

I putt the choyse in you.

Both body and goodes, hartt, and every dele,

Ys alle your oun, for to by and sell—

That make I God avowe! (*The Weddyng* 677-84)

Gawen breaks the spell of ugliness with these words and Dame Rangell, having been granted true *sovereignty* over her husband's "body and goodes, hart, and every dele," is now the most beautiful creature in the land.

The need for beauty to return to Dame Ragnell arises; again, Hass's use of Mulvey's theories on scopophilia and the male gaze apply here. As a result of Matthew of Vendôme and Geoffrey of Vinsauf so solidly establishing the beauty topos, neither the medieval author nor the audience can bear to have an ugly woman remain ugly if she is of good moral character. ✓

Throughout the romance, Dame Ragnell, the title Dame itself equivalent to the status of nobility, exhibits the values of a noble woman, stating to Arthur in their first meeting, "a lady I am" (*The Weddyng* 317). According to Colleen Donnelly's 1997 article "Aristocratic Veneer and the Substance of Verbal Bonds in *The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell and Gamelyn*" Dame Ragnell demonstrates the highest of noble traits: the keeping of her word (323). Because the gaze is a male and is based on stimulation or pleasure through sight, then Dame Ragnell, because she follows the rules of noble virtue, has to be transformed at the end of the romance in order for the male gaze to be satisfied. Additionally, since the image of a realistic and beautiful human woman, that is, not a saint or a supernatural goddess type, with true power and *sovereignty* over a man is an image which did not generally exist in medieval literature, Dame Ragnell had to sacrifice either her beauty or her *sovereignty* in order to function in the romance. A further illustration of the relationship between beauty and power as it relates to beautiful but more-than-

human women characters in *Sir Launfal* and *Pearl* will work to solidify the idea that a realistic, medieval, female character could not be beautiful *and* truly powerful over male characters within the male dominated social structure of medieval literature.

In *Sir Launfal* Guinevere serves as the human woman character; she does not possess any special powers and she is not immortal as Dame Tryamour is. The poet describes Guinevere as a woman who has had many lovers: "For the lady bar los of swych word / That sche hadde lemmannys under her lord, / So fele ther nas noon ende," and is liked by neither Launfal himself nor Arthur's knights: "But Syr Luanfal lykede her noght— / Ne other knyghtes that wer hende" (*Sir Launfal* 46-8, 44-5). So, Guinevere is what Specht would call a "beautiful traitor"; she is a beautiful woman but her physical description does not match her corrupt persona (135).

Guinevere exercises a certain amount of power over the men in the story in that her words and accusations against Launfal get him into the position of judgment in which he finds himself at the end of the poem. She convinces Arthur to hold the court against Launfal because she falsely accuses him of propositioning her to be his lover when really it is the other way around. It is also her neglect of Launfal in the giving of gifts that causes him to leave Arthur's hall in the first place. She exercises her power to make Launfal feel unwelcome in court because he rejected her advances to be her lover. Moreover, she brings about the loss of her very eyes when she wagers against her own beauty that Launfal cannot produce his aforementioned lover who he claims is the fairest of women: "Yyf he bryngeth a fayrer thyng— / Put out my eeyn gray!" (*Sir Launfal* 809-10). Because her motivations are not virtuous, Guinevere cannot remain physically beautiful or retain her power and has her eyes gored out at the end of the poem to match her ugly characterization.

Dame Tryamour, on the other hand, appears as the most beautiful woman in the poem, the description of her as she rides into Arthur's court follows the models of Matthew of Vendôme and Geoffrey of Vinsauf:

The lady was bryght as blosme on brer,

Wyth eyen gray, with lovelych chere.

Her leyre lyght schoone.

As rose on rys her rode was red.

The her schon upon her head

As gold wyre that schynth bryght.

.....

Wyth gentyll gody and myddyll small,

That seemly was of sight. (*Sir Launfal* 935-9, 944-5)

She rides into court complete with blonde hair, rosy lips, and a tiny waist. She then tells Arthur the truth about Guinevere's false accusations against Launfal. Arthur's reply confirms that Dame Tryamour is indeed more beautiful than Guinevere: "Ech man may y-se that ys soothe, / Bryghtere that ye be" (*Sir Launfal* 1004-5). Dame Tryamour then blows on Guinevere's eyes and blinds her.

Tryamour undoubtedly triumphs as the most beautiful and most powerful woman in the poem. As a matter of fact, she is the most powerful character in the poem, male or female. She functions as one who is the fairest of creatures, who supports her lover, Sir Launfal, and who also has power over King Arthur and his men in her testimony for Sir Launfal; Launfal is at her

mercy to show herself and save his life, Guennere's sight is lost at Tryamour's hand (or breath), and Arthur listens to Tryamour above all others. She truly prevails as the "best" of females in this story: the most beautiful, the most powerful, and most importantly, she retains her beauty and her power. However, she is a supernatural character because, "Her fadyr was Kyng of Fayrye, / Of occident, fer and nyghe" (*Sir Launfal* 280-1). It is this supernatural quality which allows her to remain both beautiful and truly the most powerful character, even more-so than the King himself. A medieval author could only write this woman and have her accepted by the medieval audience because she is not supposed to represent a human woman; she is admittedly too extraordinary to be a human woman: "In all manere fayr inowe / To wonye yn wordly wone" (*Sir Launfal* 932-3).

