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Arthur’s Pilgrimage: A Study of Golagros and Gawane

It is seldom realised that Scottish Literature of the fifteenth century contains, apart from the works of the great makars Henryson and Dunbar, a number of metrical Romances celebrating both its own martial heroes and those of the traditional cycles.1 Although all these works have been edited for the Scottish Text Society, they have attracted little critical attention and as a result Scotland’s contribution to Romance literature remains seriously underestimated. The present analysis of Golagros and Gawane (ca 1450) is an attempt to redress this situation at least in part.

The plot of the Romance is loosely based on two episodes in the First Continuation of the Old French Perceval. This discovery was first made by Frederick Madden in 1839, overturning the earlier theory, held by both Sir Walter Scott and David Laing, that it was an original work, drawing on popular and Celtic tradition.2 In fact the Scottish poem centres on that portion of the French poem dealing with the story of the Chastel Orguelleus and in particular with the adventure of Kay and the Spit (16,323–16,634) and the winning of the Chastel itself (18,209–19,456). Paul J. Ketrick has done the most detailed and reliable analysis in The Relation of Golagros and Gawane to the Old French Perceval.3 He concludes that the Perceval Continuation is definitely the source of the Scottish poem and that its author probably worked from a prose Perceval manuscript on which the later 1530 prose print was based. The relation-

1 These include The Wallace, Rauf Coylear, Lancelot of the Laid, and The Auntyrs off Arthure.
ship, however, is a loose one and much can be learned about Golagros and Gawane through noting the many alterations and additions made by the Scottish writer to the original material.

The Scottish poem opens with King Arthur leading his forces on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He stops for sustenance outside a fair castle and sends Kay to ask the Lord for aid. Kay rudely assaults a dwarf, who is engaged in roasting meat at a spit. The Lord is greatly angered and throws Kay out. Gawain then embarks on the same mission. The Lord is impressed by Gawain’s courtesy and treats the Arthurian host hospitably. The King continues his journey, pausing to survey a fine castle. On being told by Spynagros that the Lord of this domain has vowed fealty to no man, Arthur determines to conquer his realm. He completes his pilgrimage but hurriedly returns to place the castle under siege. Gawain heads another embassy, this time in company with Lancelot and Ewin. Knightly courtesy is evident on both sides but the Lord (Golagros) refuses to give up his freedom. The battle which ensues involves a series of formal combats with grave losses on both sides. During it, Arthur’s wise counsellor Spynagros frequently comments on events. The climactic battle between Golagros and Gawain is preceded by Kay’s wilful seeking of a challenger on his own behalf. Kay wins, though he noticeably overestimates the extent of his superiority. Gawain, after a long conflict, defeats Golagros but agrees to feign defeat in order to protect the latter’s honour in front of his dependents. Gawain goes to Golagros’ castle while Arthur laments over what appears to be the end of the Round Table. Golagros, meanwhile, explains the true situation to his host, who nonetheless urges him to continue as their leader. He then goes to Arthur and vows fealty. Celebrations are held on both sides and Arthur relieves Golagros of his vow, returning to him the freedom he values so highly.

Amours in his edition of the poem reflects earlier criticism by seriously underestimating its power in two ways. He states that the two major episodes concerning the dual embassy to the friendly Lord and the campaign against Golagros are in no way linked. He further places the appeal of the poem on the battle scenes, considering the lengthy speeches with their moralising emphasis “stilted and
boring."

My own reading would suggest that the two episodes are closely related, having been drawn together from separate parts of their French source in order to highlight this thematic link. While the battle scenes are undeniably well-imagined, with the author delighting in the reproduction of many feats in arms, all this is clearly placed within a higher spiritual framework by those very speeches, which Amours lightly dismisses. Some later critics have indicated a similar dissatisfaction with the traditional interpretation but were dealing with the poem in a larger context, which forbade lengthy analysis. D. J. Williams, for example, notes that "the two episodes are thematically connected" within an "ingenious structure" and concludes, "It is clear that much of the interest, outside the vigorously described action of battle, is meant to consist in the substance and manner of the speeches between chivalrous protagonists." Larry Benson links it with *Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Morte Arthure*, and the *Auntyrs of Arthur* in possessing a narrative structure, which makes use of "parallels, contrasts, and variations." Later, he shrewdly places it among those later Romances, which begin to emphasize "religious virtues at the expense of chivalry" and comments on the "completely debased characterisation of Arthur." This last feature is particularly noticeable, when *Golagros and Gawane* is set beside the Old French *Perceval* with its more favourable portrayal of the King.

