

# Speech Representation as a Narrative Technique in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

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## ABSTRACT

Speech plays a central role in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a trait that it shares with other Arthurian romances. Accordingly, its dialogues have been scrutinized for their lexical choices and their significance for a number of key elements in the story. However, the stylistic and pragmatic effects of speech representation have not received similar attention. By presenting a typology of modes of speech representation that takes into account the distinctive features of medieval texts and focusing on their role in (mis)guiding the audience's reaction towards the events they are presented with, this paper identifies the representation of speech as a key narrative technique in the poem, an element of the poet's craft comparable to others that have been studied more frequently, such as his lexical choices or the text's structural patterns. In this respect, the paper is of interest to literary critics of medieval narrative and historical stylisticians.

The spoken word plays a central role in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, one of the best-known Middle English texts. We are reminded of the power of language, and speech in particular, at the beginning of the poem, when the Green Knight tells the terrified Arthurian court: 'Now is þe reuel and þe renoun of þe Rounde Table / Ouerwalt wyth a worde of on wyzes speche' (ll. 313–4; 'Now is the revelry and renown of the Round Table overthrown by a word of one man's speech').<sup>1</sup> Words can easily overturn Camelot's reputation, supposedly earned with much blood and sweat. It is this threat that moves Arthur into action to accept the challenge that the newcomer proposes. It is not surprising, then, that the Green Knight later tells Gawain that his alter ego's wife, with whom the courteous knight has only exchanged words and kisses, not blows, was his 'enmy kene' (l. 2406; 'bitter enemy'). Indeed, her carefully planned words lead Gawain to break his promise to surrender to his host everything that he wins each day in Castle Hautdesert, and hence to break his word or

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- 1 Except for ll. 1281–7 (see below), quotations and translations follow *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (Exeter, 2007).

*treuth*, a key concept in the text.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, the poem presents itself as fully characteristic of its genre, for Frank Brandsma reminds us that '[i]n Arthurian romance, knights seem to talk at least as much as they fight'.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars' recognition of the centrality of speech in the poem has led to the careful study of its dialogues, with particular emphasis on the ambiguity of some of the terms they include (e.g. the significance of ME *gāme*, *strōke* and *buffet* in Fitt I for the correct understanding of the Green Knight's challenge);<sup>4</sup> their link to well-known topoi and genres, such as the association of the bedroom scenes with medieval debates;<sup>5</sup> and the significance of the dialogues for a number of key elements in the story: (1) characterization and identity definition;<sup>6</sup> (2) morality and religion;<sup>7</sup> and (3) heterosexual and homosexual desires, and homosocial links.<sup>8</sup>

What is lacking is the analysis of speech representation as an important narrative technique. The exploration of the form, rather than solely the content, of speech representation is an approach that is starting to gain some force in medieval studies. For instance, the stylistic and pragmatic uses of direct speech in Old English texts, particularly *Beowulf*, have received significant attention;<sup>9</sup> French, Dutch and German medieval texts, mainly romances, have also been analysed through this lens.<sup>10</sup> Yet, the formal study of speech representation in English medieval texts has centred mainly around the different techniques used to separate direct speech from other modes of speech representation, particularly *inquit* clauses (a.k.a. quotative or reporting clauses; cp. Latin *inquit* 'he/she said'), in terms of their structure and the verbs they include.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the analysis of the forms and purposes of the various types of

