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[Re]Visiting the Middle English *Cleanness*: Structure, Rhetoric, and Resonance in The *Gawain*-Poet's Homily

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Abstract:

The Middle English homily *Cleanness* is a difficult text which awards the diligent student with opportunities for close reading, the study of poetic structure and rhetorical method, considerations of the relationship of source material to the primary text, and the importance of diction to the thematic and ideological content of the poem. The article models the basic process of approaching *Cleanness* from a variety of angles, allowing the instructor working with the poem, perhaps for the first time, the chance to tailor class discussion and low stakes writing assignments to further students' appreciation of this difficult text.

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[Re]Visiting the Middle English *Cleanness*: Structure, Rhetoric, and Resonance in The *Gawain*-Poet's Homily[1]

In the introductory discussion to the translation of *Cleanness* in her edition of *The Gawain Poet: Complete Works* (2011), Marie Borroff makes the following cautionary statement about this fourteenth-century Middle English homily:

> Of the five poems by the "Gawain poet," the one called *Cleanness*…is the least accessible to the modern reader. Compared with the other four, it lacks an intelligible shape. Each of the others tells one story, *Cleanness* tells three stories at length and two more briefly. And it is difficult to see how all three of the stories told at length in the poem are concerned with the virtue the poet calls *clannesse*, thought the concluding summary insists that they are. Moreover, the poet's attitude toward the behavior he condemns as *fylthe* offends present day sensibilities. (35)

On the subject of *Cleanness*' lack of accessibility, structural difficulties, and problematic thematic content, Borroff is far kinder than many previous critics. When considering the place of *Cleanness* among the four poems of MS. Cotton Nero A.x,, George Anderson stated in his *Old and Middle English Literature* (1950), "*Purity* (often called *Clannesse*) is the least important of the four" (223-24), while Andrew and Waldron (1978) note that the "structure of *Cleanness* has generally been found less satisfactory than that of *Patience*" (24), and Stone (1971), too, believes the "final impression left by this complex and highly organized Bible epic is a curiously inharmonious vision" (71). Cawley and Anderson (1962) believe that "to summarize what the poet means by cleanness is difficult as the whole poem is a working out of the concept" (xv), that "it is difficult to pinpoint exactly where one story or section ends and another begins," that "the poet refuses to allow us to chop the poem up into neat compartments" (xv), and, additionally, that in its generation of thematic complexity "the number of possible relations is very large, indeed hardly definable" (xviii). Finally, to return to Stone's evaluation of the text, he notes that the poet's "emphasis on sexual uncleanness places him among the obsessives of the medieval church, who saw love narrowly, and overrated the seriousness of sin in sexual matters" (61-2). Over the years, critics have questioned *Cleanness*'s claims to authorship by the so-called *Gawain*-Poet, whose dream-vision *Pearl*, homiletic *Patience*, and the romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* make up the remainder of the manuscript's contents,[2] and have garnered a more positive reputation amongst critics than that of *Cleanness*. As a result of this battery of apparent imperfections, the poem has been relegated, like the Disheveled Guest described in its own parabolic prologue, to be "cast out of the critical wedding feast into the dark dungeon of critical disfavor" (Schreiber 131). However, the structural issues and content which have

stimulated Borroff and others' reactions to the text are precisely the reasons why students of both specialized and general surveys of early British literature should have the opportunity to study *Cleanness*.

Chief amongst its difficulties, *Cleanness* requires that its reader engages in an organized study of its structure. As a well-organized but complicated piece of critical writing, *Cleanness* provides a clear thesis statement and subcategories of argument evident to the careful reader, but one must work these out through repeated attempts at clarification, notation, and summary—even those who are working from one of the many serviceable Modern English translations available will find repeated reevaluations of the text's structure necessary, but the resulting clarity reveals the depth of artistry at work in the text. By way of example, one successful approach to the text may focus on the organizational principle that the definitive characteristics of the Middle English *Cleanness* are its homiletic structure, its synchronic progression of events, and the narrative artistry with which it retells the Biblical parables and the various exempla that form the substance of its argument.[3] The argument of the homily may be clarified without initially concerning the nuances of the poet's dialect and the physical culture of the manuscript in itself,[4] including the stylistic trappings that make it a simultaneously masterful and obscure example of the fourteenth century alliterative revival,[5] which can all serve as topics for a succeeding analysis of the text. Thus, the basic argument of the homily, coupled with its artistic expansion of Biblical narrative used as examples, draws the core of its meaning from the text's progressive redefinition of the term "*clannesse*." The attentive student will find the first installment of this definition exactly where there introductory training in composition has taught them to look: in the poem's introductory Prologue.

