

**THE AUTHOR OF PEARL,  
CONSIDERED IN  
THE LIGHT OF HIS  
THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS**

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BY  
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VI.—THE AUTHOR OF *THE PEARL*, CONSIDERED  
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OPINIONS.

Among the English poets of the fourteenth century the one who deserves the seat next to Chaucer is the anonymous author of the four poems: *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight*, *The Pearl*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience*.<sup>1</sup> The singular beauty of these poems has long stimulated scholars to the most diligent efforts to discover their author.

The first attempt to identify the unknown poet was made in 1838 by Dr. Edwin Guest,<sup>2</sup> who confidently assigned these poems to Huchown, the mysterious Scotch poet mentioned by the chronicler Wyntoun. At one time or another, almost every piece of fourteenth century verse which shows a northerly dialect has been ascribed to Huchown; this

<sup>1</sup> Preserved only in a single ms. (Nero A x of the Cottonian collection). *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight* was first edited in 1839 by Sir Frederic Madden in his collection of Gawayne romances. In 1864 it was again edited by Richard Morris for the Early English Text Society. *Pearl*, *Cleanness* and *Patience* were also edited by Morris in 1864 (*Early Engl. Allit. Poems*, E. E. T. S.). In 1891 the *Pearl* was again edited by Mr. I. Gollancz, with translation, notes and introduction.

Some scholars are disposed to include also as the work of the same author the *Legend of Erkenwalde*. This opinion was first expressed in 1881 by Dr. Carl Horstmann (*Allengl. Legenden*, p. 265), in editing the *Erkenwalde*. Horstmann's opinion was endorsed in the following year by Dr. M. Trautmann (*Anglia*, v, Anzeiger, pp. 23-5), and in 1886 by Dr. Fr. Knigge (*Die Sprache des Dichters von Sir Gau. and the Green Knight*, pp. 4-12). On the other hand, Mr. Gollancz (*Pearl*, p. xiv, note 2) expresses his doubt. The argument for ascribing the *Erkenwalde* to the Gawayne poet rests upon similarities of dialect and vocabulary. Such similarities as have been pointed out, however, do not seem to me conclusive. Cf. further p. 126, note 2.

<sup>2</sup> *History of English Rhythms*, ed. 1882, pp. 458, 462.

identification of our author was therefore natural, if not inevitable. In the following year Sir Frederic Madden, in his edition of *Sir Gawayne*, accepted Dr. Guest's opinion that Huchown was its author. At the same time he recognized the fact that the poem in its present form is not in the Scotch dialect, and suggested as an explanation that it had been rewritten "by a scribe of the Midland counties."<sup>1</sup> With this recognition that *Sir Gawayne* as we have it is in the Midland rather than the Scottish dialect, there was manifestly slender reason for continuing to suppose that Huchown was the author. At length, in 1864, Dr. Richard Morris dealt a decisive blow to the Huchown hypothesis by showing that "the uniformity and consistency of the grammatical forms is so entire that there is indeed no internal evidence of subsequent transcription into any other dialect than that in which they were originally written."<sup>2</sup> Dr. Morris's conclusion that the language of these poems can be relied on as fixing the author's home in the West Midland district, has been accepted by later philologists.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, in the face of the unanimous decision of the philologists that these poems are not the work of a Scottish poet, certain Scotch writers continue to ascribe them to Huchown.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Sir Gawayne*, ed. 1839, pp. 301 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Early Engl. Allit. Poems*, E. E. T. S., p. viii.

<sup>3</sup> In 1885 Morris's opinion that these poems were composed in the West Midland dialect was endorsed by Wilhelm Fick (*Zum mittlengl. Gedicht von der Perle*, Kiel), who believes, however, that they were later copied by a southerly scribe. In 1896 L. Morsbach (*Mittlengl. Gram.*, I, p. 16) assigned these poems to the northern border of the West Midland district or the southern border of the Northern district (cf. also p. 9).

<sup>4</sup> It is impossible here to follow all the ramifications of the Huchown discussion. The original source of our information as to Huchown's literary productions is the chronicler Wytoun (circa 1420), who ascribes to him three poems:—

He made the Gret Gest off Arthure  
 And the Awntyre off Gawane,  
 The Fystryll als off Swete Swsane. (vv. 4826-8.)

Their arguments, however, have not succeeded in carrying conviction.

