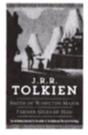


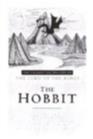
Three translations by the author of The Lord of the Rings Edited by Christopher Tolkien

MORE WORKS BY J.R.R. TOLKIEN





THE EPIC THAT STARTED IT ALL











J. R. R. TOLKIEN, beloved author of THE HOBBIT, THE LORD OF THE RINGS, and THE SILMARILLION, was Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford University from 1925 to 1945 and Professor of English Language and Literature and a Fellow of Merton College from 1945 to his retirement in 1959. As a scholar, his principal interest was in the literary and linguistic tradition of the English West Midlands, a section of England about 150 miles northwest of London. It was in the West Midlands of the late fourteenth century that the unidentified poet who is believed to have written SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT is thought to have lived. Though remote from the dominant cultural center of London, the site of the royal court, the West Midlands is believed to have been a provincial yet highly sophisticated cultural center in its own right, with SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT being its crowning, and lasting, literary achievement. Professor Tolkien died in 1973.

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Works Published Posthumously
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SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT, PEARL, AND SIR ORFEO

J.R.R. TOLKIEN

EDITED BY CHRISTOPHER TOLKIEN



NEW YORK

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PREFACE

When my father, Professor J. R. R. Tolkien, died in 1973 he left unpublished his translations of the medieval English poems Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo. A form of his Pearl translation was in existence more than thirty years ago, though it was much revised later; and that of Sir Gawain soon after 1950. The latter was broadcast on the BBC Third Programme in 1953. His version of Sir Orfeo was also made many years ago, and had been (I believe) for long laid aside; but he certainly wished to see it published.

He wished to provide both a general introduction and a commentary; and it was largely because he could not decide on the form that these should take that the translations remained unpublished. On the one hand, he undoubtedly sought an audience without any knowledge of the original poems; he wrote of his translation of *Pearl: 'The Pearl* certainly deserves to be heard by lovers of English poetry who have not the opportunity or the desire to master its difficult idiom. To such readers I offer this translation.' But he also

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wrote: 'A translation may be a useful form of commentary; and this version may possibly be acceptable even to those who already know the original, and possess editions with all their apparatus.' He wished therefore to explain the basis of his version in debatable passages; and indeed a very great deal of unshown editorial labour lies behind his translations, which not only reflect his long study of the language and metre of the originals, but were also in some degree the inspiration of it. As he wrote: 'These translations were first made long ago for my own instruction, since a translator must first try to discover as precisely as he can what his original means, and may be led by ever closer attention to understand it better for its own sake. Since I first began I have given to the idiom of these texts very close study, and I have certainly learned more about them than I knew when I first presumed to translate them.'

But the commentary was never written, and the introduction did not get beyond the point of tentative beginnings. My concern in preparing this book has been that it should remain his own; and I have not provided any commentary. Those readers whom he most wished to reach will be content to know that in passages of doubt or difficulty these translations are the product of long scrutiny of the originals, and of great pains to embody his conclusions in a rendering at once precise and metrical; and for explanations and discussions of detail reference must be made to editions of the originals. But readers who are wholly unacquainted with these poems will wish to know something about them; and it seemed to me that if it were at all possible the translations should be introduced

in the words of the translator himself, who gave so much time and thought to these works. I have therefore composed the introductory and explanatory parts of the book in the following way.

The first section of the Introduction, on the author of Sir Gawain and Pearl, is derived from my father's notes. The second section, on Sir Gawain, is (in slightly reduced form) a radio talk which he gave after the broadcasts of his translation. For the third section, the only writing of his on Pearl that I could find suitable to the purpose was the original draft for an essay that was subsequently published in revised form. After my father and Professor E. V. Gordon had collaborated in making an edition of Sir Gawain, which was published in 1925, they began work on an edition of Pearl. In the event, that book was almost entirely the work of Professor Gordon alone, but my father's contribution to it included a small part of the Introduction; and the essay is here reproduced in the form it finally took as the result of their collaboration. 1 Its appearance here has been made possible through the generosity of Mrs. I. L. Gordon. I wish also to thank the Delegates of the Clarendon Press for their permission to use it.

I was not able to discover any writing by my father on the subject of Sir Orfeo. Here therefore, in keeping with my general intentions for the book, I have restricted myself to a very brief factual note on the text.