The Prologue, occupying the first 48 lines of text, proposes to discuss *clannesse* and establish it as a literal and metaphorical state of body and spirit, a binary construction favored in the eyes of God, who detests filth, which functions as *clannesse*'s categorical opposite:

Clannesse whoso kindly cowþe commende,
And rekken vp alle þe resounz þat ho by ri3t askez,
Fayre formez my3t he fynde in forþering his speche,
And in þe contraré kark and combraunce huge. (1-4) [6]

[He who would acclaim Cleanness in becoming style,
And rehearse all the honours she asks as of right,
May find fair forms to further his art:
To utter the opposite would be hard and troublesome.][7]

These lines herald the creation of a work that will attempt to communicate through the application of *fayre* signifiers, that is, signs which are aesthetically pleasing, as part of an edificatory project which terminates some 1,750 lines later with the simple concluding statement: "*Þus vpon þrynne wyses I haf yow þro schewed/Þat vnclannes tocleues in corage dere/Of þat wynnelych Lorde þat wonyes in heuen*" (1805-07), (Thus in three ways I have thoroughly shown you/That uncleanness is cleft asunder in the courteous heart/Of our gracious God who governs heaven).[8] From a structural standpoint, therefore, even the introductory student, with some patient work cross referencing several difficult allusions or references, perhaps comparing two or more translations, comes to see the poet's clear attempt to establish a relationship between the text's introductory and concluding statements. The student, again taking cues from their introductory composition training, may wonder if this central idea will be clearly developed through successive examples; will the text establish a relationship between its thesis statement and its evidence.

Of course, clarity and understanding cannot be achieved without some serious leg work, much of it involving the intellectual and cultural context of the authorities and evidence which *Cleanness* utilizes. However, in order for the process of fixing the text within an historical and cultural context to not become a mindless exercise in citing references, the student must be guided to see how extra-textual reference does not simply supplement meaning, but relates to the structure of its argument. To put it simply, the clarification of content and reference in the text should allow the student to illuminate not just the "why" but also the "how" of *Cleanness*' use of authority. *Cleanness*'s prologue[9] (1-48) draws from authority to frame its argument, and fixes its role as edificatory project within the larger tradition of Christian education and documentation. We are told, "*Kryst kydde hit Hymself in a carp onez*" (23) (Christ said it himself in a sermon once), and take note of the poet's use of the phrase "…*as Maþew recordez,/Þat þus of clannesse vnclosez a ful cler speche*" (25-6) (…as Matthew records it,/Clearly describing cleanness in these terms); the implication here is that *Cleanness* operates within the assumed permanency of a particular world view; *Cleanness*'s authority is part of an historical project, as event and text, with its meaning developed through the appropriation of both form and theme. The poet's subject, too, developed in relation to the sixth Beatitude of Matthew 5:8, "*Beati mundo corde: quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt*" (Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God), blends spiritual purity with literal confirmation, sight and seeing, marrying the literal and figural levels of expression that will interact throughout the remainder of the text. In this sense, the didactic value which is embodied in the text's rhetorical constructions illustrate "how" the text "means."

