationalize his misdeed by placing the blame upon the temptress, he lists methodically the downfall of all the past great men by women they have loved: "For so was Adam by one, when the world began/ And Solomon by many more, and Samson the mighty-/ Delilah was his doom, and David thereafter/ Was beguiled by Bathsheba, and bore much distress" (1.2416-9). In that listing Sir Gawain unrealistically reiterates not only the past great men but also the past great animas. Perhaps there still hangs in the air a mist of confusion but even this mist reveals solid truths.
Thus the anima and life itself are meaningless insofar as they offer no interpretation. Yet they have a nature that can be interpreted, for in all chaos there is a cosmos, in all disorder a secret order, in all caprice a fixed law, for everything that works is grounded on its opposite. It takes man's discriminating understanding which breaks everything down into antinomial judgements, to recognize this. Once he comes to grips with the anima, her chaotic capriciousness will give him cause to suspect a secret order, to sense a plan, a meaning, a purpose over and above her nature, or even—we might almost be tempted to say—to "postulate" such a thing, though this would not be in accord with the truth.\footnote{72}

There existed an unconscious order behind all the love babblings of the lovely lady and hopefully Sir Gawain shall realize to a great extent the true "frailty of the flesh perverse" rather than the simple sin of pride. For in time, the baldric itself might lose its original meaning and degenerate into a simple token of ceremony worn by a most courteous knight. For Sir Gawain has not only survived the "death-dealing" blow of the shadow but has made peace with his anima—which is a greater accomplishment. Jung, in The Integration of the Personality, tells of the importance of this coming to terms:

If the coming to terms with the shadow is the companion-piece to the individual's development, then that with the anima is the masterpiece. For the relation with the anima is again a test of courage and—more than that—a test by fire of all a man's spiritual and moral forces.\footnote{73}

Sir Gawain rides away with his green baldric and a slight wound on his neck as mementos of Green Chanel, but hopefully he rides away with some realization of his own dark side
and his ability to do evil. For the green baldric, though it shows to be an outward symbol, is sorely won and the baldrics worn by the other members of the round table "as a token" can only be regarded as a lower order of honor—not as a badge of rebirth.
REFERENCE NOTES

Chapter 1


2 Ibid., p. 135.

3 Ibid., p. 136.

4 Marie Borroff, trans., Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, The Norton Anthology of English Literature, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1967), I, p. 223. All page references are to this work Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and will hereafter be noted in parentheses in the text.


7 Cirlot, op cit., p. 53.

8 Ibid., p. 51-2.

9 Ibid., p. 50.

10 Ibid., p. 51.

11 Ibid., p. 53.


13 Guerin, op cit., p. 121.

14 Bodkin, op cit., p. 79.

15 Ibid., p. 72.

16 Guerin, op cit., p. 136.
Chapter 2


18Ibid., p. 123.


22Ibid., p. 247.


24Ibid., p. 82.

25Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 327.

26Ibid., p. 275.

27Ibid., p. 291-3.

28Ibid., pp. 326-7.

29Ibid., p. 219.


31Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 218.


33Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 389.

34Jung, Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious, p. 135.
Chapter 3

37 Whitmont, op cit., p. 160.
39 Whitmont, op cit., p. 163.
40 Ibid., p. 225.
41 Ibid., p. 162.
42 Ibid., p. 280.
43 Ibid., p. 165.
44 Ibid., p. 166.
46 Ibid., p. 167.
47 Whitmont, op cit., p. 164.
48 Ibid., p. 199.

Chapter 4

50 Whitmont, op cit., p. 156.
51 Ibid., p. 158.
52 Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 20.
53 Whitmont, op cit., p. 158.
54 Ibid., p. 156.
55 Ibid., p. 158.
57 Ibid., p. 123.
58 Whitmont, op cit., p. 159.
59 Ibid., p. 252.
60 Jung, Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious, p. 122.

Chapter 5

61 Jung, Aion, p. 13.
63 Ibid., pp. 271-2.
64 Whitmont, op cit., p. 192.
65 Jung, Aion, p. 258n.
66 Ibid., p. 22.
67 Whitmont, op cit., p. 178.
68 Ibid., p. 180.
69 Jung, Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious, p. 77.
70 Jung, Aion, p. 31.
71 Jung, Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious, p. 32.
72 Ibid., p. 32.
73 Ibid., pp. 78-9.
LIST OF WORKS CITED