- 2 See Conor McCarthy, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Sign of Trawþe', *Neophilologus*, 85 (2001), 297–308, for an analysis of the meanings of the word in the poem. The forms of the lemmata presented here follow Hans Kurath et al. (eds), *Middle English Dictionary* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1952–2001), hereafter *MED*.
- 3 Frank Brandsma, 'Knight's Talk: Direct Discourse in Arthurian Romance', *Neophilologus*, 82 (1998), 513–25, at 513.
- 4 See, for instance, Victoria Weiss, 'Gawain's First Failure: The Beheading Scene in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *The Chaucer Review*, 10 (1976), 361–6; and Sheri Ann Strite, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: To Behead or Not to Behead—That is a Question', *Philological Quarterly*, 70 (1991), 1–12.
- 5 See Myra Stokes, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: Fit III as Debate', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 25 (1981), 35–51; and Thomas L. Reed Jr., "'Boþe blisse and blunder": *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Debate Tradition', *The Chaucer Review*, 23 (1988), 140–61.
- 6 See Cecily Clark, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: Characterisation by Syntax', *Essays in Criticism*, 16 (1966), 361–74.
- 7 See A. Francis Soucy, 'Gawain's Fault: "angardez pryde"', *The Chaucer Review*, 13 (1978), 166–76; and Olga Bukarov, 'False Speech: Sins of the Tongue, Selfhood and Middle English Romances', PhD dissertation, New York University, 2008, 86–123.
- 8 See Carolyn Dinshaw, 'A Kiss is Just a Kiss: Heterosexuality and its Consolations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Diacritics*, 24 (1994), 205–26; and Jayme M. Yeo, "'Dere dame, to-day demay yow neuer": Gendering Fear in the Emotional Community of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Exemplaria*, 28 (2016), 248–63.
- 9 See Elise Louviot, *Direct Speech in Beowulf and Other Old English Narrative Poems* (Woodbridge, 2016), with references.
- 10 See Jane Emberson, 'Reported Speech in Medieval German Narratives', *Parergon*, 4 (1986), 103–16; and Frank Brandsma, 'The Presentation of Direct Discourse in Arthurian Romance: Changing Modes of Performance and Reception', in Douglas Kelly (ed.), *The Medieval Opus: Imitation, Rewriting, and Transmission in the French Tradition* (Amsterdam, 1996), 245–60; and Brandsma, 'Knight's Talk'.
- 11 See Michael Peverett, "'Quod" and "seide" in *Piers Plowman*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 87 (1986), 117–27; Colette Moore, *Quoting Speech in Early English* (Cambridge, 2011); and Thomas D. Hill, 'God's "Inquits" and Exegetical Speech Theory in the Middle English *Patience*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 116 (2017), 182–94.

speech representation in medieval English texts is not well developed yet, in spite of the fact that this stylistic approach is very well established for modern texts and, to some extent, for some other medieval traditions.<sup>12</sup> There are, however, some notable exceptions. For instance, Lucy Perry discusses what speech representation can tell us about the relationship between the two manuscripts of *Lazamon's Brut*,<sup>13</sup> while Colette Moore devotes a chapter to the stylistic uses of reported speech in Middle English literary texts.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, even though Moore opens that chapter with a discussion of the *Gawain*-poet's art, she focuses primarily on *Pearl*, with her study of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* being restricted, in the main, to swift changes between direct and non-direct speech, in keeping with the fact that their formal distinction is the main topic of her book.

The present article aims to show that this relatively new stylistic approach to Middle English literature can lead to very fruitful results and, accordingly, seeks to set the way for further studies along similar lines. By presenting a new approach to the text and relying on a framework of speech representation especially adapted for the study of medieval texts, this paper significantly contributes to our understanding of the poet's art, in particular *how* the text (mis)guides the audience's reaction towards the events and verbal exchanges they are presented with in order to keep them in the dark about the nature of Gawain's challenge, before letting them make up their minds about its moral significance. This approach makes clear that, despite lack of scholarly attention, speech representation is a key narrative technique in the poem, an element of the poet's craft comparable to others that have been discussed more frequently, such as his lexical choices,<sup>15</sup> or the text's structural patterns.<sup>16</sup>

Medieval rhetorical works show awareness of the importance of direct speech for the sake of characterization (cp. *sermocinatio*) and, in keeping with this, the need to attribute a character words that are suitable to his age, social status, and other characteristics.<sup>17</sup> However, they do not pay similar attention to the various modes of speech representation. Since we cannot rely on those works for a theoretical framework, this paper takes instead Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short's typology as its starting point.<sup>18</sup> It has been widely used for the study of (near-)contemporary texts, although it has also been occasionally applied in historical stylistics.<sup>19</sup> Yet, this

12 See, for instance, Sophie Marnette, 'Réflexions sur le discours indirect libre en français médiéval', *Romania*, 114 (1996), 1–49, with references, for work on speech representation in French medieval texts, particularly the presence and effects of free indirect speech.