Since a primary object of these translations was the close preservation of the metres of the originals, I thought that the

Pearl, edited by E. V. Gordon, Oxford 1953, pages xi-xix: 'Form and Purpose.'

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book should contain, for those who want it, an account of the verse-forms of Sir Gawain and Pearl. The section on Sir Gawain is composed from drafts made for, but not used in, the introductory talk to the broadcasts of the translation; and that on the verse-form of Pearl from other unpublished notes. There is very little in these accounts (and nothing that is a matter of opinion) that is not in my father's own words.

It is inevitable that in thus using materials written at different times and for different purposes the result should not be entirely homogeneous; but it seemed to me better to accept this consequence than not to use them at all.

At his death my father had not finally decided on the form of every line in the translations. In choosing between competing versions I have tried throughout to determine his latest intention, and that has in most cases been discoverable with fair certainty.

At the end of the book I have provided a short glossary. On the last page will be found some verses translated by my father from a medieval English poem. He called them 'Gawain's Leave-taking', clearly with reference to the passage in *Sir Gawain* where Gawain leaves the castle of Sir Bertilak to go to the tryst at the Green Chapel. The original poem has no connection with Sir Gawain; the verses translated are in fact the first three stanzas, and the last, of a somewhat longer poem found among a group of fourteenth-century lyrics with refrains in the Vernon manuscript in the Bodleian Library at Oxford.

INTRODUCTION

I

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and Pearl are both contained in the same unique manuscript, which is now in the British Museum. Neither poem is given a title. Together with them are two other poems, also title-less, which are now known as Purity (or Cleanness), and Patience. All four are in the same handwriting, which is dated in round figures about 1400; it is small, angular, irregular and often difficult to read, quite apart from the fading of the ink in the course of time. But this is the hand of the copyist, not the author. There is indeed nothing to say that the four poems are the works of the same poet; but from elaborate comparative study it has come to be very generally believed that they are.

Of this author, nothing is now known. But he was a major poet of his day; and it is a solemn thought that his name is now forgotten, a reminder of the great gaps of ignorance over which we now weave the thin webs of our literary history. But something to the purpose may still be learned of this writer from his works. He was a man of serious and devout mind, though not without humour; he had an interest in theology, and some knowledge of it, though an amateur knowledge, perhaps, rather than a professional; he had Latin and French and was well enough read in French books, both romantic and instructive; but his home was in the West Midlands of England: so much his language shows, and his metre, and his scenery.

His active life must have lain in the later half of the fourteenth century, and he was thus a contemporary of Chaucer's: but whereas Chaucer has never become a closed book, and has continued to be read with pleasure since the fifteenth century, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and Pearl are practically unintelligible to modern readers. Indeed in their own time the adjectives 'dark' and 'hard' would probably have been applied to these poems by most people who enjoyed the works of Chaucer. For Chaucer was a native of London and the populous south-east of England, and the language which he naturally used has proved to be the foundation of a standard English and literary English of later times; the kind of verse which he composed was the kind which English poets mostly used for the next five hundred years. But the language of this unknown author from the far less populous, far more conservative West Midlands, his grammar, his style, his vocabulary, were in many respects remote from those of London, off the main track of inevitable development; and in

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight he used the ancient English measure which had descended from antiquity, that kind of verse which is now called 'alliterative'. It aimed at quite different effects from those achieved by the rhymed and syllable-counting metres derived from France and Italy; it seemed harsh and stiff and rugged to those unaccustomed to it. And quite apart from the (from a London point of view) dialectal character of the language, this 'alliterative' verse included in its tradition a number of special verse words, never used in ordinary talk or prose, that were 'dark' to those outside the tradition.

In short, this poet adhered to what is now known as the Alliterative Revival of the fourteenth century, the attempt to use the old native metre and style long rusticated for high and serious writing; and he paid the penalty for its failure, for alliterative verse was not in the event revived. The tides of time, of taste, of language, not to mention political power, trade and wealth, were against it; and all that remains of the chief artist of the 'Revival' is the one manuscript, of which nothing is now known before it found a place in the library of Henry Savile of Bank in Yorkshire, who lived from 1568 to 1617.