Yet the first major alteration made by the Scottish author would appear to point in the opposite direction. In *Perceval*, Arthur is on his way to liberate Gyflet fis Do from imprisonment in the Chastel Orguelleus. In *Golagros and Gawane*, he

> turnit on ane tyde towar Tuskane,
> Hym to seik our the sey, that saiklese wes said,
> The syre that sendis all seill, suthly to sane. (2-4)

Arthur is therefore advancing on a spiritual pilgrimage rather than a simple chivalric adventure. His troupes are described with the superlatives usual to Romance and as he sends off Kay to seek aid

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from the Lord of the Castle, he appears to be a great martial leader, who is also aware of his ultimate debt to Christ.

The two embassies to the castle inevitably move the focus away from Arthur and on to Kay and Gawain. In both the Old French and Middle Scots versions, the two knights are clearly contrasted as exemplars of chivalry.\(^7\) The *Golagros* author, however, does add some material to the Gawain embassy, making the Lord at first appear hostile:

\begin{quote}
Than said the syre of the saill and the soverane:
"I will na vittale be sauld your senyeour untill." \hfill (145–46)
\end{quote}

Gawain's courtesy soon wins him over, but there has been a real test lacking in the Old French, where Gawain is immediately recognised and welcomed. Thus although *Golagros* does lack some of the descriptive vividness of the *Perceval*, especially in the recounting of the dwarf episode, it presents a more thorough comparison between the two ambassadors from Arthur's court.

In appearance, there is little to choose between them. They are both knights. They both ask Arthur's blessing and are given it in the name of Christ. They both enter an apparently unguarded and friendly castle, clad in the fine trappings of knighthood. But if we compare their subsequent conduct in relation to the central tenets of chivalry, it becomes clear that they present an almost exact antithesis. The true knight should at all times show valour and fidelity in the service of his Lord. Kay's duty to his Lord was to offer a friendly plea for aid, thus gaining provisions for the whole army. Instead he behaves aggressively, gains food for himself, boasts of his martial prowess but is easily vanquished by the Lord of the Castle:

\begin{quote}
Thair with the grume, in his grief, leit gird to schir Kay,
Fellit the freke with his fist flat in the flure. \hfill (105–6)
\end{quote}

He then retreats with undignified haste and gives a distorted report to the King:

\begin{quote}
Yone berne nykis yow with nay;
To prise hym forthir to pray,
It helpis na thing. \hfill (115–17)
\end{quote}

\(^7\) In Romance literature the characters of Gawain and Kay were traditionally contrasted. See R. S. Loomis, *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes*. (New York, 1949) p. 154.
In fact he has behaved so churlishly that at no time has he presented any petition to be accepted or denied by the Lord of the Castle. Gawain on the other hand makes the plea on Arthur's behalf at once, remaining courteous even when faced with an apparent refusal. He thus succeeds in gaining hospitality for the whole of Arthur's host.

A true knight was expected to show justice to both the strong and the weak. Kay is presented with a classic test from this point of view. Confronted with the defenceless dwarf at the spit, he throws him aside and snatch the meat. When the powerful Lord appears, justly demanding an explanation for his behaviour ("Quhy has thou marrit my man, with maistri to mene?") Kay's only answer is a furious challenge to battle. In contrast to the belligerent responses of his brother knight, Gawain behaves justly and even charitably throughout. When the Lord denies his first petition, he does not draw his sword in fury but mildly acknowledges:

"That is at your awne will." (146)

His fair and peaceful approach meets with similar justice and generosity from the Lord.