13 Lucy Perry, "'Pus heo hit spoken': Direct and Indirect Speech in the Two Versions of *Lazamon's Brut*", *Neophilologus*, 92 (2008), 523–43.

14 Moore, *Quoting Speech in Early English*.

15 See the various chapters devoted to vocabulary in Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (eds), *A Companion to the Gawain Poet* (Cambridge, 1997).

16 See Donald R. Howard, 'Structure and Symmetry in *Sir Gawain*', *Speculum*, 39 (1964), 425–33; and Larry D. Benson, *Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (New Brunswick, 1965), 158–66.

17 See, for instance, Iv.43 in *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 367–9; this was one of the best-known rhetorical works in the Middle Ages.

18 Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Harlow, 2007), 255–81. First edition from 1981.

19 See Dan McIntyre and Brian Walker, 'Discourse Presentation in Early Modern English Writing', *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 16 (2011), 101–30; and Katrina M. Wilkins, 'Characterization in *Ælfric's Esther*: A Cognitive Stylistic Investigation', PhD dissertation, University of Nottingham, 2018, 87–120.

typology was developed for the study of modern texts; accordingly, it needs to be adapted to the distinctive features of medieval texts (in ways suggested below).

Leech and Short conceptualize the different ways in which speech can be represented as a continuum of categories in relation to the narrator's control of the speech event. Their categories, with increasing control, are: free direct speech, direct speech, free indirect speech, indirect speech and narrative report of speech acts. They argue that the main difference between direct and indirect speech is that, when one uses the former, one quotes the speaker's words verbatim rather than using one's own, as it is the case in indirect speech.<sup>20</sup> While this is the common understanding of the difference between these two categories, scholars have problematized the assumption that direct speech necessarily transmits the speaker's original words.<sup>21</sup> This clarification might seem unnecessary in terms of fiction, where direct speech is not understood as reporting an actual past speech event verbatim, but it helps us to distinguish between three important subtypes of direct speech in medieval texts:

- a. Direct speech that *could* represent what a particular character might have said in a particular situation (e.g. ll. 313–4, quoted above);
- b. Collective direct speech: this category refers to direct speech that is unlikely to have been uttered by anyone in particular, but rather represents the opinions shared by a group (e.g. ll. 672–83, quoted below);<sup>22</sup>
- c. Internal direct speech: Leech and Short explain that, in modern narratives, the norm for thought representation is indirect thought because it is recognized that we do not have access to people's thoughts and because not all thoughts can be said to be clearly verbalized. Thus, in modern narratives, direct thought highlights, somewhat artificially, the strength of thought and is particularly appropriate to reproduce 'conscious "thinking to yourself" thought'.<sup>23</sup> Medieval texts treat the representation of consciousness differently. On the one hand, its report is very often introduced by verbs referring to speech rather than thought (e.g. 'he sayde in hymself', l. 1198; 'he said to himself'). On the other, the use of direct discourse in these contexts is actually the norm, not the exception, and, accordingly, we cannot attribute to it the same stylistic effect here as in modern texts. In keeping with these features, Monika Fludernik argues in favour of associating verbalized internal discourse in medieval compositions with speech instead of thought representation, and her suggestion is followed in this study.<sup>24</sup>

20 Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, 255.

21 See Monika Fludernik, *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction: The Linguistic Representation of Speech and Consciousness* (London, 1993), 391–426, with references. See Moore, *Quoting Speech in Early English*, 80–98, for an argument, based on the study of slander depositions, that medieval speakers did not necessarily identify direct speech with verbatim quotation either.

22 See Monika Fludernik, '1050–1500 Through a Glass Darkly: Or, the Emergence of Mind in Medieval Narrative', in David Herman (ed.), *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English* (Lincoln, NE, 2011), 90–92.

23 Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, 275–7. See also Mick Short et al., 'Using a Corpus for Stylistics Research: Speech and Thought Presentation', in Jenny Thomas and Mick Short (eds), *Using Corpora for Language Research: Studies in Honour of Geoffrey Leech* (London, 1996), 116; and Elena Semino and Mick Short, *Corpus Stylistics: Speech, Writing and Thought Presentation in a Corpus of English Writing* (London, 2004), 13–15.