And these, then, are the reasons for translation: it is necessary if these poems are not to remain the literary pleasure only of mediaeval specialists. And they are difficult to translate. The main object of the present translations is to preserve the metres, which are essential to the poems as wholes; and to present the language and style, nonetheless, not as they may appear at a superficial glance, archaic, queer, crabbed and rustic, but as they were for the people to whom they were ad-

dressed: if English and conservative, yet courtly, wise, and well-bred—educated, indeed learned.

П

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

If the most certain thing known about the author is that he also wrote *Patience*, *Purity* and *Pearl*, then we have in *Sir Gawain* the work of a man capable of weaving elements taken from diverse sources into a texture of his own; and a man who would have in that labour a serious purpose. I would myself say that it is precisely that purpose that has with its hardness proved the shaping tool which has given form to the material, given it the quality of a good tale on the surface, because it is more than that, if we look closer.

The story is good enough in itself. It is a romance, a fairytale for adults, full of life and colour; and it has virtues that
would be lost in a summary, though they can be perceived
when it is read at length: good scenery, urbane or humorous
dialogue, and a skilfully ordered narrative. Of this the most
notable example is the long Third Part with its interlacing of
the hunting-scenes and the temptations. By this device all
three main characters are kept vividly in view during the
three crucial days, while the scenes at home and in the field
are linked by the Exchange of Winnings, and we watch the
gains of the chase diminish as the gains of Sir Gawain increase and the peril of his testing mounts to a crisis.

But all this care in formal construction serves also to make the tale a better vehicle of the 'moral' which the author has imposed on his antique material. He has re-drawn according to his own faith his ideal of knighthood, making it Christian knighthood, showing that the grace and beauty of its courtesy (which he admires) derive from the Divine generosity and grace, Heavenly Courtesy, of which Mary is the supreme creation: the Queen of Courtesy, as he calls her in Pearl. This he exhibits symbolically in mathematical perfection in the Pentangle, which he sets on Gawain's shield instead of the heraldic lion or eagle found in other romances. But while in Pearl he enlarged his vision of his dead daughter among the blessed to an allegory of the Divine generosity, in Sir Gawain he has given life to his ideal by showing it incarnate in a living person, modified by his individual character, so that we can see a man trying to work the ideal out, see its weaknesses (or man's weaknesses).

But he has done more. His major point is the rejection of unchastity and adulterous love, and this was an essential part of the original tradition of amour courtois or 'courtly love'; but this he has complicated again, after the way of morals in real life, by involving it in several minor problems of conduct, of courtly behaviour to women and fidelity to men, of what we might call sportsmanship or playing the game. On these problems he has been less explicit, and has left his hearers more or less to form their own views of the scale of their values, and their relation to the governing value of sin and virtue.

So this poem is made to be, as it were, all about Gawain.

The rest is a web of circumstance in which he is involved for the revelation of his character and code. The 'Faerie' may with its strangeness and peril enlarge the adventure, making the test more tense and more potent, but Gawain is presented as a credible, living person; and all that he thinks, or says, or does, is to be seriously considered, as of the real world. His character is drawn so as to make him peculiarly fitted to suffer acutely in the adventure to which he is destined.

We see his almost exaggerated courtesy of speech, his modesty of bearing, which yet goes with a subtle form of pride: a deep sense of his own honour, not to mention, we might say, a pleasure in his own repute as 'this fine father of breeding' (stanza 38). We note also the warmth of his character, generous, even impetuous, which by a slight excess leads him ever to promise more than necessary, beyond the consequences that he can foresee. We are shown his delight in the company of women, his sensitiveness to their beauty, his pleasure in the 'polished play of converse' with them, and at the same time his fervent piety, his devotion to the Blessed Virgin. We see him at the crisis of the action forced to distinguish in scale of value the elements of his code, preserving his chastity, and his loyalty on the highest plane to his host; finally rejecting in fact (if not in empty words) absolute worldly 'courtesy', that is, complete obedience to the will of the sovereign lady, rejecting it in favour of virtue.

Yet later we see him, in the last scene with the Green Knight, so overwhelmed by shame at being discovered in a breach of his laughing word, given in a Christmas game, that the honour he has gained in the great test is of small comfort to him. With characteristic excess he vows to wear a badge of disgrace for the rest of his life. In a fit of remorse, so violent that it would be appropriate only to grievous sin, he accuses himself of Greed, Cowardice, and Treachery. Of the first two he is guiltless, except by a casuistry of shame. But how true to life, to a picture of a perhaps not very reflective man of honour, is this shame at being found out (especially at being found out) in something considered rather shabby, whatever in solemn conscience we may think of its real importance. How true also is this equality in emotion aroused by all parts of a personal code of conduct, however various in importance or ultimate sanctions each element may be.