The chivalric code thirdly demanded from its followers both sobriety and courtesy in their private life. The present episode perhaps highlights this contrast in the behaviour of Kay and Gawain most clearly of all. We learn that Gawain is at all times rational and dignified. We are even explicitly informed that

Sobirly the soverane salust has he. (136)

Kay's conduct on the other hand is throughout characterised by wilfulness and impetuosity. He "ruschit" up to the dwarf; he is "haisty and hate and of ane he will" in his dealings with the Lord, while even his retreat is done "spedely." Gawain presents his embassy from Arthur, "the king cortasse" with matching politeness, while Kay's conduct is so boorish, that even the Lord of the Castle comments on it later to Gawain:

8 The "topos" whereby a hero of Romance has to possess both courage and wisdom stemmed ultimately from the Classical epic. Barbour in The Bruce contrasts the intelligent courage of Bruce with the unthinking impetuosity of Edward Bruce.
“Thare come ane laithles leid air to this place,  
With ane girdill ourglit and uthir light gerr.” (137–58)

Finally, as all knights modelled their conduct ultimately on that of Christ, they were duty bound to show piety in the service of God. While the meekness and “frenschip” of Gawain is emphasized, Kay’s behaviour enacts a number of the Seven Deadly Sins. His snatching “throu lust the lym fra the lyre; To feid hym of that fyne fude” not only suggests a selfishness in direct contrast to Gawain’s stated altruism (line 122), it is also an example of gluttony and covetousness. His altercations with the Lord equally present him as a victim of pride and uncontrollable ire. In this as in all else, he proves a knight only in appearance, while Gawain serves as the true model of chivalry, embodying many of the Christian virtues.

This chivalric contrast is followed by the account of Arthur’s stay in the Lord’s castle. The Scottish author here handles his material with much originality. Amours, who refuses to admit the possibility that he may have intentions distinct from those of the Perceval, laments that in the French text, “the whole scene is more amusingly and more dramatically described.” 9 In fact, in Golagros we are given an entirely different account, which, instead of highlighting Kay once again, focusses on Arthur and sets his behaviour in the context of the earlier knightly opposition between the seneschal and Gawain. The King’s reactions resemble those of the true knight, Gawain. He behaves with meekness and courtesy, vowing to repay the Lord’s kindness whenever possible:

“Sic frenschip I hald fair, that forssis thair dedis;  
Thi kyndnes salbe quy, as I am trew knight.” (203–4)

and continues on his way to Jerusalem, apparently an embodiment of all the chivalric virtues.

But this is Arthur in a period of good fortune. Immediately afterwards he encounters the castle of Golagros. He comes upon it by chance and in the context of his pilgrimage, while in the French poem the Chastel Orguelleus was the main and intended goal of Arthur’s quest. The problem of fealty is once again introduced by the Scottish author. Spynagros tells the King:

"Yone lord haldis of nane leid, that yone land aw,
Bot ever-lesting but legiance, to his leving,
As his eldaris has done, enduring his daw." (262–64)

This contrast between a knight who has vowed fealty and one who will not, suggests that Arthur is about to be tested in a period of adverse fortune. Moreover, the introduction of the issue of fealty in a Scottish Romance has inescapable political overtones not present in the English tradition. The lengthy wars of independence at the turn of the fourteenth century had been undertaken to free Scotland from being a mere fief of the English crown. Nor did the Battle of Bannockburn secure the country's freedom, as is popularly supposed. After the death of Edward II, Edward III once more attempted to gain feudal superiority by "recognising" Edward Balliol as King of Scotland and lending him an army. Later, in 1364, he came to an agreement with David II whereby the Scottish king vowed again to become a vassal of England, and as late as 1460 the English still possessed castles in Scotland as a sign of this earlier period of domination. Scottish Romances often deal with the theme of fealty in relation to personal freedom and are thoroughly consistent in condemning all conquest, which brings free men into a position of unsought vassalage:

Fredome all solace to man giffis:
He levys at es that frely levys!
A noble hart may haiff nane es,
Na ellys nocht that may him ples,
Gif fredome failythe; for fre liking
Is yharnyt our all othir thing. (The Bruce, 227–32) 11

Arthur's reactions at this juncture, therefore, are measured against three interrelated ideals. There is first the ideal of the pilgrimage, imposed by the King himself. There is the chivalric ideal and its antithesis enacted in the earlier Gawain-Kay contrast. Finally, there is the specific political ideal of Scotland's proud tradition of freedom, attributed to Golagros' land by Spynagros.

