

al ghosts were material enough to exist outside the mind of a perceiver, material enough to be seen at times by some people, but not material enough to do physical harm to living people or to be physically touched by them. And well he might have used technical language, for his correspondent, Oliver Lodge, a professor of physics at Liverpool University, was also an active member of the Society for Psychical Research.

Frederic Myers and Henry James were friends. When *Phantasms of the Living* was published, Henry James bought his own copy and later consulted it before he wrote *The Turn of the Screw*. When James's story was published, Myers read it. Surely more than casual importance should be attached to the opinion, written shortly after publication of the story, by a personal friend of the author, to a fellow investigator of supernatural phenomena. If Myers, who had spent years recording and studying the narratives of people who said they saw ghosts, thought the governess was a generally reliable narrator of a story about ghosts, perhaps we should pause before we decide that she is neurotic and her ghosts imaginary. But then, Alexander Jones told us that twenty-five years ago.

PETER G. BEIDLER
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Reply:

I should like to make two very brief comments. First, I congratulate Peter Beidler on his discovery of a most interesting piece of evidence. Second, it is gratifying to learn that items consigned to *PMLA* have such a long shelf life.

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Gawain's Wound

To the Editor:

Paul F. Reichardt's "Gawain and the Image of the Wound" (99 [1984]: 154–61) makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. For it is very important to know that the neck was associated with the will in medieval imagery and that Gawain's wound symbolizes the correction of an improperly ordered will. But we need to look at the early events in the story to understand why Gawain's will—and by extension, Arthur's—needs to be corrected.

Chaucer's Parson tells us that ostentatious hospitality is a sign of pride (vainglory) and that the remedy is humility or true self-knowledge. The ostentatious

Christmas celebration staged by Arthur is probably a sign of pride. Moreover, Arthur himself needs to be carefully assessed on other matters. In lines 85–99, he is described as still subject to the needs of youth for lively action, and he acts against the virtue of fortitude (or courage) when he brashly accepts the stranger's no-win game. At this point his nephew, Sir Gawain, steps in and becomes a surrogate for the brash Arthur. The lesson that Gawain—and by extension, Arthur and his court—learns at the end through the wound is to take care of himself. He needs to value his life properly and not put it on the line just to meet stupid, meaningless challenges. Thus the author reaffirms the idea that the cardinal virtue of fortitude is the mean between the extremes of pusillanimity and brashness.

The author also implies through the images of the story that there is an intimate connection between the right ordering under reason of the irascible appetites (leading to true courage) and of the concupiscible appetites (leading to true temperance). The author calls attention to these interrelated aspects of our animal nature by juxtaposing the hunting scenes, involving aggressive tendencies, and the temptation scenes, involving cupidity. When Gawain learns how to care for himself properly and not be brash, he presumably also learns how to moderate and rule by reason his concupiscible appetites. When everyone at Arthur's court joins in wearing the green banner won by Gawain in his victory over pride, they symbolically join in his newly acquired humility and maturity.

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To the Editor:

Paul F. Reichardt's "Gawain and the Image of the Wound" provides some helpful insights into a major symbol of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. At the same time, the overall thrust of his essay sends the reader striking off in a wrong direction. Reichardt observes in the beginning that "more remains to be said about Gawain's culpability" (154) and, later, "the threat of beheading that hangs over the plot of *Gawain* may be related to the impending dissolution of the Arthurian body politic through the corruptive pride of its own knights" (158). First, nothing in *Gawain* suggests the dissolution to be "impending." This story takes place in the earlier part of Arthur's reign, as indicated by the description of Guenevere as "without a flaw" and, more significant, of Arthur as "a little boyish." Second, in both quotations Reichardt emphasizes the problem as individual sinfulness. Along this line he connects the pentangle only with *homo se relictus*, "the individual operating without the aid of divine grace" (159). He ignores that it can also apply to Arthur's court in its en-