Of the last charge: disloyalty, troth-breach, treachery, all the hard things that he calls it, Gawain was guilty only in so far as he had broken the rules of an absurd game imposed on him by his host (after he had rashly promised to do anything his host asked); and even that was at the request of a lady, made (we may note) after he had accepted her gift, and so was in a cleft stick. Certainly this is an imperfection upon some plane; but on how high a plane, and of what importance? The laughter of the Court of Camelot—and to what higher court in matters of honour could one go?—is probably sufficient answer.

But in terms of literature, undoubtedly this break in the mathematical perfection of an ideal creature, inhuman in flawlessness, is a great improvement. The credibility of Gawain is enormously enhanced by it. He becomes a real man, and we can thus really admire his actual virtue. We can indeed give serious thought to the movements of the English

mind in the fourteenth century, which he represents, from which much of our sentiment and ideals of conduct have been derived. We see the attempt to preserve the graces of 'chivalry' and the courtesies, while wedding them, or by wedding them, to Christian morals, to marital fidelity, and indeed married love. The noblest knight of the highest order of Chivalry refuses adultery, places hatred of sin in the last resort above all other motives, and escapes from a temptation that attacks him in the guise of courtesy through grace obtained by prayer. That is what the author of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight was mainly thinking about, and with that thought he shaped the poem as we have it.

It was a matter of contemporary concern, for the English. Sir Gawain presents in its own way, more explicitly moral and religious, one facet of this movement of thought out of which also grew Chaucer's greatest poem, Troilus and Criseyde. Those who read Sir Gawain are likely to read the last stanzas of Chaucer's work with a renewed interest.

But if Chaucer's poem is much altered in tone and import from its immediate source in Boccaccio's Filostrato, it is utterly removed from the sentiments or ideas in the Homeric Greek poems on the fall of Troy, and still further removed (we may guess) from those of the ancient Aegean world. Research into these things has very little to do with Chaucer. The same is certainly true of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, for which no immediate source has been discovered. For that reason, since I am speaking of this poem and this author, and not of ancient rituals, nor of pagan divinities of the

Sun, nor of Fertility, nor of the Dark and the Underworld, in the almost wholly lost antiquity of the North and of these Western Isles-as remote from Sir Gawain of Camelot as the gods of the Aegean are from Troilus and Pandarus in Chaucer-for that reason I have not said anything about the story, or stories, that the author used. Research has discovered a lot about them, especially about the two main themes, the Beheading Challenge and the Test. These are in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight cleverly combined, but are elsewhere found separately in varied forms, in Irish or in Welsh or in French. Research of that sort interests men of today greatly; it interests me; but it interested educated men of the fourteenth century very little. They were apt to read poems for what they could get out of them of sentence, as they said, of instruction for themselves, and their times; and they were shockingly incurious about authors as persons, or we should have known much more about Geoffrey Chaucer, and the name at least of the author of Sir Gawain. But there is not time for everything. Let us be grateful for what we have got, preserved by chary chance: another window of manycoloured glass looking back into the Middle Ages, and giving us another view. Chaucer was a great poet, and by the power of his poetry he tends to dominate the view of his time taken by readers of literature. But his was not the only mood or temper of mind in those days. There were others, such as this author, who, while he may have lacked Chaucer's subtlety and flexibility, had, what shall we say?-a nobility to which Chaucer scarcely reached.

III

Pearl

When Pearl was first read in modern times it was accepted as what it purports to be, an elegy on the death of a child, the poet's daughter. The personal interpretation was first questioned in 1904 by W. H. Schofield, who argued that the maiden of the poem was an allegorical figure of a kind usual in medieval vision-literature, an abstraction representing 'clean maidenhood'. His view was not generally accepted, but it proved the starting-point of a long debate between the defenders of the older view and the exponents of other theories: that the whole poem is an allegory, though each interpreter has given it a different meaning; or that it is no more than a theological treatise in verse. Much space would be required to rehearse this debate, even in brief summary, and the labour would be unprofitable; but it has not been entirely wasted, for much learning has gone into it, and study has deepened the appreciation of the poem and brought out more clearly the allegorical and symbolical elements that it certainly includes.

