

KNIGHTHOOD IN A CARL'S HOUSE:
CHIVALRY AND DOMESTICITY IN
*SIR GAWAIN AND THE CARL OF CARLISLE*¹

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When a murdering giant is not killed by the medieval romance hero but instead becomes a knight of the Round Table, one really ought to wonder why. Such a situation arises in the under-appreciated poem *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle* (*SGCC*), a short romance probably composed around the year 1400. However, few critics have offered a clear reason behind the giant's entry to the nobility.² Yet surely a monstrous commoner rising to knighthood would have been a topic of interest to the nobility, gentry, and economic elite who formed the primary audience of late medieval romance.³ Since the genre of romance reflects the historical and social concerns of its audience, the interaction between the titular giant, the Carl of Carlisle, and that most perfect knight, Sir Gawain, within *SGCC* can serve as a means for a modern reader to comprehend more fully the ways in which the original audience understood the interaction of individuals and institutions across social boundaries. Specifically, *SGCC* offers a glimpse at a particular issue that was of some concern for the nobility and commons alike: the potential conflict between a traditional ideal of chivalry and the economics of the household, a necessary but somewhat questionable aspect of the lifestyles of both the nobility and the gentry. Tension between chivalry and domesticity is not new to romance, and *SGCC* depicts that tension even as it seeks to reconcile the two concepts in an effort to better reflect the situation of the nobility at the end of the fourteenth century. In *Arts of Possession: The Middle English Household Imaginary*, D. Vance Smith argues that romance is directly related to the social issue of domestic space ("English romances change under the pressure of a particular set of problems

having to do with the household . . .”) and that the major problem at issue is the definition of the household, particularly “the problem of delimitation that takes on the particular shape of a concern over surplus in the Middle Ages.”⁴ *SGCC* seeks to solve the problem of domestic surplus and relieve the tension between the household and the chivalric by shifting the emphasis of knighthood away from an older, more martial form of self-expression and towards a more imitable and economically driven form. Gawain facilitates an idealized path by which the overly material and domestic giant, the Carl of Carlisle, can become a knight of the Round Table by redefining domestic success as chivalric worth. Through the Carl’s adoption into the nobility, this romance reflects the need in fourteenth-century England to understand economic and domestic development as a legitimate and recognizable form of chivalric expression.

Since *SGCC* is not a well-known romance, a brief review of the plot will be useful before proceeding. *SGCC* opens with King Arthur and his knights enjoying the hunt at Cardiff. Sir Gawain, Sir Kay, and Bishop Baldwin are separated from the larger group and find themselves lost in the forest. While considering where to spend the night, the Bishop describes a fine dwelling nearby ruled by the Carl of Carlisle, a deadly giant. They seek the castle despite the danger, only to have the rather ferocious and threatening Carl invite them in and offer them an enormous feast. During the feast, Kay, the Bishop, and Gawain each go out in turn to see to their horses. A small foal is feeding in the stable alongside the horses, but only Gawain treats it with respect. The Carl is impressed by Gawain’s treatment of the foal and later invites Gawain to first strike him with a spear, then woo his wife, and finally bed his daughter. Gawain does all these tasks and in the morning the Carl reveals that he had vowed to kill all who stay with him until he found someone who would obey him in his own house. Now that Gawain has fulfilled his commands, the Carl is free to interact with the knights peacefully. The Carl bestows gifts upon Kay and Baldwin, offers his daughter’s hand in marriage to Gawain, and sends them back to Arthur. The tale ends happily with Arthur knighting the Carl, all of Arthur’s knights returning to their various homes, and the Carl building a monastery where monks will forever pray for those the Carl has killed.

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Clearly, *SGCC* has all the elements of a fantastical and enjoyable romance, but the text also explores chivalric identification through martial performance from the onset of the action. The text opens with a short preamble in praise of Gawain and then lists the knights of the round table as they go to the hunt. Besides Gawain, only Sir Ironside gets a lengthy description in the first hundred lines of the poem, and his description offers the audience a traditional ideal of chivalry:

Ironsyde, as I wene,
I-armyd he wolde ryde full clene,
Wer þe sonn nevyr so hoot.
In wyntter he wolde armus bere;
Gyanntus and he wer euer at were
And allway at þe debate.
Fabele Honde hyzt ys stede
.....
He coude mor of venery and of wer
Then all the kyngus þat wer ther,
Full oft asay hem he wolde.
Brennynge dragons hade he slayn,
And wylde bullus many won
That gresely wer iholde. (73- 79, 85- 90)⁵