10 Margaret Gray notes in her edition of Lancelot of the Laik, Scottish Text Society (Edinburgh and London, 1912), that the "demand for homage is a leading motive in all Scottish Arthurian Romances." She also suggests that this may be evidence of "how far the ever present fear of the English demands for homage had become an obsession in the Scottish national mind." (Introduction, p. xiii.)

11 John Barbour, The Bruce, Book i.
Arthur fails on all three levels. The liberty of Golagros' domain impresses him only as a challenge to the might of the Round Table. He vows never to find happiness until Golagros "mak homage and obllissing." 12 Spynagros' later arguments on the virtue of the land's inhabitants, their victory over other marauding forces and Christ-like meekness of their monarch serve only to increase the King's impatience for battle. It is also clear that the wealth of this fine domain has become a more important goal for Arthur than Jerusalem. With unseemly haste he

raid withoutin resting,
And socht to the clete of Criste, our the salt flude.
With mekil honour in erd he maid his offering,
Syne buskit hame the samyne way that he before yude. (301-4)

More and more he comes to resemble Kay rather than Gawain. Like the seneschal he puts all his faith in military conquest, is concerned with might rather than justice and shows clear signs of pride and covetousness. His intemperate behaviour when faced with rational argument, his frequent rages, his constant rushing from place to place all recall Kay's behaviour on his embassy to the Lord. Forgetting the ultimate Christian base to Chivalry, Arthur relies wholly on temporal power and is deaf to the spiritual warnings of his wisest counsellor:

"The wy that wendis for to were quhen he wenys best,
All his will in this wyrd, with welthis I wys,
Yt sall be licht as leif of the lynd lest,
That weleris doun with the wynd, sa waverand it is." (287-90)

"In faith," said the cumly king, "trow ye full traist,
My hecht sall haldin be, for baill or for blis.
Sall never my likame be laid unaissit to sleip,
Qhull I have gart yone berne bow,
As I have maid myne avow,
Or ellis mony wedow
Ful wraithly sal weip." (292-98)

The Arthur, who prepares his host for the conflict with Golagros, has thus suddenly fallen from a pedestal of apparent virtue and chivalric

12 Cf. the initial "childgered" behaviour of Arthur in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, lines 85-106.
13 This is probably intended as a reference to earlier Scottish victories over the English.
integrity to a level at which the Scottish audience can see him sharing the political ethics of the hated Edward I ("hammer of the Scots"), the superficial pilgrimage motivation of Langland's 'paynym in pylgryms wyse' and the false chivalry of Kay.

Prior to the battle itself, Arthur sends an embassy to Golagros. There is no parallel for this incident in the Perceval Continuation. In Golagros, however, it is clearly meant to recall the earlier embassies of Kay and Gawain to the Lord of the Castle. Phraseological echoes abound. On this occasion a senior warrior comments:

"I rede ane sayndis-man ye send to yone senyeour,"  (326)
while earlier Arthur had commanded:

"I rede we send furth ane saynd to yone ciete."  (47)

Further, the King's readiness to go to battle if Golagros "nykis you with nay" inevitably recalls Kay's pessimistic report, that "yone berne nykis you with nay." But Kay has no part in this embassy and it does not present a conflict between good and bad exemplars of chivalry as in the earlier case. Instead, Gawain leads the delegation and meets in Golagros a knight who matches his chivalric excellence. This parallel is again encouraged by verbal echoes from the first embassy. There Gawain had been sent because he was "mekar of mude." Now Spynagros informs Arthur, that Golagros "is maid on mold meik as ane child." Gawain's politeness is also as marked as it was to the Lord of the Castle and is matched by the courtesy of Golagros. Yet there is an important variation. Gawain, though again a "mediatour" carrying the message of Arthur, is this time bearing a false offer of friendship. It is proffered conditional on Golagros vowing fealty to him. There is, therefore, a hypocritical note in Gawain's presentation, not present when he addressed the Lord of the Castle. When he outlines the tremendous power of his King:

Thare is na leid on life of lordechip hym like,
Na nane sa doughty of deid, induring his daw.
Mony burgh, mony bour, mony big bike,
Mony kynrik to his clame, cumly to knaw,  (404–7)

the particular intention of his embassy converts apparent description into martial threat. Inevitably Golagros' dignified reply with its generous offer to please Arthur so far as is consistent with retained liberty sounds much more impressive. The Scottish audience
could not fail to hear in this stanza the voice of Wallace and Bruce, the heroes of their own wars of independence:

"Bot savand my senyeoury fra subjection,
And my lordeis un-lamy, withoutin legiance,
All that I can to yone king, cumly with crowne,
I sall preif all my pane to do hym plesance;
Baith with body and beild, bowsum and boun,
Hym to mensk on mold, withoutin manance.
Bot nowthir for his senyeoury, nor for his summun,
Na for dreid of na dede, na for na distance,
I will noght bow me ane bak for berne that is borne;
Quhilk I may my wit wald,
I think my fredome to hald,
As my eldaries of ald
Has done me beforne."  (441–53)

This comparison does not reflect on the status of Gawain, who comes in a spirit of 'lawte' to his King. It is Arthur's integrity and sense of justice, which are called into question. If the first embassy with its contrast between Kay and Gawain provided a double touchstone against which to measure Arthur's behaviour in time of good and bad fortune, the second embassy with its comparison of two good knights dramatizes the effect of chivalric loyalty on one, when his King is obsessed with temporal power.

It should now be clear, that the author of *Golagros and Gawane* has intentions far removed from those of the *Perceval* continuator. Using a narrative form based on parallels, contrasts and variations he is employing the episodes of the friendly Lord and Golagros to explore the nature of chivalry and distinguish between its ideals and the temporal perversion of those ideals. In this context I cannot agree with Paul Ketrick's view that Arthur "appears in precisely the same subordinate role in the French story as in the Scottish." 14 Many of the Scottish author's additions concern Arthur. He is the one who sets out on a pilgrimage but longs for temporal power rather than spiritual meekness. The chivalric contrast between Gawain and Kay is at once applied to his situation in the ensuing episodes. It is Arthur to whom the wise counsellor Spynagros almost always speaks, although so far he has been entirely unheeded. It is Arthur the great chivalric leader, who has twisted the concept of fealty to

14 Ketrick, op. cit., p. 112.
subserve his own lust for power instead of the needs of the weak. Most importantly, in *Golagros and Gawane*, while Kay remains throughout weak, Gawain throughout courteous and noble, Golagros throughout dignified, Spynagros throughout wise, it is only Arthur who changes. And his change is an extreme one. Prior to the battle with Golagros, he is presented as spiritually blind, extremely proud and intent on overthrowing Golagros. After this battle he is found meekly confessing his weakness before Christ and refusing Golagros’ proffered vow of fealty:

I mak releisie of thin allegiance;
But dreid I sall the warand,
Baith be sey and be land,
Fre as I the first fand,
With-outin distance. (1358–62)

Even the good Arthur of the *Perceval* Continuation fails to reach this level of altruism. It would appear that in some way the battle with Golagros serves as a true spiritual pilgrimage for the King, contrasting with the ineffective geographic pilgrimage of the earlier episode. It remains to trace the skill with which the *Golagros* author depicts the King’s growth in knowledge.