A clear distinction between 'allegory' and 'symbolism' may be difficult to maintain, but it is proper, or at least useful, to limit allegory to narrative, to an account (however short) of events; and symbolism to the use of visible signs or things to represent other things or ideas. Pearls were a symbol of purity that especially appealed to the imagination of the Middle

Ages (and notably of the fourteenth century); but this does not make a person who wears pearls, or even one who is called Pearl, or Margaret, into an allegorical figure. To be an 'allegory' a poem must as a whole, and with fair consistency, describe in other terms some event or process; its entire narrative and all its significant details should cohere and work together to this end. There are minor allegories within Pearl; the parable of the workers in the vineyard (stanzas 42-49) is a self-contained allegory; and the opening stanzas of the poem, where the pearl slips from the poet's hand through the grass to the ground, is an allegory in little of the child's death and burial. But an allegorical description of an event does not make that event itself allegorical. And this initial use is only one of the many applications of the pearl symbol, intelligible if the reference of the poem is personal, incoherent if one seeks for total allegory. For there are a number of precise details in Pearl that cannot be subordinated to any general allegorical interpretation, and these details are of special importance since they relate to the central figure, the maiden of the vision, in whom, if anywhere, the allegory should be concentrated and without disturbance.

The basis of criticism, then, must be the references to the child or maiden, and to her relations with the dreamer; and no good reason has ever been found for regarding these as anything but statements of 'fact': the real experiences that lie at the foundation of the poem.

When the dreamer first sees the maiden in the paradisal garden, he says (stanza 21):

Art bou my perle bat I haf playned, Regretted by myn one on ny3te? Much longeyng haf I for be layned Syben into gresse bou my agly3te.

This explains for us the minor allegory of the opening stanzas and reveals that the pearl he lost was a maid-child who died. For the maiden of the vision accepts the identification, and herself refers to her death in stanza 64. In stanza 35 she says she was at that time very young, and the dreamer himself in stanza 41 tells us that she was not yet two years old and had not yet learned her creed or prayers. The whole theological argument that follows assumes the infancy of the child when she left this world.

The actual relationship of the child in the world to the dreamer is referred to in stanza 20: when he first espied her in his vision he recognized her; he knew her well, he had seen her before (stanza 14); and so now beholding her visible on the farther bank of the stream he was the happiest man 'from here to Greece', for

Ho watz me nerre ben aunte or nece.

'She was more near akin to me than aunt or niece.' Nerre can in the language of the time only mean here 'nearer in blood-relationship'. In this sense it was normal and very frequent. And although it is true that 'nearer than aunt or niece' might, even so, refer to a sister, the disparity in age makes the assumption of this relationship far less probable. The depth of

sorrow portrayed for a child so young belongs rather to parenthood. And there seems to be a special significance in the situation where the doctrinal lesson given by the celestial maiden comes from one of no earthly wisdom to her proper teacher and instructor in the natural order.

A modern reader may be ready to accept the personal basis of the poem, and yet may feel that there is no need to assume any immediate or particular foundation in autobiography. It is admittedly not necessary for the vision, which is plainly presented in literary or scriptural terms; the bereavement and the sorrow may also be imaginative fictions, adopted precisely because they heighten the interest of the theological discussion between the maiden and the dreamer.

This raises a difficult and important question for general literary history: whether the purely fictitious 'I' had yet appeared in the fourteenth century, a first person feigned as narrator who had no existence outside the imagination of the real author. Probably not; at least not in the kind of literature that we are here dealing with: visions related by a dreamer. The fictitious traveller had already appeared in 'Sir John Mandeville', the writer of whose 'voyages' seems not to have borne that name, nor indeed, according to modern critics, ever to have journeyed far beyond his study; and it is difficult to decide whether this is a case of fraud intended to deceive (as it certainly did), or an example of prose fiction (in the literary sense) still wearing the guise of truth according to contemporary convention.