Much of the rest of his description not quoted here is devoted to his coat of arms, the visible marker of his chivalric identity, and to his begetting a son. The quoted passage focuses on the knight conforming to his militaristic identity regardless of season or weather. Ironside is a knight in motion. He is constantly out of doors, and, as his never-ending feud with the giants suggests, he is in perpetual combat. Even his knowledge is focused on outdoor pursuits: war and hunting. His chivalric identity is constantly being enacted, making him a knight in keeping with the non-economic chivalric traditions of romance. The narrative describing him places him in a house only once, and then only to beget a son (67-72). Ironside may require the household to perpetuate his mode of existence into the next generation, but otherwise the domestic space has nothing to do with establishing his identity. Ironside's chivalry is marked by a restless need to enact his

knighthood, which precludes any sort of domestic space that would confine the knight and restrict him from performing his role.⁶

Ironside performs the role of knight through martial expression, a method in keeping with historical understanding of the knightly ideal. In *The Performance of Self*, Susan Crane uses a variety of historical texts, including romance, to highlight two primary factors through which knights obtained and maintained their chivalric identity: blood and performance.⁷ The former was a birthright and provided the impetus to chivalric life. The latter was a set of actions that had to be performed perpetually in order to maintain one's status. Ironside's description makes use of these sources of knightly identity as described by Crane: it specifies the knight's coat of arms, the symbol of his blood, it notes his relationship to a lady, and it emphasizes his martial performance. Indeed, while Crane suggests that any sort of courtly behavior, including courtly love, could encode chivalric identity, *SGCC* emphasizes martial performance above all else in its description of Ironside, further driving the knight away from the household. The audience may see in the text a comparison between chivalry at the beginning of the narrative and chivalry at the end. Ironside enacts chivalry exclusively through performative martial markers. By the end of the narrative, Ironside will be open to criticism because he does not utilize domestic space as a means of demonstrating his chivalry.

Sir Kay, like Sir Ironside, demonstrates the potential for conflict between the chivalric and the domestic by going so far as to assume that the household is subject to the martial knight's authority. Kay's chivalric character is suspect; he is traditionally the least courteous of Arthur's knights. However, his attitude toward the household is not far removed from the dismissal of the domestic found in the description of Ironside. When the knights are lost in the woods, Gawain is ready to sleep there, but Kay hopes to find shelter: "We schall haue harbrowe or we gon. / Dar no man wern hit me" (137-38). Later, when the bishop describes the Carl, Kay's reaction is to suggest that they are capable of taking what is not offered: "And zeyf he be neuer so stovte, / We woll hym bette all abowt / And make his beggyng bar" (157-59). Kay suggests that every sufficiently imposing knight deserves hospitality and, if it is not offered, then it is appropriate to take it. Before the Carl even enters into the text, the chivalric and the domestic have been

separated and, in Kay's rapacious mood, set at odds. In the absence of the domestic, in the idealized concept of Ironside, and in Kay's sense of entitlement, the audience may perceive a problem with Arthur's court as depicted in *SGCC*: its inability to account for domestic space.

The conflict between the chivalric, which fails to recognize economic issues, and the domestic, which is ultimately an aspect of economics, is a concern throughout the fourteenth century. Smith points out that the Middle English poem *Winner and Waster* posits a definition of gentility dependent upon heredity and martial performance, not economic concerns. As Smith explains, "The 'gentle' use of arms as signs only confirms a privilege that excludes, almost by definition, any involvement in economic activity. . . ." ⁸ Similarly, David Starkey suggests that the expression of gentility was magnificence, and magnificence "requires a willing suspension of calculation" (256). Knights were not to consider economic issues when making decisions; rather, their response to any choice was to be determined by pre-existing expectations of knightly behavior. The chivalric class had means of establishing identity other than economic concerns. As Smith states in regards to romances: "we find . . . the relation between merchants and gentry (particularly knights) represented as a dialectical one, the confrontation of economic and social goods (or capital) represented as a matter of class distinction" (21). Smith does not rest upon his observation but goes on to point out the error of such simplistic opposition. Kate Mertes, dealing with the aftermath of the changes of the fourteenth century, explains: "The reconciliation of magnificence and economy was a chief problem to the fifteenth-century English aristocracy, one that frequently centered on the important but expensive household—itself usually the lord's greatest expense" (104). Thus, by the fifteenth century, a well-balanced chivalric house was one aware of its economic situation. But despite the reality of the situation, keeping account of finances was antithetical to the romance ideal of the chivalric class, in which consideration of the economic situation did not directly enter into self-identification. ⁹