The last of the poems in this list is unanimously identified as the *Pistil of Susan* (ed. F. J. Amours, *Scottish Allit. Poems*, Scot. Text Soc'y, 1897). As to the other two poems, however, scholars have not come to any general agreement. The *Gret Gest*, according to Sir F. Madden, is the alliterative *Morte Arthure* of the Thornton ms. (ed. Geo. G. Perry, E. E. T. S., 1865). This is also the view of Trautmann ("Ueber Huchown und Seine Werke," *Anglia*, 1), of Mr. Gollancz (*Pearl*, p. xlv) and of Mr. Amours (*op. cit.*, p. lvi). On the other hand, Morris (*Early Eng. Allit. Poems*, p. vi) rejected Huchown's authorship of the *Morte Arthure* on the ground that the dialect of this poem, though Northumbrian, is not Scottish. In 1883 Dr. H. Luebke (*The Auntyers of Arthur at the Tern Wathelan*, Berlin, p. 30) also expressed the opinion that Huchown was not the author of the *Morte Arthure*. More recently, Dr. P. C. Hoyt in an unpublished dissertation (*The Auntyers of Arthur*, Harvard Univ., 1902) has pointed out that the contents of this poem do not correspond to the description of the *Gret Gest* in Wyntoun.

Opinion as to the *Aventyre off Gawane*, the second in Wyntoun's list, is similarly divided. Guest's and Madden's identification of this poem as *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight* has been discarded by later scholars generally. In 1877 Trautmann (*Anglia*, 1, pp. 142-3) suggested that the words of Wyntoun, "the Gret Gest off Arthure and the Awntyre off Gawane," are to be taken together as the description of a single poem, the *Morte Arthure*. This explanation is accepted by Mr. Gollancz. On the other hand, Mr. Amours (*op. cit.*, pp. lvii-lxviii) argues that the poem referred to by Wyntoun is the *Aventyrs of Arthure*. Dr. Hoyt, however, holds that the *Aventyrs of Arthure* cannot be the work of Huchown, because it differs in both vocabulary and dialect from the *Pistil of Susan*—the one poem universally conceded to him.

Notwithstanding the fact that Wyntoun ascribes to Huchown only three poems, various other pieces of verse have been conveniently attributed to him by scholars. A wholesome check was given to this tendency by Trautmann (*Anglia*, 1, p. 109 ff.), who showed that the various poems attributed to Huchown cannot be the work of a single author, but fall into no less than five distinct groups. As a result of Trautmann's investigation Huchown's authorship has been restricted to the poems mentioned by Wyntoun.

But Scottish patriotism could not rest content with such a modest list of Huchown's works. In 1888 Mr. George P. M'Neill ("Huchown of the Awle Ryale," *Scottish Review*, April, 1888) reiterated the earlier arguments of Sir F. Madden for Huchown's authorship of the *Gawayne* poetry. And recently Mr. George Neilson (*Huchown of the Awle Ryale*, Glasgow, 1902) gathers together under Huchown's name the following library of fourteen



A fresh attempt to find a name for the author of the Gawayne poetry was made in 1891 by Mr. I. Gollancz. In his edition of *The Pearl*, Mr. Gollancz brought forward the theory that these poems were written by Ralph Strode,<sup>1</sup>

century poetry: *Morte Arthure, Wars of Alexander, Destruction of Troy, Titus and Yespasian, Parlement of Thre Ages, Wynnyere and Wastour, Pistil of Susan, Auntyre of Arthur, Gologros and Gawayn, Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience*, and the *Legend of Erkenwalde*—a total of 35,445 lines! That philologists have agreed in assigning many of the poems in this list to a West Midland instead of to a Scottish author, gives Mr. Neilson small concern; for the philologist he has a fine scorn (cf. p. 7).

To outline even in the briefest way the intricacies of Mr. Neilson's argument is here out of the question. But, as a specimen of his ingenious speculation, I take his attempt to identify Hunterian ms. T. 4, 1, as "Huchown's Codex." While endeavoring to link together as the work of Huchown the various poems in the list above, Mr. Neilson (pp. 16-7) came upon this Latin ms. in the Hunterian Library. It contains, among other works, Guido de Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Trojane Urbis, Leo's De Preliis Alexandri*, and Mandeville's *Itinerary*. Observing a number of correspondences between peculiarities in the Latin text of this Hunterian ms. and the English poems, *Wars of Alexander* and *Destruction of Troy*, he concludes that this "must have been the identical ms. used by the poet" (p. 22). Moreover, he calls attention to the fact that in the *Wars of Alexander*, the *Morte Arthure*, the *Parlement of Thre Ages*, and *Cleanness* there is obvious dependence upon the *Book of Mandeville*. Inasmuch as a copy of *Mandeville* is contained in this Hunterian ms. he finds in this dependence a further evidence that this ms. was the source used.