One of the true challenges of the poem is that it demands the student sustain a level of organized explication over a period of time, as *Cleanness* does take a variety of turns in its structural piling of reference upon explication, and explication upon nuance, and nuance upon authoritative citation. There is the retelling of the parable of the Wedding Feast, at lines 51-160, drawn from *Luke* 14:16-24 and *Matthew* 22:1-14, as well as discussion of its interpretation and application, a *significacio*, at lines 161-192. Again, this application of rhetorical method is made in accordance with established authority, "*Thus comparisunez Kryst þe kyndom of heuen/To þis frelych feste þat fele arn to called*" (161-62) (Christ by this account likens the kingdom of heaven/To a marvelous meal to which many are invited), and applied to the immediate

experience of the audience or reader, with the use of "*þe*," "*þou*," and "*þy*" (165), an invitation to imagine oneself as a potential guest at God's feast. A portion of text based upon *Galatians* 5:19-21 occupies lines 181-92, and is followed by an introduction to the primary body of the poet's argument, a sequence of major and minor exempla, which the narrator again links to extra-textual sources, to a larger homiletic tradition, and to his own thesis: that *fylþe*, in its many manifestations, inspires God's most violent anger.

Bot I haue herkned and herde of mony hy3e clerkez,
And als in resounez of ry3t red hit myseluen,
Þat þat ilk proper Prynce þat paradys weldez
Is displesed at vch a poynet þat plyes to scaþe;
Bot neuer 3et in no boke breued I herde
Þat euer He wrek so wyþerly on werk þat ȝe made,
Ne venged for no vilté of vice ne synne,
Ne neuer so sodenly so3t vnsoundely to weng,
As for fylþe of þe flesch þat foles han vsed;
For, as I fynde, þer He for3et alle His fre þewez,
And wex wod to þe wrache for wrath at His hert.
(193-204)

[Though I have both heard from scholars
And in true writings have read it myself,
That the perfect prince who in paradise rules
Is hostile to everything whose aim is evil,
I never saw it set down in scroll or book
That he acted with more hate against his own creation,
Avenging himself on vileness, vice or sin,
Or was more hotly angry in haste of his purpose,
Or sought more suddenly to exact savage vengeance,
As when folly of fleshly filthiness was committed.
Then God, I find, forgets his gracious generosity
And fiercely takes revenge with fury in his heart.]

Again, the appeal to the audience is couched within reference to authoritative sources, confirmation is made through reference to personal experience, and the idea that *fylþe* might escape God's greatest anger is negated by its *absence* from authoritative sources and tradition.

What follows are three sequences of exempla, each sequence containing one major and two minor narratives in support of the poet's argument. The pattern adopted by the poet uses two minor examples followed by a major example in the first two sequences, and a third and final sequence that begins with a minor example, and then alternates portions of the remaining minor and major examples. The alteration of form in this final sequence is indicative of the increasingly complex narrative structure of the text as a whole. Likewise, the poet's argument takes on increasing subtlety as these developments progress.

The first exemplary sequence, occupying lines 205-545, consists of the minor exempla of the falls of Lucifer and of Adam, using source material drawn from *Isaiah* 14:12-13 and *Genesis* 2-3, and the major exemplum of the story of Noah and the flood, which draws source material selectively from *Genesis* 6:1-9:1 and possibly Mandeville's *Travels*. A linking passage follows, from lines 545-600, and then the second exemplary sequence, running from lines 601-1048. This sequence consists of two minor exempla, God's visit in the form of angels to Abraham and Sarah and the minor exemplum of Lot and his family, and the major exemplum of the destruction of the cities of the plain. The source material for much of this sequence is various and imaginative, indicating the poet's broad reading and ability to blend both secular and sacred inspiration into the landscape of his thought, with pertinent materials drawn from *Genesis* 13:10 and 18:1-19:28, as well as Mandeville's *Travels*,[10] Josephus' *Wars* (IV.viii.4), and possibly Dante's *Inferno* Cantos I and XII:1-6.

By way of an illustration of how the reworking of a standard Biblical narrative, such as the Destruction of the Cities of the Plains from *Genesis*, can serve as a springboard for both creative elaboration and the development of additional thematic content important to the poet, it will be necessary to consider an extended close reading of one particular episode in the expansion of Biblical narrative. In the retelling of the episode of Sodom and Gomorrah, the poet depicts the local denizens of the city clamoring at the gates of Lot's house, demanding that he give up his newly arrived houseguests to the angry mob so that the crowd "*lere hym of lof, as oure lyst biddeȝ,/As is þe asyse of Sodomas to seggeȝ þat passen*" (844-845), [teach them about love, driven by our lust, in the style of Sodom, as we do to all passersby!].[11] The "style" referenced here is obviously sodomy, but note that it is couched within reference to both "lust" and socially sanctioned behavior—"*As is þe asyse of Sodomas to seggeȝ þat passen,*" thereby establishing that the "filth" being targeted by the "cleanness program" is, as in the case of the iniquities prior to the flood, a matter of collective practice. In order to illustrate the dynamic generated by the poet, the entirety of the sequence must be appreciated to illustrate the manner in which the poet develops the theme even on the level of poetic diction:

With kene clobbeȝ of þat clos þay clatȝ on þe woweȝ,

wyth a schrylle scharp schout þay schewe þyse worde:
and demand that Lot should deliver up his guests.
"If þou louyeȝ þy lyf loth in þyse woneȝ
Ȝete vus out þose ȝong men þat ȝore-whyle here entred,
Þat we may lere hym of lof, as oure lyst biddeȝ,
As is þe asyse of Sodomas to seggeȝ þat passen."
Whatt! þay sputen & speken of so spitous fylþe,
What! þay ȝeȝed& ȝolped of ȝestande sorȝe,
Þat ȝet þe wynd, & þe weder, & þe worlde stynkes
Of þe brych þat vp-braydeȝ þose broþelych wordeȝ.
Þe god man glyfte with þat glam & gloped for noyse,
So scharpe schame to hym schot, he schrank at þe hert,
For he knew þe costoum þat kyþed þose wrecheȝ,
He doted neuer for no doel so depe in his mynde.

(839-852)

[With thick cudgels they clamored and clubbed on the gates,
With shrill, sharp shouts they screamed these words
And demanded that Lot deliver up his guests:
"Lot, if you value your life in this dwelling,
Give us those young men while you are still able,
So that we can teach them about love, driven by our lust,
In the style of Sodom, as we do to all passersby!"
Lo! They spit and spoke such sputtering filth!
Oh! They yelled and they yelped with such anger and rage,
That the wind, the weather, and even the world still stink from their filthy speech
And the breach violently created by the belch of those words.
The Good man glanced away from their message
And looked askance from their noise,
So sharp was the shame that shot to his heart, it caused him to shrink,

For he knew of the *customs* known to those wretches,

But he dared never to delve so deep in his mind.]

On the surface, it is clear that the poet's intention is to critique the "unclean" nature of the accepted practice of the sodomites, and illustrates the concept of filth through the potential for violence in the demands and threats of the crowd, the disruptive and damaging effect of their "words," and the shame that Lot feels for having simply heard those words. The words themselves "tear" a "breach" in the world and leave an unsavory odor on it—literally emanating from it--infecting even the wind and the weather with its odor. The poet's diction functions on another level as well, which becomes apparent if we focus on lines 844b-845, "*as oure lyst biddeȝ,/As is þe asyse of Sodomas to seggeȝ þat passen*." The only direct reference, evasive though it may be, to the actual "*costoum*" of Sodom, which causes Lot such shame that he will not think of it (lines 848-852), contains a pattern of sound which indicates intentional punning: "***AS*** *oure lyst biddeȝ,/**AS** is þe **AS**yse of Sodom**AS** to seggeȝ þat p**ASS**en*." The embedded rhyming pun, a repetitive homophone of the word "ass" is plain to the ear, and the poet drives his point home by further developing the idea through the image of the foul words of the men of Sodom tearing a breach with "wind" that is foul, making the air, the weather, and the world itself stink.

Following this prosodic tour de force in the service of rabid intollerance, the conclusion of the episode of the Destruction of the Cities of the Plain rejoins the organizational process of *Cleanness* through a linking passage from lines 1049-1156, which functions as an extended homily on cleanness, drawing sources from *The Romance of the Rose*,[12] *Matthew* 13:45-6, and *Chronicles* 36-18. The poem then concludes with the third and final exemplary sequence, running lines 1149-1804. This final sequence consists of the minor exemplum of Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem and seizure of the vessels, his ordeal of madness, and death at lines 1157-1332. This is succeeded by the intertwined major exemplum of Belshazzar's feast and punishment, at lines 1333-1650 and 1709-1804, and the minor exemplum of Daniel's account of Nebuchadnezzar's conversion at lines 1651-1708. The sources for this sequence are both secular and religious, including Mandeville's *Travels*, again, *Chronicles* 36:11-14 and 17-21, *Jeremiah* 52:17-21, *Daniel* 4:27-33 and 5:1-31, *Exodus* 25:31, *Kings* 7:27, and a mishmash of Hebrew demonology probably drawn from the encyclopedic digests of the Middle Ages.[13] The text then terminates with its brief epilogue from lines 1805-1812.