Like *Winner and Waster*, the first half of *SGCC* suggests that domesticity and chivalry are antithetical, and, even as the chivalric—in the form of Sir Kay—may threaten the domestic, so too can the domestic threaten the chivalric. Once Bishop Baldwin, Sir Kay, and Sir

Gawain reach the Carl's household, they find that the household Kay had dismissed is very dangerous. The giant Carl and his domestic space are inextricably joined, combining images of opulent materialism and comfort with the threat of the monstrous figure that kills knights regularly. The Carl keeps four ferocious beasts: a lion, a boar, a bear, and a bull, which the Carl refers to as "whelpys" (235), suggesting their position as pets. They are at once part of the domestic space and threatening creatures that romance heroes routinely battle. Moreover, the materiality of the Carl's castle is emphasized along with the physical presence of the dangerous giant. The text offers detailed descriptions of the gold that makes both the Carl's cup and his bedclothes (292-97 and 442-47). Similarly, the Carl is described extensively and his great size is emphasized:

He semyd a dredful man:
Wytt chekus longe and vesage brade;
Cambur nose, and all ful made,
Betwyne his browus a large spane,
His mo3th moche, his berd graye,
Ouer his brest his lockus lay
As brod as anny fane." (249-53)

He has all the traits of a giant with a bearing more in keeping with a churl than one who holds a castle and a wealthy household. Similarly, the metaphor that compares his beard to a fan creates a domestic image even as it emphasizes the Carl's size. Continuing to develop the Carl's link to the domestic as well as his material reality as a giant, the poem takes note of the number of gallons the Carl's various golden goblets can hold in line 283 and again in lines 293 and 295. The specific description of the material object parallels the description of the span of the Carl's shoulders and his height in specific "taylloris yerdus" (257-59). The two descriptions help unite the Carl with his domestic possessions, and the relationship becomes more explicit when the Carl, in his excessive materiality, becomes conflated with his house. As his extreme dimensions are made explicit, his legs are compared to the substance of the house's timbers: "Ther was no post in þat hall / Grettyst growand of hem all / But his þeys wer þycker" (262-64). The

conflation of limbs to housing structure implies the intimate relationship between the Carl and his domicile. Here the monstrous and the pleasingly domestic are joined and the text invites the audience to consider the domestic as both desirable and dangerous.

Because of the combination of danger and domesticity, the Carl and his household present a particularly difficult challenge to the knights visiting his home. They cannot fight, as they are guests in a domestic space, yet they are clearly threatened by the giant. Gawain steps up to the Carl's challenge and serves as mediator between the domestic space and the more traditional model of the chivalric knight. Gawain is able to respond properly to the Carl because of his most famous attribute: his courtesy. Yet, Gawain's courtesy here does not necessarily signal a recognition of his host's social status; rather, it is an awareness of property and economic ownership that transcends social boundaries. Courtesy becomes an understanding of domestic space.

The question of courtesy is central to *SGCC*: both Gawain and the Carl seek to take chivalric courtesy and redefine it from a domestic point of view. T. Brandsen defines courtesy within the text as a respect for the Carl's sovereignty (299). However, the sequence of events suggests that 'carl's courtesy' is far more closely linked to specific economic questions than to the social concept of sovereignty, despite the fact that courtesy first appears to be based on social behavior. Gawain first breaks down the social barrier between churl and knight by attempting to enact his courtesy with respect to the Carl as he kneels before the giant:

And [the Carl] bad hyme [Gawain] stond vpe anon.
'Lett be Ði knellynge, gentyll knyzt;
Thow logost wytt a carll tonyzt,
I swer, by sennt Iohnn.
For her no corttessy Pou schalt have,
but carllus corttessy, so God me save,
for serttus I can non.' (273-79)

The Carl conflates Gawain's actions with a form of courtesy that is enacted to distinguish social groups and points out that it is

inappropriate in a churl's house. Yet, Gawain was enacting courteous behavior across social boundaries, indicating an unbiased form of courtesy that transcends social structures. Further, the Carl's profession of being ignorant of courtesy ("I can non") is contradicted in the same set of lines. The Carl does know courtesy, for he has defined his own code of behavior as "carl's courtesy." He has displaced the chivalric mode of behavior as enacted by Gawain's kneeling with his own conception of proper behavior, which involves acting independently of social status and recognizing property.