This convention was strong, and not so 'conventional' as it may appear to modern readers. Although by those of literary

experience it might, of course, be used as nothing more than a device to secure literary credibility (as often by Chaucer), it represented a deep-rooted habit of mind, and was strongly associated with the moral and didactic spirit of the times. Tales of the past required their grave authorities, and tales of new things at least an eyewitness, the author. This was one of the reasons for the popularity of visions: they allowed marvels to be placed within the real world, linking them with a person, a place, a time, while providing them with an explanation in the phantasies of sleep, and a defence against critics in the notorious deception of dreams. So even explicit allegory was usually presented as a thing seen in sleep. How far any such narrated vision, of the more serious kind, was supposed to resemble an actual dream experience is another question. A modern poet would indeed be very unlikely to put forward for factual acceptance a dream that in any way resembled the vision of Pearl, even when all allowance is made for the arrangement and formalizing of conscious art. But we are dealing with a period when men, aware of the vagaries of dreams, still thought that amid their japes came visions of truth. And their waking imagination was strongly moved by symbols and the figures of allegory, and filled vividly with the pictures evoked by the scriptures, directly or through the wealth of medieval art. And they thought that on occasion, as God willed, to some that slept blessed faces appeared and prophetic voices spoke. To them it might not seem so incredible that the dream of a poet, one wounded with a great bereavement and troubled in spirit, might resemble the vision

in Pearl.1 However that may be, the narrated vision in the more serious medieval writing represented, if not an actual dream, at least a real process of thought culminating in some resolution or turning-point of the interior life—as with Dante, and in Pearl. And in all forms, lighter or more grave, the 'I' of the dreamer remained the eyewitness, the author, and facts that he referred to outside the dream (especially those concerning himself) were on a different plane, meant to be taken as literally true, and even by modern critics so taken. In the Divina Commedia the Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita of the opening line, or la decenne sete of Purgatorio xxxii, are held to refer to real dates and events, the thirty-fifth year of Dante's life in 1300, and the death of Beatrice Portinari in 1290. Similarly the references to Malvern in the Prologue and Passus VII of Piers Plowman, and the numerous allusions to London, are taken as facts in someone's life, whoever the critic may favour as the author (or authors) of the poem.

It is true that the 'dreamer' may become a shadowy figure of small biographical substance. There is little left of the actual Chaucer in the 'I' who is the narrator in *The Boke of the Duchesse*. Few will debate how much autobiography there is in the bout of insomnia that is made the occasion of the poem. Yet this fictitious and conventional vision is founded on a real event: the death of Blanche, the wife of John of Gaunt, in 1369. That was her real name, White (as she is called in the

Ek oother seyn that thorugh impressiouns, As if a wight hath faste a thyng in mynde, That thereof comen swiche avysiouns. (Troihes and Criseyde, v. 372–4)

poem). However heightened the picture may be that is drawn of her loveliness and goodness, her sudden death was a lamentable event. Certainly it can have touched Chaucer faless deeply than the death of one 'nearer than aunt or niece' but even so, it is this living drop of reality, this echo of sudder death and loss in the world, that gives to Chaucer's early poem a tone and feeling that raises it above the literary devices out of which he made it. So with the much greater poem Pearl, it is overwhelmingly more probable that it too was founded on a real sorrow, and drew its sweetness from a real bitterness.

And yet to the particular criticism of the poem decision or this point is not of the first importance. A feigned elegy remains an elegy; and feigned or unfeigned, it must stand or fall by its art. The reality of the bereavement will not save the poetry if it is bad, nor lend it any interest save to those who are in fact interested, not in poetry, but in documents, whose hunger is for history or biography or even for mere names. It is or general grounds, and considering its period in particular, that a 'real' or directly autobiographical basis for *Pearl* seems likely, since that is the most probable explanation of its form and its poetic quality. And for this argument the discovery of biographical details would have little importance. Of all that has been done in this line the only suggestion of value was made by Sir Israel Gollancz: that the child may have been actually called a pearl by baptismal name, *Margarita* in

¹ Edition of Pearl, p. xliii: 'He perhaps named the child "Margery" or "Marguerite". 'The form Marguerite would not have been used; it is a modern French form.

Latin, Margery in English. It was a common name at the time, because of the love of pearls and their symbolism, and it had already been borne by several saints. If the child was really baptized a pearl, then the many pearls threaded on the strands of the poem in multiple significance receive yet another lustre. It is on such accidents of life that poetry crystallizes:

And goode faire White she het;
That was my lady name ryght.
She was bothe fair and bryght;
She hadde not hir name wrong.
(Boke of the Duchesse, 948–51).

'O perle', quod I, 'in perle3 py3t, Art bou my perle bat I haf playned?'