During the early stages of the battle, the author continues to emphasise the martial might and the riches of the Round Table:

As the reverend roy was reknand upone raw,
With the rout of the Round Tabill, that wes richest,
The king crownit with gold, cumly to knaw. (519–21)

The King is aware of his opponent’s strength but is aggressively confident that victory lies within his own power:

Yit sal I mak thame unrufe, foroutin resting,
And reve thame thair rentis, with routis full ride. (499–500)

He does not attend mass, as does the Arthur of the *Perceval* Continuation at this stage. Indeed Ketrick was so struck by the lack of religious references during the battle scenes, that he concluded that the author lacked “a religious trend of thought.” Nothing could

13 In the *Perceval* Continuation, the Soudoir presents his sword and pledge of fealty to Arthur. These are accepted by the King, who then leaves after fifteen days of merrymaking. He does not renounce his right to homage.

be further from the truth, and he would have done well to look more closely at his own evidence, which showed a marked increase of devotional expression towards the end of the poem when Arthur begins to learn the enduring spiritual lessons.

At this stage, Arthur's pride is countered within the tale both by Spynagos and by the narrator. While the King trusts blindly in his own might, Spynagos foresees the fall to come:

Schir, ye ar in your majeste, your mayne and your myght,
Yit within thir dais thre,
The sicker suth sail ye se. \(514-16\)

Meanwhile, the narrator enthusiastically depicts the valour of the combatants but reminds his readers that final victory or defeat, death or life lies not in their hands but in the power of God:

Quhilk Gaudifeir and Gaiiot baith to grund yhude,
Gaudifeir gat up agane, throu Goddis grete mightis. \(577-78\)

Sa huge wes the melle,
Wes nane sa sutell couth se
Quhilk gome suld govern the gre,
But God that al weildis. \(696-99\)

The battle itself progresses in such a way, that Arthur cannot fail to question his own earlier pride. In the Perceval Continuation, despite the capture of Lucain and the questionable outcome of Kay's encounter, Arthur's forces are clearly winning. In Gologros only the initial victory of Gaudifeir confirms the monarch's earlier confidence. Sir Rannald dies along with his worthy opponent Sir Rigal in a battle, which emphasises the ultimate wastefulness of such heroic combat. Then the scale of the engagement escalates in a fashion not found in Perceval. Four knights ride against four and Arthur sees both Sir Lionel and Sir Bedwar captured; five ride against five with two prisoners taken on each side. Arthur's bombastic confidence turns to a real concern for his knights:

The roy ramyt for reuth, richist of rent,
For eair of his knyghts cruel and kene. \(693-94\)

It should be noted that this development is skilfully underlined by placing his newfound "reuth" in apposition to the phrase "richist of rent," which recalls his earlier worldly ambition. The major turning
point, however, is withheld until Golagros makes his personal challenge, which is accepted by Gawain. For the first time, Arthur admits the need for spiritual aid and prays on behalf of his finest knight:

The king granteth the gait to secur Gawan,
And prayst to the grete God to grant him his grace,
Him to save and to salve, that is our soverane,
As he is makar of man, and alken myght haise. (791–94)

It would appear that the Golagros author wishes at this stage to suggest a gradual spiritual awakening on the part of the King, occasioned by the events of the battle. His deletion of the earlier religious references in the Perceval Continuation and his alteration of the course of the conflict in the Old French original may in part be related to this different thematic intention.

The superficiality of Arthur's chivalry had first been revealed through episodes involving Kay, Gawain, and Golagros. This pattern is now repeated, as he moves towards spiritual regeneration. Kay's conflict is moved from its position on the second day in the Perceval Continuation and now precedes Gawain's own conflict. This facilitates a second comparison between the two knights. In the Perceval Kay fought within the regular tournament but the Scottish author represents him as feeling slighted at having been passed over. This permits him to restress Kay's hunger for physical conflict, and his wilfulness as he sets out on his own to find an opponent. The unofficial nature of his encounter also highlights the vast disparity between this impromptu scuffle against an unprepared knight and the mighty battle between Golagros and Gawain, which will decide the fate of the Round Table.