In much the same manner, a beautiful and powerful woman appears in J.R.R. Tolkien's translation of *Pearl*. Here again a supernatural type of character appears in the form of beautiful female. The emphasis on sight is obvious and the scopophilic gaze of the jeweler invades the dream in stanza 14: "Long did my glance on her alight, / And the longer I looked I knew her more" (*Pearl* 129). He then goes on to describe the girl's appearance and because the description is written in the first person and his gaze is directly linked to his description of her physical beauty, scopophilia results. He is clearly pleased with what he sees in stanza 18 and what he sees follows the traditional description of beauty:

On head nought else her hair did furl,  
 And it framed, as it did round her run,  
 Her countenance grave for duke or earl,  
 And her hue asewel as ivory wan.

As shredded sheen of gold then shone  
 Her locks on shoulder loosely laid.  
 Her colour pure was surpassed by none  
 Of the pearls in purfling rare arrayed. (*Pearl* 131).

In stanza 19 the girl has an ivory complexion, long, curly, golden hair, and further on he describes a large pearl that she wears around her neck, "amidst her breast secure did bear" (*Pearl* 131). The lapidary tradition of including polished gemstones in literature appears here. The shape and color of the pearl also mimics the shape and color of a woman's breasts as described by Matthew of Vendôme. The scopophilic gaze as applied to the jeweler here is a bit problematic because he thinks he is looking on his lost daughter; an incestuous undertone emerges as a result. She however, retains her beauty and seems unconcerned.

This girl is powerful as well and chides the jeweler for judging only by his sight. She most pointedly illustrates this when she says in stanza 25,

Why jest ye men? How mad ye be!  
 Three things at once you have said, I ween:  
 Thoughtless, forsooth, were all three.  
 You know not on earth what one doth mean;  
 Your words from your wits escaping flee. (*Pearl* 131)

This woman appears as a physical beauty, but also one who, like Dame Tryamour, is obviously aware of her own power and does not fear speaking her mind. She even tells him in stanza 64 that her marriage to Christ is what has made her thus: "Power and beauty he gave to me" (*Pearl* 151). She admits the relationship between beauty and power and implies that those two things

are heaven-sent only to those who are deserving of them; she even says in the same stanza that Christ said to her, "For no blot nor spot is found in thee!" (*Pearl* 151). This link between beauty and power and a woman's possession of it in this dream vision is further complicated in this poem and is pushed further out of reach for a "mere" human woman just as it is in the romances by this addition of both beauty and power as a divine gift.

Lastly, it is the woman's beauty which draws the jeweler into the river which ultimately leads to his revelation at the end of the poem. Even though the jeweler knows he is not allowed in the water, he goes anyway, drawn by her beauty. She wields a power over him greater than what he knows is Christ's wish that he stay on the opposite bank. Then, after he wakes, he arrives at his revelation to praise God and be a good Christian only because of his encounter with this beautiful and powerful woman. Yet again, this woman is not meant to be a real, human character. She appears in a dream vision, which immediately renders her "unreal" due to the allegorical nature of the poem; then she actually turns out to be a bride of Christ due to her innocence in death. Clearly this is another instance of a supernatural type of female character being "allowed" to possess both beauty and power over her own existence and the male character's existence in the poem only because she is so obviously not meant to be a realistic human character. ✓

In conclusion, the three medieval pieces, *The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell* for *Helpyng of Kyng Arthoure*, *Sir Launfal*, and *Pearl* illustrate how descriptions of both beauty and ugliness played a role in the romances and dream visions of the time. Poetry and rhetoric manuals written in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries by Matthew of Vendôme and Geoffrey of Vinsauf greatly impacted the way in which medieval authors presented external female beauty as well as ugliness. However, by contrasting the ways in which beauty and power

relate to female characters and their states of "reality" be they realistic human women, like Dame Ragnell or Guinevere, or supernatural women, such as Dame Tryamour and the woman in *Pearl*, a relationship emerges. Women who were depicted as both beautiful to look at and possessing noble virtues and who exercised true power over the male dominated social structure within the literature were depicted as some form of more-than-human beings. In the three medieval poems discussed, true *sovereignty* or power of a realistic, human, female character could not coexist with true beauty, that is, both interior and exterior beauty within the patriarchal framework of medieval literature.

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67.

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- The paper exhibits a sustained, consistent level of analysis appropriate to the work(s).
- The paper exhibits a slightly less sustained, less consistent level of analysis appropriate to the work(s) (#10).
- The paper exhibits a less sustained or consistent level of analysis appropriate to the work(s) (#10).
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**ORGANIZATION**

- Paper is logically organized \_\_\_ but has few transitions (#28-9) \_\_\_ but is too short.
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- Thesis is not focused enough (#2-3) \_\_\_ Thesis is missing or in rhetorically awkward place (#2-3).
- Some paragraphs are not developed enough (#4-5); \_\_\_ they lack analytical topic sentences (#4-5).
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- Sentences are varied and grammatically correct \_\_\_ varied and grammatically correct with a few exceptions.
- Sentences could use more \_\_\_ coordination \_\_\_ subordination (#26) \_\_\_ active voice (#34).
- Sentences could use more variation: \_\_\_ too short \_\_\_ too long \_\_\_ always S-V-O constructions (#26).
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- Paper shows no understanding of *Style* requirements: layout (#43-45, 54) quotations (#46-53) documentation (#55-71).
- Works Cited page is accurate;  slightly inaccurate; \_\_\_ inaccurate (#72-101) or \_\_\_ missing (#72).

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