After Gawain makes the initial move to translate chivalric courtesy into the Carl's domestic space, he continues to navigate his position between the chivalric and the domestic, remaining humble instead of demanding the hospitality Kay feels is owed a knight. Beyond kneeling to the supposedly socially subordinate Carl, Gawain also gains the Carl's approval by taking care of the Carl's foal. The Carl confirms his own idea of courtesy when he strikes both Bishop Baldwin and Kay when they abuse the foal. When Bishop Baldwin protests that he is a clerk, the Carl replies: "zett cannyst Pou nozt of cortessyze" (314); and to Kay, he warns, "Euyll-tavzt knyztus / . . . I schall teche þe or þou wend away / Sum of my cortessye" (328-30). These two figures are ignorant of courtesy from the Carl's point of view. They may be courteous in that they acknowledge their own socially granted rights as they both assume the high places at the table without invitation, but they lack the form of respect that the Carl acknowledges to be a form of "carl's courtesy." Unlike Kay or Baldwin, when Gawain finds the foal, he covers it with his own mantle and says, "Stond vpe, fooll, and eette thy mette, / We spend her þat thy master dothe gett, / Whyll þat we her byne" (349-51). The Carl thanks him for his behavior, but it is not simply polite respect for the Carl or acceptance of the Carl's sovereignty in his own house that is "carl's courtesy," though such issues are important. Rather, Gawain's courtesy is a mode of behavior that arises from Gawain's understanding of the economic impact he has on the Carl's household. Romances often assume a universal surplus of goods, allowing for infinite gestures of hospitality.¹⁰ Here, however, Gawain acknowledges the possible finite nature of the Carl's household despite the earlier show of extravagance.

Gawain's oddly realistic understanding that what the knights devour is the result of what "thy master gets" is courtesy.

Gawain knows how to enact "carl's courtesy" because, within *SGCC*, he understands domestic economy. At the beginning of the narrative, the text does not describe Gawain in terms of the hunt as it describes so many of Arthur's other knights at this point in the text. Rather, the text notes that "Sir Gawen was stwarde of the halle, / He was master of hem all / and buskyde hem bedenne" (146-48). Traditionally, Kay serves as Arthur's seneschal, his domestic administrator. However, in *SGCC*, Gawain has the domestic job: he is both steward of the hall and master of the knights.¹¹ Gawain, the perfect knight, embodies a form of chivalry different than that of his fellows, a form that embraces the household. Historically, the steward of the king's household had control over the servants, decided right modes of behavior, and had jurisdiction over those supplying purveyance for the traveling household.¹² As steward, Gawain must be aware of domestic affairs, and particularly he must be aware of the cost of supplying food for guests and the effects the aristocratic household might have upon geographic space. By giving Gawain the role of steward, the poem links an understanding of economic concerns with the traditionally courteous knight. Gawain's position and his behavior allow him to bridge the gap between the Carl's domesticity and his own chivalric reputation.

As the Carl redefines chivalric courteousness, he also begins to break down the traditional chivalric ideal more generally by testing Gawain further. Once Gawain returns to the feast after taking care of his horse, the Carl commands that Gawain strike him with a spear, embrace his wife, and sleep with his daughter. In each instance the text takes a moment to express Gawain's delight in performing each of the tasks. Yet, even as the Carl asks Gawain to perform, he also controls Gawain's actions, reprimanding him lightly, ensuring that Gawain does not go too far when he and the Carl's wife are in bed together. The Carl is putting Gawain through his paces, asking him to demonstrate both his martial and his amorous skills. Brandsen optimistically suggests that "the tests . . . bring out the best in [Gawain], but while obeying the host's orders he also shows some of the great individual qualities of a noble knight" (305). Jeffrey Jerome Cohen sees the tests in a much