It has been objected that the child as seen in Heaven is not like an infant of two in appearance, speech, or manners: she addresses her father formally as sir, and shows no filial affection for him. But this is an apparition of a spirit, a soul not yet reunited with its body after the resurrection, so that theories relevant to the form and age of the glorified and risen body do not concern us. And as an immortal spirit, the maiden's relations to the earthly man, the father of her body, are altered. She does not deny his fatherhood, and when she addresses him as sir she only uses the form of address that was customary for medieval children. Her part is in fact truly imagined. The sympathy of readers may now go out more readily

to the bereaved father than to the daughter, and they may feel that he is treated with some hardness. But it is the hardness of truth. In the manner of the maiden is portrayed the effect upon a clear intelligence of the persistent earthliness of the father's mind; all is revealed to him, and he has eyes, yet he cannot see. The maiden is now filled with the spirit of celestial charity, desiring only his eternal good and the cure of his blindness. It is not her part to soften him with pity, or to indulge in childish joy at their reunion. The final consolation of the father was not to be found in the recovery of a beloved daughter, as if death had not after all occurred or had no significance, but in the knowledge that she was redeemed and saved and had become a queen in Heaven. Only by resignation to the will of God, and through death, could he rejoin her.

And this is the main purpose of the poem as distinct from its genesis or literary form: the doctrinal theme, in the form of an argument on salvation, by which the father is at last convinced that his Pearl, as a baptized infant and innocent, is undoubtedly saved, and, even more, admitted to the blessed company of the 144,000 that follow the Lamb. But the doctrinal theme is, in fact, inseparable from the literary form of the poem and its occasion; for it arises directly from the grief, which imparts deep feeling and urgency to the whole discussion. Without the elegiac basis and the sense of great personal loss which pervades it, Pearl would indeed be the mere theological treatise on a special point, which some critics have called it. But without the theological debate the grief would never have risen above the ground. Dramatically the debate represents a long process of thought and mental struggle, an

is first mood, even if he had been granted a vision of the blessed in Heaven, the dreamer would have received it introdulously or rebelliously. And he would have awakened by the mound again, not in the gentle and serene resignation of the last stanza, but still as he is first seen, looking only backward, his mind filled with the horror of decay, wringing his hands, while his wreched wylle in wo ay wrazte.

IV

Sir Orfeo

Sir Orfeo is found in three manuscripts, of which the earliest gives very much the best text; this is the Auchinleck manuscript, a large miscellany made about 1330, probably in London, and now in the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh. The other manuscripts, both of the fifteenth century, offer very decrepit versions of the poem; but the Auchinleck text has also suffered from the corruptions of error and forgetfulness, if much less so than the others. The translation follows the Auchinleck text (with some emendations), except at the beginning, where a leaf is lost from the manuscript. Auchinleck begins with Orfeo was a king (line 25 of the translation); but the manuscript Harley 3810 precedes this with the 24-line prologue which is here translated. This prologue appears also in a very corrupt state in the third manuscript, Ashmole 61; and, remarkably, also elsewhere in the Auchinleck

st have followed there. For there the feast was unfailing with all meats and all mirth that such gladness and gaiety as was in was founded by this famous lord, din of voices by day, and dancing there who in battle rejoiced, all happiness at the highest in ha t betid they troubles aroused. had the lords and the ladies, such marvels have by men been seen With all the bliss of this world th t I know of since that olden time; the knights most renowned after ode in Britain as kings and the ladies most lovely that ev t honoured, as I have heard men tell. and he, king most courteous, wh For all that folk so fair did in the among men I mean to recall, some men have held it, lventures of the wonders of Arthur. Under heaven the his lay but a little while now, their king most h s in town I have heard it would now be l it told, a troop in war so is fixed and fettered ory brave and bold, linked and truly lettered, While New Year was yet young t as loved in this land of old. that day double dainties on the d when the king was there come w and the chanting of the choir in t With loud clamour and cries bot nelot at Christmas-tide ord, lieges most noble, Noel announced anew, and name Round all those tried brethren, then nobles ran anon with New Y natched and mirth without care. Handsels, handsels they shouted ny a time the trusty knights, Competed for those presents in ously these gentle lords; ladies laughed loudly, though th where strange things, strife and at whiles in the land did fare, 23

each other grief and gladness

then to the court they came at car

abide,

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