As a student of the text toils to consider the interdependent structure of the poem's references, images, and argument, and develops an appreciation for the poet's use of one narrative to comment upon another towards a more and more nuanced understanding of the text's thesis, it becomes possible to consider relationships between examples and *Cleanness*'s larger argument. Students may be intrigued by the intellectual application of narrative which both supports and undermines *Cleanness*' process of typological arrangement, and as such, rhetorical and structural choices made by the poet may again be evaluated. As an example of this process, the lives of both Noah and Lot would seem to preclude them from serving as models of ideal cleanness, although they are both obviously "clean" in comparison to their surroundings. The

tradition of Noah's drunkenness and castration or assault at the hands of his son, as implied in *Genesis* 9:18-25, would seem to mire him and his family in the same iniquities which God has punished with death and wholesale destruction. At the very least, the episode serves as an example of a serious lapse in decorum. Lot's daughters' incestuous coupling with their father, accompanied as it is by their statement "Our father is getting old, and there is not a man on the earth to unite with us" (*Genesis* 19:31), again implies that the story of the destruction of the cities of the plain is, like the deluge, a tale of the exemption of one family from the total annihilation of the world, who in spite of or because of this exemption engage in outrageous sin. How can they be clean? Taken as such, both Noah and Lot are representative of the role of worldly goodness in the eschatological undercurrent of the entire piece; men who are good, but nonetheless "in" the world and "of" the world. The student may question whether this works as part of the text's persuasive definition, if both Noah and Lot are not unclean so much as victimized, or, as in the many post-apocalyptic narratives permeating the student's own popular culture, when society falls apart to rules simply change.

To take this avenue of inquiry a step further, the student may consider the examples of Noah and Lot in structural relation to Abraham, the larger context of whose narrative confirms him as an exemplary *man of God*. He epitomizes the gracious host, even in the monstrous hospitality characterized by his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac (*Genesis* 22:1-19). He demonstrates his obedience to God even in opposition to his instincts as a parent, like Lot's offer of his daughters to the men of Sodom. Is Noah's cursing of Ham, then, a form of demonstration facilitated by an unclean act? In respect to this larger context, Abraham may be characterized as a keeper of covenants, who, unlike Lucifer, Adam, and Belshazzar, is a dutiful servant of his Lord. If the student continually returns to the text, considering content in relation to structure, it becomes possible for even the most elusive sections to be explicated into a series of correspondences. As always, the ultimate goal is for the student to arrive at an informed position based on an analysis of the text; the ultimate "rightness" or "wrongness" of the position is really subordinate to the process, and frees the student from slavish reliance on dogmatic or plagiaristic solutions to the problem of "text." The student should of course be aware that some perceived correspondences within the text, while meaningful to them, may make greater or lesser logistical or contextual sense, but if their process is clear, then beneficial work is being done.

Seen in this way, through the use of "broad strokes," the exempla of *Cleanness* resonate with one another in the service of the poet's larger theme. As a result, I believe we can read both Noah and Lot as examples of *good* men who, until God's intervention, are forced by circumstance to live in a world that is sinful. Both Adam and Nebuchadnezzar are, therefore, *lapsed* men who must endure exile and penance into order to come back into God's grace. The disheveled guest at the wedding, Lucifer, and Belshazzar are all cast into pits because they are *ignorant* of God's superiority and see no difference between themselves and the Deity. Both Abraham and Daniel, and by implication the narrator of the text, are *pious* men of God who have the ability to read the signs and intercede on behalf of others. At the heart of the text is the brief tale of Christ, who serves as the shining ideal of perfect cleanness upon which the entire spiritual project is based.