It may seem strange that if the intention of the Golagros author is to emphasize the Gawain-Kay contrast, he allows the latter to win his encounter, when his source suggested defeat. But the intended contrast is not at this stage between martial might and martial weakness; it is between different spirits of victory. Kay wins a victory in arms against an unknown knight. The author informs us that it was a narrow decision with Kay extremely relieved at a capitulation, which briefly anticipated his own:

For to resave the brand the berne wes full blith,
For he wes hyssit and beft, and braithly bledand. (869–70)
Yet he feigns a power he no longer possesses and proffers "mercy" while "myghtles." The contrast with Gawain's behaviour could not be more complete. Instead of exaggerating a puny victory in arms, evaluating it in martial terms and proffering false mercy, Gawain sacrifices the appearance of victory in the most momentous of battles for spiritual reasons and offers genuine mercy to his opponent. To preserve the honour of Golagros in front of his men, he agrees to feign capture. As in Paradise Lost, this is depicted as a victory of "grace" over "wrath" and is evaluated against a background of Christian considerations by both combatants:

Lat it worth at my wil the wourseship to wale,
As I had wonyn the of were, wourthy and wis;
Syne cary to the castel, quhare I have maist cure.
Thus may thou saif me fra syte;
As I am cristynit perfite,
I sall thi kyndnes quyte,
And sauf thy honour." (Golagros) (1096–1102)

"Or thou be fulyeit fey, freke, in the fight,
I do me in thi gentrice, be Drightsin sa deir!"
He lenyt up in the place;
The tothir raithly upraise;
Gat never grome sic ane grace,
In feild of his feir! (Gawain) (1110–15)

In the second quotation, the narrator's comment indicates an awareness that Gawain is here transcending the usual chivalric practices. This fact has been more forcefully dramatised through setting his sacrifice next to Kay's petty victory in arms.

Clearly the Golagros author is continuing his practice of altering the order and the details of his French source in order to advance an original theme. He also introduces a parallel comment on Fortune and places it in the mouths of the two vanquished knights. Kay's opponent is not willing to attribute his downfall to the might of the seneschal:

"Of this stonay and stour I rede that ye stynt
I will yeld the my brand, sen na better may bene.
Qhahir that fortoune will faill,
Thair may na besynes availl." (865–66)

Gawain's opponent, Golagros, is more eloquent but his message is essentially the same. A complete trust in your own martial might,
such as Arthur exemplified earlier in the poem, is ultimate folly when the wish of God may cause a good knight to fall to the questionable power of Kay or overthrow the virtuous strength of a Golagros:

"Sen fortoune cachis the cours throu hir quentys,
I did it noght for nane drel that I had to de,
Na for na fauting of hart, na for na fantise;
Qhmare Criste cachis the cours, it rynnis quently;
May nowthir power nor pith put him to prise.
Quhan on-fortone quhelmys the quheil, thair gais grace by;
Qhse may his danger endure or destanye dispise,
That led men in langour ay lestand inly,
The date na langar may endure na Drightin devinis.
Ilk man may kyth be his cure,
Bailth knyght, king and empriour,
And muse in his myrrour,
And mater maist mine is."

(1220–32)

The parallel structure of the poem encourages us to compare both the battles and the comments; to see the victory of Christian charity transcend the triumph of might and hear both placed within the context of ultimate reliance on the will of God.

While Kay and Gawain once more represent the extremes of the knightly spectrum, and develop the broad chivalric theme, Golagros continues to concern himself primarily with the problems of liberty, fealty and tradition, which were particularly relevant to Scotland's own political situation. Once again, in order to make this point, the Golagros author had to diverge from the Perceval Continuation. There, the disgrace feared by Le Riche Soudoier 17 is not defeat in front of proud nobles accustomed to victory and liberty but defeat in front of his "amie." 18 This romantic line is wholly excised in the Scottish poem. In its place Golagros faces a problem of honour and politics. Honour demands that he fulfill his vow to Gawain and swear an oath of fealty to Arthur, but this implies that

17 The Soudoier is the character in the Perceval Continuation, who corresponds to Golagros.

18 In the Perceval Continuation, Gawain, while hunting, meets a beautiful lady, who is hastening to meet the knight whom she loves. He learns that this knight is in fact the Soudier, whom he is about to meet in battle. After their conflict, Gawain gives his sword to the "amie" and she is sent away, still believing that the Soudoier has been victorious.
his whole country will become a feof of the Round Table, so sacrificing its proud traditions of liberty. Faced with a choice not unlike that which had confronted Scottish Kings in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Golagros gives the nobles the chance to renounce his leadership and so retain political freedom.\textsuperscript{19} They reaffirm their faith in him and go with Gawain to Arthur’s castle.