24 Fludernik, 'Through a Glass Darkly', 77–9 and 94.

Other scholars have highlighted the formal differences between direct and indirect speech instead of focusing on whether there is verbatim repetition of someone's words. For instance, Elise Louvriot explains that in direct speech discourse markers, particularly deictic markers (e.g. personal and demonstrative pronouns, adverbs of time and place such as 'here', 'now', etc.), are 'appropriate to the situation of utterance of the speech itself, and not to the situation in which the speech is represented'.<sup>25</sup> The following quotations, both of which record the Lord's offer of hospitality to Gawain, exemplify the differences between direct and indirect speech, respectively: 'Ȝe ar welcum to welde, as yow lykez, / Þat here is' (ll. 835–6; 'you are welcome to enjoy whatever is here as you please') and '[he] sayde he watz þe welcomest wyȝe of þe worlde' (l. 938; 'he said he was the most welcome man in the world'). In the first example, the Lord refers to Gawain, his interlocutor, with second person pronouns ('ȝe', 'yow') and the finite verbs are in the present ('ar', 'lykez', 'is'), while in the second sentence Gawain is referred to with a third person pronoun ('he') and the verb shows backshift to the past ('watz'). Such differences are fundamental to explain the common association of direct speech with vividness. Louvriot points out that 'events belonging to a time and place distinct from the situation of utterance (e.g. past or hypothetical events) are, from the reference point of that situation, lacking in actuality'.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the emphasis of direct speech on the here and now is what gives it a vivid or dramatic effect. It not only foregrounds the information presented in this way but also, as noted by Herbert Clark and Richard Gerrig,<sup>27</sup> helps the audience to become engrossed in the characters' world; indirect speech is preferred instead when the aim is to engross the audience in the narrator's thoughts and actions.

While modern and medieval texts differ with regard to the norms of thought representation, they are aligned when it comes to speech representation: in both modern and medieval texts direct speech can be identified as the norm because it is reasonable to assume that a reporter might have had access to the original utterance, should there have been one.<sup>28</sup> In fact, in medieval narratives, often composed to be listened to rather than read,<sup>29</sup> the narrative function of direct speech plays a particularly important role, as J. M. Pizarro points out: 'the oral narrator tries to become transparent, to vanish from the scene or from the listeners' awareness; by appealing primarily to their dramatic imagination, he invites them to follow an action that does not include him as a judge, critic or interpreter'.<sup>30</sup> On the basis of various references to the oral transmission of our story (e.g. ll. 30–1 and 1996–7), J. J. Anderson

25 Louvriot, *Direct Speech in Beowulf*, 11.

26 Louvriot, *Direct Speech in Beowulf*, 13.

27 Herbert Clark and Richard J. Gerrig, 'Quotations as Demonstrations', *Language*, 66 (1990), 764–805, at 794.

28 On the relevance of this claim for modern texts, see Short et al., 'Using a Corpus for Stylistics Research', 110–31; and Semino and Short, *Corpus Stylistics*. On Old English texts, see Louvriot, *Direct Speech in Beowulf*; and on Middle English texts, see Matylda Włodarczyk, 'Is Reanimation of Voices Possible? Pragmatics of Reported Speech in Selected Middle English Texts', *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, 41 (2005), 99–113.

29 See Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge, 1996), 1–2.

30 J. M. Pizarro, *A Rhetoric of the Scene: Dramatic Narrative in the Early Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1989), 55–6.



suggests that ‘the narrator presents himself as part of the oral culture of storytelling, a minstrel who tells stories and hears stories from others’.<sup>31</sup> Even though we cannot take such comments at face value in a text that consciously portrays its links to literacy as well,<sup>32</sup> direct speech is indeed the main mode of speech presentation in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (see further below).

In Leech and Short’s taxonomy, free direct speech is the category with least narratorial intervention, as it differs from direct speech in the absence of the *inquit* clause and/or quotation marks. However, in more recent interpretations of the taxonomy, it has been suggested that it might be better to consider free direct speech as a variant within the larger category of direct speech because, in spite of their formal difference, there is not much functional difference in terms of faithfulness in their representation of the original speech.<sup>33</sup> While the criterion of faithfulness has already been discussed as problematic, the distinction between these two categories becomes even more unnecessary in medieval texts, where the formal difference between them is reduced by the fact that there was no standard way to mark direct speech: manuscripts employed different punctuation marks such as the *punctus*, *punctus elevatus*, *punctus interrogativus* or *virgula*, and very often no mark at all.<sup>34</sup> Thus, whenever necessary, I simply refer to direct speech without an *inquit* clause.