different light: "Gluttony, lust, homicide: these are the sins of gigantism. . . . Even as Gawain explicates 'courtesy,' the courtliness that is supposed to construct a proper chivalric subject, Gawain occupies the textual position of the monster" (162). These two readings appear to be in direct contrast. Yet, martial performance of chivalric identity lends itself already to the monstrous; Gawain's giant-like actions are also Brandsen's demonstrations of knightly qualities. The conflation of knightly activities with monstrousness is intentional. These are the deeds that enact chivalric identity but, because Gawain appears to be a puppet controlled by the figure that is, by appearance and behavior, excluded from the chivalric world, the behavior becomes recognizable as monstrous and open to criticism. Enacting the chivalric for the domestic Carl reveals the absurdity of those very activities that demonstrate knighthood out of doors. They become laughable and inappropriate in the domestic space, while the Carl's material wealth seems a more worthy sign of nobility. As a means of performing chivalry, his domestic existence is far more real, imitable, and stable than military performance, and so the text ends with the court's recognition of the household.

When the Carl is at last reconciled to the Round Table, the pre-existing chivalric world, personified in Arthur, accepts the domestic as a means of performing nobility. At the feast the Carl holds in the king's honor, the material surplus of the Carl, earlier seen in his massive body, is now represented by the multitude of dishes and the material wealth found in the structure of his hall. Unlike the actions of Ironside, the Carl's materiality is fixed in the domestic space, yet Arthur is sufficiently impressed to equate the Carl's surplus with nobility:

The Kynge swore: "By Seynte Myghelle,
This Dynere lykythe me as welle
As any þat euyr Y fonde."
A dubbyd hym [the Carl] knyght on þe morne;
The centre of Carelyle he zafe hym sone
To be lorde of þat lande." (625-30)

The tight juxtaposition of the king enjoying the feast with the Carl's knighthood stresses that domestic surplus used for hospitality and

nobility is equitable. While the Carl does not perform traditional chivalric acts, his hospitality is enough to garner legitimacy and recognition.¹³ The absence of the domestic felt at the beginning of the poem is now filled by the presence of the Carl and his ability to feast the king and his knights with lavish materiality. The economic household is now part of the knightly mode of existence.

While the Carl is made legitimate by the figures of the previously existing chivalric norm, he still retains those qualities that made him threatening in the first place, demonstrating that chivalry, not the household, has changed. The tremendous cup of wine reappears at the final feast, reminding the audience that the Carl is still a giant. Further, though the Carl may greet the king on bended knee as Gawain had met him, the Carl is also ready to command the king towards enjoyment: "The carle seyde to þe kynge, 'Dothe gladly. / Here get ye no noþir curtesy, / As I vndirstonde'" (619-21). This line recalls the declaration of "carl's courtesy" as if to imply that it is not courtesy as defined by the Carl that has changed but the understanding of the knights receiving it. The Carl, as the representative of domestic space, may accept legitimacy from Arthur's hand, yet legitimacy is possible not because the Carl has changed but because chivalry recognizes the value of the domestic.

In *SGCC*, the romance genre has adapted to the reality of the changing social framework of England's aristocracy. For many members of the chivalric class, economic standing was the deciding factor in their social identity and the household became the means of expressing that identity. The situation in England was unique in terms of the development of the baronial and gentle orders. Movement between the commons and the baronial class in both directions was relatively easy and occurred frequently.¹⁴ While the romance ideal of chivalric self-identification did not include economic considerations, English law of the fourteenth century very much defined participation in the chivalric class through economic standing. Moreover, English law could demand that those land-holders who generated sufficient wealth be made knights. Both King Edward III and King Richard II issued writs of distraint, orders for those making more than a particular amount a year to become knights (Smith 25-43). Through the fourteenth century the number of great households increased

dramatically as a result of such laws.¹⁵ Thus, for many members of the chivalric class, domestic economy was the deciding factor in their social position and intimately connected to their sense of identity.