The poem thus ends as it had begun by focussing firmly on the King. In many Romances this is just a perfunctory indication of his unique status and implies no major thematic involvement. But in \textit{Golagros and Gawane} Arthur’s reaction to the Golagros embassy is of crucial importance. He believes that his best knight has been vanquished and that the glory of the Round Table is gone forever. In these depths of despondency, however, he has apparently found a new stoicism, somewhat at odds with his earlier “childgered” reactions:

\begin{quote}
"The flour of knighthede is caught throu his cruelte!  
Now is the Round Tabill rebuit, richest of rent."  \hfill (1135–36)
\end{quote}

His grief, though real, is not excessive, while the setbacks of the battle have finally turned his reliance on self to reliance on Christ and even to the admission that all life is a gift from Him:

\begin{quote}
"Lord, as thou life lent to levand in leid,  
As thou formit all frute to foster our fude,  
Grant me comfort this day,  
As thou art God verray."  \hfill (954–57)
\end{quote}

These hints suggest that Arthur is now a more mature knight than he was at the outset of the poem. But he is about to move rapidly from the bottom to the top of Fortune’s wheel, when he learns the true outcome of the battle. When that wheel had moved in the opposite direction from the friendship of the Lord to the opposition of Golagros, the effect had been to expose Arthur as a false knight and topple him from the pedestal of our good opinion. Again the parallel form of the poem encourages us to compare that situation with this. The ideals of the spiritual pilgrimage, the true concept of chivalry and the value of freedom, which the King had earlier failed to embody, are all again implicit in the text, which now approaches him. It remains to discover whether the revelation of

\textsuperscript{19} As only Golagros has vowed fealty, another leader would not share his obligations to Arthur.
Gawain's victory will confirm his apparent spiritual progress or thrust him back into pride and temporality.

The answer is given both explicitly and powerfully. Arthur's initial courtesy might be the mark of one, who only possesses the appearance of chivalry, but his reception of the news proves that he has learned well the lessons taught by the battle. Instead of his earlier martial boastfulness, he welcomes the knights' account "be Ihesu." The King, whose inordinate temporal ambition had first caused the conflict, now values the loyalty shown by Golagros and Gawain above:

"all thi braid landis
Or all the rentis fra thyne unto Ronsiwall." (1312-13)

Then, after the inevitable feasting, he makes his pronouncement on Golagros' proffered fealty:

"Before thir senyeouris in sight, semely beside,
As tuiching the temporalite, in toure and in toune,
In firth, forest and fell, and woddis so wide;
I mak releisching of thin allegiance;
But dreid I sall the warand,
Baith be sey and be land,
Fre as I the first fand,
With outin distance." (1355-62)

By placing spiritual values above temporal, by waiving his right of feudal superiority and by admitting the ultimate control of God, Arthur at once proves himself a true knight of chivalry, a believer in liberty, and one who has at last achieved a true pilgrimage of experience. He does not discover Christ in Jerusalem but in himself.

Those earlier critics, who were attracted to the vividness and the linguistic skill of *Golagros and Gauane*, refused to grant it a high literary status because it also appeared to them to be loosely episodic and lacking in any serious theme. I believe that the evidence of the poem does not really provide grounds for this condescension. Once the crucial role of Arthur has been recognised, it becomes clear that the episodes centring on Gawain, Kay, and Golagros have been skilfully integrated into a poetic form, which makes extensive use of parallelism, contrast, and variation. Its function is to explore the development of Arthur as he moves from an apparent to a real
pilgrimage and in so doing to distinguish between the true and false faces of chivalry. This central theme leads into a more profound consideration of the theological premisses of chivalry and of life itself, while the problems of fealty and freedom introduce a more particular, political focus, bearing directly on the current position of Scotland. Despite its links with the Perceval Continuation, it is a work of real originality, which deserves wider critical recognition.

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