Free indirect speech is described as a mixture of direct and indirect speech by Leech and Short, and Louviot.<sup>35</sup> While, as expected, these scholars disagree in connection with Leech and Short’s claim that free indirect speech has ‘odd status in terms of truth claims and faithfulness’,<sup>36</sup> they agree that this mode is characterized by bringing together linguistic markers (such as deictic and expressive elements) that could be appropriate to the character and the narrator. The analysis of this category has led to much scholarly debate because there is still no full agreement on the linguistic features that can be said to allow a reader to identify a character’s voice through narratorial expression. Moreover, the presence of free indirect speech in medieval texts remains disputed, its development being often associated with the birth of the novel.<sup>37</sup> Its identification in medieval texts is made particularly complex by the difficulties in classifying expressions as being clearly colloquial (and hence more suited to oral speech), as well as the general absence of some of the linguistic markers prototypically associated with this category, such as the use of proximal deictic markers in clauses with shifted reference (e.g. ‘tomorrow’ instead of ‘the day after’ in ‘He would see her tomorrow, he said’) or reliance on linguistic variation for the sake of characterization.<sup>38</sup> In spite of these difficulties, Fludernik has argued that

31 J. J. Anderson, *Language and Imagination in the Gawain-Poems* (Manchester, 2005), 163.

32 See Mark C. Amodio, ‘Tradition, Modernity, and the Emergence of the Self in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’, *Assays: Critical Approaches to Medieval and Renaissance Texts*, 8 (1995), 47–68, especially 49–55.

33 See Short et al., ‘Using a Corpus for Stylistics Research’, 127; and Semino and Short, *Corpus Stylistics*, 16.

34 Moore, *Quoting Speech in Early English*, 18–79. See also below, note 47.

35 Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, 260–1; and Louviot, *Direct Speech in Beowulf*, 12, n. 41.

36 Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, 261.

37 See, for instance, Moore, *Quoting Speech in Early English*, 4. Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, 266, trace its use as far back as the seventeenth century, but see above, note 12.

38 See Fludernik, *Fictions of Language*, for an overview of the linguistic features that characterize free indirect speech.

there are a number of medieval cases that could be classified as free indirect speech.<sup>39</sup> In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, one of the best examples might be ‘And he nikked hym “Naye!”—he nolde bi no ways’ (l. 2471; ‘And he told him “No!”—he would not on any account’), where what looks like direct speech, in the form of the interjection ME *nai* ‘no’ (cp. ll. 256, 1222, 1813, 2250 and 2407), is immediately followed by an independent clause with shifted reference. Lines 706–7 present a similar case:

And al nykked hym wyth ‘Nay!’—þat neuer in her lyue  
 Þay seȝe neuer no segge þat watz of suche hwez  
 Of grene.  
 [‘And all said “No!” to him—that never in their lives did they ever see a man  
 of such green hues.’]

Yet, here a conjunction introduces the clause that follows the apparent direct speech, thus rendering it a subordinate clause (more typical of indirect speech). Moreover, while the significant emphasis on negation gives it a level of expressivity that one might find in direct speech (cp. ll. 399–400), such emphasis is not necessarily out of place in the narrator’s voice (cp. ll. 203–5).

Given the difficulties in identifying free indirect speech in medieval texts and the fact that this category tends to be associated in the main with modern attempts to subvert the distinction between direct and indirect speech for particular stylistic purposes (e.g. a distancing effect leading to irony),<sup>40</sup> I use *mixed speech* instead. Fully embracing Leech and Short’s vision of a continuous cline, this term attempts to capture those cases where the boundaries between direct and indirect speech are blurred, either because it is difficult to know whether the utterance is reproduced as direct or indirect speech (e.g. l. 67; see note 47 below), or because it is not possible to distinguish systematically between proto-free indirect speech and indirect speech with some expressive elements.