Arthur recognizes the Carl's intimate connection with the domestic space at the moment he dubs him a knight and, in so doing, acknowledges the value of private ownership of the household. Arthur states, "Here I make Þe yn Þis stownde / A knyght of Þe Table Rownde, / Karlyle Þi name schalle be" (631-33). Arthur takes responsibility here for that which already exists: he identifies the Carl with the location of his home. Beyond the similarity of sounds, the Carl already possessed the land. However, in the simultaneous act of naming and knighting, Arthur recognizes and accepts the totality of the Carl's possession. The threat of the giant possessing the land is long standing. Cohen writes of the episode from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, in which Arthur kills the giant of St. Michael's Mont. He states that, in cutting off the giant's head, Arthur has changed the dynamic of power: "The giant's threat of anarchy . . . installed beneath the aegis of monarchy, becomes the king's power over individualism" (67). While knighting the Carl brings him under the king's control, it is not the same ultimate control that appears in either the St. Michael's Mont episode or in the analogous romance, *Carle of Carlisle*. In both cases, the giant is beheaded and the threat of his individuality ends, either because he is slain or because beheading has transformed the giant into a figure more easily recognizable as a knight who can then be made part of the established structure of the Arthurian court.¹⁶ A king triumphing over individualism is precisely what does not happen in *SGCC*, in which there is no beheading or transformation. Instead of destroying individual control, Arthur embraces it and confirms Smith's theory of possession: "The uncanniness of possession means that one can only fully possess while not knowing that one possesses, and the proximity of the object and the self collapses the relation between the two, folding together property and the Proper, goods and the self."¹⁷ The Carl is totally identified with his goods; there is no break between his identity and his territory. Even as his body is conflated with the domestic space, so his name encompasses the land he rules. He possesses completely because he is his possessions. In giving the Carl the name of his land, Arthur makes such ownership a

part of chivalric identity. As in the historic situation of fourteenth-century England, what a landowner owns, not what he does, determines his position in society.

The household was at once the center of individual economy and a signifier for personal identity. Those in the baronial class of England had consistently understood their possession of land as constitutive of their identity as members of the chivalric order. Crane asserts: "Throughout the period of the romances of English heroes . . . baronial society was based on landholding" (*Insular* 23). Further, the house itself was becoming as much a representation of chivalric identity as martial prowess. Woolgar suggests that Richard II attempted to support his kingship through ritual and through the expansion of his household (198). A king's household required substantial expenditure, for conceptions of identity became intimately linked with notions of economy in the domestic space. Similarly, Mertes argues that the aristocrat of the medieval period used the domestic to advertise social position:

By keeping a luxurious house and a generous table, by dressing servants in fine livery, by displaying a large following, a lord was able to assert his nobility, proclaim his wealth, and advertise his power, thus attracting clients and gaining respect. (103)

The nobility used the household as a means of communicating who they were; it was a means of identification. Domestic space in the late fourteenth century, as representative of both identity and economy, was becoming as much an indicator of chivalric standing as either martial performance or aristocratic heritage.

By the end of the poem the Carl is an imitable figure, offering a new way to define chivalry, which the knights adopt. The knights accept the need to reinforce their own identity through contact with their own households: "And when þe feste was brouȝte to ende, / Lordis toke here leve to wende / Homwarde on here way" (647-48). While the nature of the lords' homes is ambiguous, it seems that the knights separate and return to their points of origin, to their own lands. They have learned to value the household enough to seek it rather than

a continued existence outside of the domestic space, their condition at the onset of the poem. The audience may realize that the performance of Sir Ironside, which took place entirely outside of the household, is no longer the best model for achieving nobility now that the performance of the Carl has been embraced by the king and his knights. Even as the knights move toward a more domestic position, the audience is invited to make a similar move in their understanding of knighthood.

The happy ending suggests that the household has been accepted into the idea of knighthood, an intellectual move that was essential if actual knightly households were to survive and grow. Domestic economics, however unsuitable for romance, were part of the social structure of England. The domestic space that was the focal point for economic concerns was as essential to generating chivalry as a horse and arms. Through this romance, the nobility and the gentry of the late fourteenth century could look to their traditional romantic ideals with both skepticism and acceptance even as they could embrace their current social situation, dependent upon economics and domestic spaces, as the new chivalric mode of constructing identity. *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle* reflects a shift in the types of identification strategies available to a knight, dismissing and even ridiculing performances of military valor while extolling personal behavior in regards to economic understanding, particularly of household values. The question of why the giant may become a knight is answered: the Carl is knighted because he is successfully domestic. The understanding of what made a knight had changed by the end of the fourteenth century and the romance reflecting knighthood had changed with it.

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Notes

¹ Portions of this paper were first presented at the Medieval Association of the Midwest's panel "The Middle English Gawain Romances (excluding *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*)," during the 45th International Congress on Medieval Studies. My thanks go to my fellow panel members for their insights and questions. I would also like to thank Kellie Robertson, who guided me while writing this paper, and Harriet Hudson, who suggested that I submit it for publication.