Although careful analysis of the organization and contextualizing of source material is of key importance to an understanding of the poem's methods of communication, the many examples of the expansion of Biblical narrative are of key importance in appreciating the poetry and "voice" of *Cleanness*. In particular, the poet's tendency to intertwine the lack of solemnity inherent in *polluted* appearance with the notion of evil as subversive to the ritualised decorum of hospitality, contract, and social order. One brief example is his expansion of the parable of the Wedding Feast, drawn from *Luke* 14:16-24 and *Matthew* 22:1-14. The disruptive effect that the dishevelled wedding guest has upon the feast, supported through the expansion of visual detail, becomes a springboard for forceful compulsion and coercion, the desire to chastise, suppress, and eliminate what the poet sees as human indecency and disobedience.

The characterization of the *dishevelled one*, and the marginalized filth which he embodies, is generated through a concreteness of detail and terminology, such as "*haterez totorne*," "*harlatez hod*," "*handez vnwaschen*," "*lyþerly attired*," "*rente cokrez at þe kne*," "*clutte traschez*," "*tabarde totorne*," and "*his totez oute*," all of which refer to the physical state of the appearance of the guest. Within the space of sixteen lines, the terms and phrases are surprising for their variety and visual clarity, and by the movement of the narrative focus from the material of garments to their decomposition, and finally to an increasing concern with the flesh that is left uncovered. The section also, not least for its length but also for its clarity, generates the sense of outrage that the narrator feels at this disruption of formality and *mode*. The filth of the character is both a concrete affront to the formality and decorum of the feast, an affront to the authority embodied by the Lord of the Hall, a subversive presence to be dealt with by the text's formative ideology, and a negative example to illustrate what "cleanness" is not.

Throughout the process of reading the narrator's commentary upon the scene, the reiteration of its concrete details, the student of the text must also confront the outrage and reactionary attitude of the text towards the dishevelled one. The narrator's personalizing of outrage is theoretically instilled within the reader as well, by the questioning nature of lines 36-8, where the pomp of the nobleman's court is juxtaposed with the inconsiderate physical appearance of the *dishevelled one*. What host, or lord, "*Wolde lyke if a ladde com lyþerly attyred,/When he were sette solempnely in a sete ryche,/Abof dukez on dece, with dayntys serued*?" (Would approve a rascal arriving wretchedly dressed,/When he himself on the high seat was solemnly attended,/Above dukes on the dais, with delicacies served?). The contrast between the purity of the Lord and the unworthy guest implied by the sequence is striking, not least for the inherent class distinction and vividness of the detail, but for its couching of this elaboration upon the theme within the framework of a question.

The narrator enlists the audience into this indictment of the *dishevelled one*, thereby enacting exclusion and punishment of *fylþe* within both the narrative and receptive realms of the text. The implementation of concrete visual detail moves the cognitive "eye" through the text, while the poet's use of *token*, *type*, and *lore*, give way to the even more active and personal *see* and *look*, as in lines 1055 and 1069, all indicative of the "pointing" noted in the literature produced during the Fourteenth-century,[14] and especially during the reign of Richard II. This stylistic and structural tendency to use the "eye" to indicate details of narrative importance, didactic focus, or aesthetic nuance are key in understanding how the Gawain-Poet negotiated the representation of surface detail in the service of what he saw as spiritual and intellectual

meaning. Coupled with the "spiritual mimicry." with which he appropriated and augmented textual authority, also predicated upon observation, become the means to the forming pious behaviour the poet notes in both his source material and suggest through the resonance of one exemplar with another. Ultimately, the tendency of the text to "look at things"—be they source material, the expansion or supplementation of Biblical narrative, or the painstaking process of defining the terms "*clannesse*" or "*fylþe*"—also requires the reader to look and read deeply into both the text's imagery and the correspondence of those images to its meaning. This process of communication, at its very core, provides the diligent student with opportunities to read deeply and think critically, and thereby arrive at an informed position from which to both understand and evaluate this extraordinarily difficult Early English text. It is hoped that as the text pushes the student, the student develops the facility to push back.