Leech and Short initially classified as narrative reports of speech acts those contexts where we are given an indication that a speech act or a number of speech acts have occurred, without necessarily having a sense of what was said.<sup>41</sup> However, in later revisions of the typology we find a distinction between narrator’s representation of speech acts, where we are told the illocutionary force of the utterance and, possibly, its topic; and narrator’s representation of voice, where the mere fact that speech has occurred is represented:<sup>42</sup> e.g. ‘[he] neuenes hit his aune nome’ (l. 10; ‘[he] names it with his own name’, Romulus’s naming being a performative speech act that results in the fact that new city he has built has a name) and ‘with mournyng

39 Fludernik, *Fictions of Language*, 93–5 and 194–5; and ‘Through a Glass Darkly’, 87–9.

40 Much has been written on the stylistic effects of modern uses of free indirect speech, so it would be impossible to give a comprehensive overview. For an introductory summary, see Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, 260–70.

41 Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, 259–60.

42 See Short et al., ‘Using a Corpus for Stylistics Research’, 124; and Semino and Short, *Corpus Stylistics*, 67–104.

he melez to his eme' (l. 543; 'he talks to his uncle with sorrow'), respectively. While this is a useful distinction, it is not always necessary in the discussion presented below; thus, *narrated speech* is used as an umbrella term for these two categories. Narrated speech, in either form, tends to be used for summarizing relatively unimportant parts of a conversation, although this backgrounding effect should not be associated with the complete lack of narrative significance of the information that we are being presented. After all, the decision about what to send to the background and what to bring to the foreground of the narrative can give us a clue about whose point of view is being represented and for what purpose.<sup>43</sup>

In order to conduct this study, the reported verbal interactions between the characters in the story have been tagged according to the adapted taxonomy presented above, with one additional caveat. In keeping with the tagging process in other studies,<sup>44</sup> the distinction between indirect speech and the narrator's representation of speech act with a topic has been established on the basis of the syntactic structure of the reported speech: indirect speech consists of an *inquit* clause and a subordinate reported clause (which can be finite or non-finite), while the narrator's representation of speech act consists of a single clause. Consider, for instance, 'he hit quyk askez / To be her seruaunt sothly, if hemself lyked' (ll. 975–6; 'he swiftly asks to be their servant truly if it pleased them') as opposed to '[he a]skez erly hys armez' (l. 567; '[he] asks early for his arms'). In its 2,531 lines, the text includes approximately 800 lines of direct speech and 250 of non-direct speech. This makes the analysis of all speech events neither possible nor desirable; the discussion below focuses instead on those cases which are particularly salient for the focus on speech representation as a useful narrative technique.

Moore argues that the lack of clear formal markers for the distinction between direct and indirect speech meant that medieval speakers did not distinguish between these categories as easily as modern authors and audiences do.<sup>45</sup> While this might indeed have been the case (as suggested by the examples of mixed speech), the lines below show that the *Gawain*-poet chose very carefully between various forms of speech representation at his disposal in order to control the emphasis that he placed on different types of information and, in that way, shape the audience's responses and expectations. One way in which he did this was by presenting the extradiegetic audience (i.e. the audience outside the fictional universe of the text) with the views, thoughts and reactions of the intradiegetic audience (the minor, unidentified characters that populate the text's universe). This is a narrative strategy that Brandsma has identified in other Arthurian romances, whose authors seem to have perceived the views of these 'mirror characters' as more effective for guiding the extradiegetic audience's reactions than expressing such views through the narrator.<sup>46</sup> In the examples that Brandsma discusses, the extradiegetic audience is expected to feel the same admiration, contempt or fear as the characters in the story. The *Gawain*-poet, similarly,

43 See Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, 260; Semino and Short, *Corpus Stylistics*, 43–5.

44 See Semino and Short, *Corpus Stylistics*, 11; and McIntyre and Walker, 'Discourse Presentation', 112–3.

45 Moore, *Quoting Speech in Early English*.

46 Frank Brandsma, 'Mirror Characters', in Keith Busby and Christopher Kleinhenz (eds), *Courtly Arts and the Art of Courtliness* (Cambridge, 2006), 275–82.