² I have relied primarily upon Auvo Kurvinen's introduction to *SGCC* for all manuscript and dating information. For further study, see Auvo Kurvinen, ed., *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle in Two Versions*. To my knowledge only three critics have recently focused on this text without analyzing it in relation to the justly more famous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In *Chivalric Romances: Popular Literature in Medieval England*, Lee C. Ramsey works with a number of Gawain romances and describes their social nature in rather broad strokes. Building on this, Brandsen argues that the text depicts an idealistic exchange of sovereignty between the commons, in the figure of the Carl, and the nobles, in the figure of Gawain. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues for a psycho-analytical reading of the giant Carl as a means of understanding the chivalric relationship to violence and gluttony.

³ The audience of medieval romance was certainly varied, including commons and nobility alike. However, the manuscript evidence points to the gentry as the most avid collectors of English romance, though the nobility also indulged in romance throughout the fourteenth and into the fifteenth century. For more information on the audience of medieval romance, see Harriet Hudson, Susan Crane (*Insular Romance*), A. I. Doyle, and Carol M. Meale, among others.

⁴ Smith 6. Much of my argument depends upon Smith's theories concerning the relationship between the household and the romance. His work, an exploration of economic and domestic concerns as they appear in romance, is further supported by my reading of *SGCC*.

⁵All quotes are taken from Auvo Kurvinen's edition of the text.

⁶ The conflict between a knight's desire to remain home and his desire to pursue chivalry in the wider world is the focus of several romances, particularly Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec and Enide*.

⁷ See Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War*, especially Chapter 4, "Chivalric Display and Incognito."

⁸ Smith 91. This reading of *Winner and Waster* corroborates Crane's understanding of the sources of chivalric identity: blood and martial action.

⁹ There are, of course, exceptions. Some romances take economic concerns as their central theme, most notably the Middle English adaptation of Marie de France's *Lanval*, entitled *Sir Launfal*. In *Sir Launfal*, the titular knight is rejected because he cannot afford to participate fully in chivalric culture. Yet, even *Sir Launfal* implies that most of the nobility seek to ignore the economic factors of knighthood.

¹⁰ For further discussion, see Smith xvi.

¹¹ I find it interesting that Kay, the character most associated with boorishness in the Arthurian tradition, is also the knight associated with domestic space. While the scope of this article does not allow me to pursue the issue here, it is possible that Kay's lack of courtesy in other romances may be the result of his association with the domestic.

¹² For details, see Jones 18-20.

¹³ Enemy knights are often integrated into the official royal court at the end of Arthurian romances, as in the final episode of *The Awentyr of Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn*. However, in most cases a physical combat precedes integration. *SGCC* demonstrates a different kind of reconciliation, one based on domestic expression, not martial display, which further distinguishes this romance from others with similar tropes.

¹⁴ See Woolgar 6. Susan Crane also describes the movement among various estates in *Insular Romance*.

¹⁵ Woolgar 5. According to Woolgar, the number of households aspiring to be considered great rose from 90 to between 1,000 and 2,000 between the beginning of the thirteenth and the end of the fourteenth century.

¹⁶ In the later version of this text, entitled simply *Carle off Carlisle*, Gawain must behead the giant in a final act of obedience. As a result the giant transforms into a noble looking young man. A similar event occurs in *The Turke and Sir Gawain*, another analogue to *SGCC*. Many critics, including Kurvinen, see *SGCC*'s lack of beheading as a flaw in the narrative. I argue that, though the omission might not be deliberate, it is useful since the Carl's continued presence as a giant forces a more dramatic reconciliation between the domestic Carl and the traditionally chivalric round table. The giant's material body and, by extension, his material wealth are to be embraced in all their excessiveness. The immense wealth and the immense body are not to be controlled and transformed into a more recognizable form of chivalry, which is the inevitable result of the beheading sequence in the analogues.

¹⁷ Smith xviii. To illustrate the coherence of possessed and possessor, Smith focuses on the giant of St. Michael's Mont as he appears in *The Alliterative Morte Arthure*. Similarities abound between *SGCC* and *The Alliterative Morte*: both giants possess their land independently of aristocratic approval, both are lavishly wealthy, both are brought under Arthur's law at the end of the narrative. However, the fact that the Arthur of *SGCC* achieves reconciliation by recognizing and embracing the Carl's method of possession speaks to that poem's desire to accept domestic economy and the notion of ownership that comes with it.

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