NOTES

[1] The following article represents a revised and considerably shorter version of a conference presentation, *Stronger Than Dirt: Rereading the Middle English Cleanness*, delivered as part of the *Using and [Re]Fusing the Bible in Medieval and Early Modern Britain* panel at the Northeast Modern Languages Association Conference, hosted by Tufts University, Boston, Massachusetts, United States, March 2013.

[2] See Andrew (23-33) and Spearing (35-51) in Brewer (1997), and Keiser (1997).

[3] The poem has been described by Stone (1971) as both a "Bible epic" (47) and "a single homily on a grand scale" (48), while Andrew and Waldron (1978) have categorized it as a "literary homily" (17). It comes down to us in a single, unique manuscript, described by Putter (1996) as "disappointingly small and unimpressive" (Putter 1), while Cawley and Anderson characterize its illuminations as "crudely drawn pictures in colours" (Cawley and Anderson vii). However, most studies of the text's relationship to the visual culture of the Middle Ages note how unusual it is for an amateurish document seemingly produced and used in isolation to have been decorated in this manner.

[4] For more complete considerations of the manuscript and the poet's dialect, see the Putter edition of *An Introduction to the Gawain-Poet*. London: Longman, 1996, (1-37); Edwards, A. S. G. "The Manuscript: British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x," (197-219), and Duggan, H. N. "Meter, Stanza, Vocabulary, Dialect," (221-42), both in Brewer, D. S., and Jonathan Gibson, eds. *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer Ltd., 1997.

[5] Andrew and Waldron (1978) note that "the poems are provincial only in the sense that it was still possible for a writer in the fourteenth century—before the development of an exclusive 'standard English'—to use a provincial dialect, without affectation, as a literary vehicle for any subject-matter whatever" (15). The dialect of composition "has been localized in the north-west midland area, where the counties of Chesire, Staffordshire, and Derbyshire adjoin" (vii).

[6] All quotations of *Cleanness* unless otherwise noted, are drawn from Andrew, Malcolm, and Ronald Waldron, eds. *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*. Berekley: U of California P, 1978. (111-184). Parenthetically referenced numbers indicate lines in this edition of the text.

[7] As the focus of this brief paper is not philological or linguistic, it is hoped the reader will be satisfied by reference to the Modern English translation of *Cleanness* found in Brian Stone's (1971) edition of the poem. Where matters of nuance are at issue, I will notate my translation of the text when necessary.

[8] Yes, Stone's translation of these lines is arguable, but reference to the poet's rhetorical method, his "three ways" is clear.

[9] The outline suggested owes much to the structural synopses featured in the introductory sections of Stone (1971) and Andrew and Waldron (1978), with my own additions of subdivisions within the text and references to probable source material.

[10] For the most part, the poet draws from Mandeville for geographical and architectural detail.

[11] In the discussion of the Sodom and Gomorrah episode, lines 839-852, I make use of my own translation in order to clarify as much as possible the effect generated by the poet's word choice.

[12] The poet's use of this episode from Jean de Meun's portion of *The Romance of the Rose* is problematic. No doubt familiar with the text, the *Cleanness*-Poet would have understood that the advice given in this sequence, running roughly from lines 7749-67 in Dahlberg's translation of the text (1971), functions in the allegory as an example of the hypocrisy and predatory nature of the secular lover. Like the larger context of the examples of Noah and Lot, one wonders if this was a case of the *Cleanness*-Poet warping his source to fit his context, or if the irony is intentional.

[13] As Morey notes (1993), "biblical material was disseminated in the vernaculars through sermons, homilies, commentaries, universal histories, picture Bibles, the drama, and a large corpus of biblical paraphrases" (6), of which, the work of Peter Comestor was probably the most influential. "A profound influence on Comestor's intellectual milieu was Jewish learning" (Morey 12), and as such, *historia* such as Comestor's were probably the point of origin for much of the Hebrew folklore and demonology used in medieval paraphrases and expansions such as *Cleanness*.

[14] See J. A. Burrow's *Ricardian Poetry: Chaucer, Gower, Langland, and The Gawain-Poet*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1971, pages 69-78, and Anne Middleton's "*William Langland's 'Kynde Name*," in Lee Patterson (ed.) *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530*, Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1990, pages 15-82, and especially pages 30-31.

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