But this theory of Mr. Neilson's that Hunterian ms. T. 4, 1 was "Huchown's Codex" proves too much for his argument. For it is to be noted that in this ms. Mandeville's *Itinerary* is found in a Latin text. The author of *Cleanness*, on the other hand, clearly depended on a French text of Mandeville (cf. note appended on p. 149). He could not, therefore, have been depending on the Hunterian ms. In other words, Mr. Neilson's own argument to prove that the author of the *Wars of Alexander* and the *Destruction of Troy* was using the Hunterian ms. proves with equal conclusiveness that he was a different person from the author of *Cleanness*, who was acquainted with *Mandeville* in a French text. Mr. Neilson has thus unwittingly given new confirmation to the conclusion of the philologists that the Gawayne poetry cannot be included among the works of Huchown.

<sup>1</sup> It should perhaps be noted that Dr. Carl Horstmann in 1896 claimed that he was the first to suggest the identification of the author of *The Pearl* with

but, with a candor which is rare in the advocates of a new theory, he admits that his identification is conjectural. "Though it be possible," he concludes, "to make a plausible surmise, one must acknowledge that the question still remains unanswered."<sup>1</sup>

Here the matter rests at the present time. Nearly seventy years after the attention of scholars was first drawn to these poems, the question as to who wrote them is still an enigma. Some lucky chance may yet reveal the secret, but the probability is that, like the larger part of the literature of that age, they will continue to be unsigned documents. After all, the bare name of the author, if we had it, would not tell us much. It is his personality which we wish most to discover—his outlook on life, his attitude toward the social and religious institutions of his time. Though we lack the author's name, it is still possible through a study of the poems themselves to learn something of his character.

In the present paper, inquiry will be directed to one side of our author's character hitherto almost wholly overlooked:<sup>2</sup> namely, his keen interest in matters of theology.

## I.

To begin with, one finds evidence of theological training in the intimate acquaintance with the Bible which the author

Ralph Strode (*Works of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, II, p. xviii, note 3). Mr. J. T. Brown gives recognition to Dr. Horstmann's claim (*Scottish Antiquary*, July, 1897, p. 8).

<sup>1</sup> *The Pearl*, ed. Gollancz, p. lii. For a discussion of the Strode theory cf. note appended to this article, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. F. J. Snell touches this point casually: "It is clear that the author of *Pearl* had studied divinity, attracted thereto by domestic calamity, and probably by inclination as well" (*The Age of Chaucer*, 1901, p. 24). Just how much he means to imply by the phrase "studied divinity" is not clear.

of *The Pearl* everywhere displays, as well as in the frankly homiletical tone of his lesser poems, *Cleanness* and *Patience*.

In *The Pearl*, besides a paraphrase of the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (vv. 500-71), there is a lengthy description of the New Jerusalem (vv. 834-1143), which even in its details closely follows the vision in the Apocalypse.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in addition to these blocks of Biblical material, there are scattered throughout the poem many quotations of texts and phrases of Scripture, which, perhaps best of all, testify to the fact that the author's mind was saturated with Biblical knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

In the other poems, *Cleanness* and *Patience*, the use of Scriptural material is even greater. In fact these poems are

<sup>1</sup>The following table shows the Scriptural basis of the description of the New Jerusalem:

<i>Pearl</i> , vv. 832-9;	cf. Rev. 5:1-7.
" 864-899;	cf. " 14:1-5.
" 984-1031;	cf. " 21:10-20.
" 1032-1079;	cf. " 21:21-22:5.
" 1092-1127;	cf. " 7:4, 9-12.

<sup>2</sup>I have noted the following passages in the *Pearl* which are either quotations from the Bible or obvious allusions to it:

<i>Pearl</i> , vv. 31-2;	cf. John 12:24.
" vv. 301-12—	an allusion to Jesus' rebuke of the incredulity of Thomas, John 20:29.
" vv. 315-6;	cf. James 4:13-15.
" vv. 321-2—	a statement of the curse consequent on Adam's sin, a Biblical commonplace.
" vv. 401-4;	cf. I. Peter 5:5-7.
" vv. 457-66;	cf. I. Cor. 12:12-27.
" v. 571;	cf. Matt. 22:14.
" vv. 592-5;	cf. Ps. 62:12.
" vv. 676-82;	cf. Ps. 24:3-4.
" vv. 688 ff.;	cf. Book of Wisdom.
" vv. 697-9;	cf. Ps. 143:2.
" vv. 708-28;	cf. Mark 10:13-16.
" vv. 729-35;	cf. Matt. 13:45-46.
" vv. 796-805;	cf. Isa. 53:7.
" vv. 817-22;	cf. John 1:29.