elaborates on the sense of wonder and fear that the Green Knight causes in Camelot's inhabitants (ll. 233–49); like and through them, we are asked to experience these feelings when hearing about the 'aghlich mayster' (l. 136; 'fearsome lord') that has just burst into Arthur's court. At this point the knights are simply left speechless, but we get to hear their views on this encounter as Gawain departs in search of the Green Chapel:

And sayde soþly al same segges til oþer,  
 Carande for þat comly: 'Bi Kryst, hit is scaþe  
 Ðat þou, leude, schal be lost, þat art of lyf noble!  
 To fynde hys fere vpon folde, in fayth, is not eþe.  
 Warloker to haf wrozt had more wyt bene  
 And haf dýzt zonder dere a duk to haue worped.  
 A lowande leder of ledez in londe hym wel semez,  
 And so had better haf ben þen britned to nozt,  
 Hadet wyth an aluisch mon, for angardez pryde.  
 Who knew euer any kyng such counsel to take  
 As knyztet in cauelaciounz on Crystmasse gomnez?' (ll. 673–83)  
 ['People with one accord said softly to each other, sorrowing for that noble one:  
 "By Christ, it is a pity that you, sir, should be lost, you who are so noble of life!  
 It is, truly, not easy to find his equal on earth. It would have made more sense to  
 have acted more cautiously, and have ordained yonder noble one to have be-  
 come a duke. It becomes him to be a brilliant leader of men in the land and it  
 would have been better so than for him to be utterly destroyed, beheaded by an  
 other-worldly man, for arrogant pride. Whoever knew any king to take such ad-  
 vice as that of knights in trivial arguments about Christmas games?"]

The courtiers' voices have otherwise only been represented through narrated speech (e.g. ll. 63–8), with the possible exception of l. 67, where their crying aloud 'Zeres ziftes!' ('New Year's gifts!') helps to bring to life Camelot's Christmas festivities.<sup>47</sup> Thus, their collective direct speech is foregrounded through internal deviation,<sup>48</sup> and we are therefore asked to think about its significance. After all, Olga Griswold has shown that the distinction between direct and non-direct speech, in terms of speakers and topics, is fundamental to the ways that storytellers 'manipulate the centrality of the story characters to the interactional point of the narrative, or the story's "aboutness".<sup>49</sup> Given their less relevant role in the narrative, it is not surprising that the courtiers' only direct speech centres around their opinion of the challenge and its

47 Andrew and Waldron, *Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, present 'Zeres ziftes' as direct speech but this is not the case in either *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn by Norman Davis (Oxford, 1967); or *The Works of the Gawain Poet: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. Ad Putter and Myra Stokes (London, 2014). This disparity arises from the fact that the manuscript does not mark direct speech out in any way; see further Moore, *Quoting Speech in Early English*, 134–7.

48 On foregrounding as a stylistic effect and its connection with deviation, see Christiana Gregoriou, 'The Linguistic Levels of Foregrounding in Stylistics', in Michael Burke (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics* (London, 2014), 87–100.

49 Olga Griswold, 'Center Stage: Direct and Indirect Reported Speech in Conversational Storytelling', *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, 20 (2016), 73–90, at 73.

main players.<sup>50</sup> At first sight, we seem to be asked to share the unanimous feeling of Arthur's court about the king's (and Gawain's) failure to deal with the challenge appropriately. Greg Walker argues that the Green Knight's is not a martial challenge but 'a test of nerve and will-power', where Camelot is asked to define itself and is presented with two alternatives: an identity 'based upon the purely martial and heroic values which hold together a royal military entourage' and another 'based upon a more totalizing notion of courtly civilization'.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, John Plummer explains that what the situation requires is 'restraint from action', because the Green Knight is testing 'Camelot's ability to qualify, modify, or complicate its identity, and to signify such subtleties'.<sup>52</sup> In contrast to the courtiers' apparent criticism, the narrator does not openly censure Arthur for his actions, although his description of the king as 'sumquat childgered' (l. 86; 'somewhat boyish') with a 'brayn wylde' (l. 89; 'restless mind'), the contrast between Arthur's frantic swinging of the axe and the Green Knight's stationary stance (ll. 330–8) and Gawain's covert reminder that it is not up to the king to engage in such fights as this could leave the realm without a leader (ll. 350–7) appear to point in that direction. In the speech, 'angardez pryde' (l. 681) is presented as an important factor for Arthur's acceptance of the challenge, but this fault could also be attributable to Gawain; in fact, this 'arrogant pride', this excessive concern for his reputation, could be said to be Gawain's main problem throughout the poem and the reason for his failure.<sup>53</sup>

Yet, nothing is fully straightforward with this poet. Just as it is difficult not to read as ironic his statement that Arthur's knights remained quiet not out of fear but out of respect towards Arthur, whom the Green Knight has singled out as his preferred interlocutor (ll. 224–5 and 246–9), these words might be taken as a further indication that these knights are not much more than 'berdlez chylder' (l. 280; 'beardless children'), as the Green Knight calls them.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, John Burrow reminds us that medieval authors did not always take mass opinion very seriously: 'their tone in such passages ranges from amused superiority (as in the *Squire's Tale*) to downright indignation (as in the *Clerk's Tale*):'<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, after all, it was the courtiers who

50 The fact that the courtiers' words regarding their views on the main characters in the story are presented in direct speech is also in keeping with the analysis of the non-narrative functions of reported speech presented by Diane Vincent and Laurent Perrin, 'On the Narrative vs Non-Narrative Functions of Reported Speech: A Socio-Pragmatic Study', *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 3 (1999), 291–313, at 305–6. In their corpus of 132 interviews with French speakers, in most cases where reported speech has an appreciative function (i.e. it 'reproduces a witness's judgement or opinion of a recounted event or object rather than reproducing a speech act as an event'; p. 296), it is given as direct rather than indirect speech.

51 Greg Walker, 'The Green Knight's Challenge: Heroism and Courtliness in Fitt I of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *The Chaucer Review*, 32 (1997), 111–28, at 124–5.

52 John Plummer, 'Signifying the Self: Language and Identity in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', in Robert J. Blanch, Miriam Youngerman Miller and Julian N. Wasserman (eds), *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives on the Pearl-Poet* (Troy, 1991), 195–212, at 200.

53 See, for instance, Soucy, 'Gawain's Fault'. For an argument that Gawain's virtues are presented as something external to him, see Anderson, *Language and Imagination*, 181–4.

54 J. A. Burrow, *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London, 1965), 61, sees their words as indicative of the courtiers' lack of understanding of the obligations that knightly excellence entails; however, this view seems to suggest that Arthur and Gawain did not have much choice, firstly, in accepting the challenge and, secondly, in how they engaged with it. For a very different view, see Weiss, 'Gawain's First Failure'; and Strite, '*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'.

55 Burrow, *Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 61.

advised Arthur to pass the challenge on to Gawain (ll. 362–5) and, therefore, they are also to blame for his being sent on what looks like a deadly quest.

Thus, in the same way that Camelot's send-off does not offer Gawain any particular consolation, with his life being honoured and yet presented as a sure loss, we do not find it very enlightening either. Although it seems to support our misapprehensions about Arthur's qualities (and those of his young court), it is not fully helpful in our attempts to understand the nature of the challenge that Gawain accepted the year before and is getting ready to finish. However, one might argue that the two readings presented above, taken together, could be interpreted as the narrator's covert indication that Gawain's adventure is about his chance to discover what being a knight is truly about, how to bring together ideals (reputation, pride) and practicalities (fear and courtly expectations). Later in the text we are presented with a similar contrast between the idealized views on knightly behaviour that the Lady attempts to force Gawain to adhere to and the more down-to-earth performance of manly accomplishments and chivalry in the hunting scenes.<sup>56</sup>

The intradiegetic *vox populi* also (mis)guides our opinions and expectations during Gawain's stay at Castle Hautdesert. As in Camelot, the courtiers are only allowed collective direct speech, and only on very few occasions, particularly to voice their perception of their guest. When they find out who he is, their immediate reaction is to think, not about his martial prowess, but about his fame as a knight of impeccable manners (and a courtly lover):<sup>57</sup>

Vch segge ful softly sayde to his fere:  
 'Now schal we semlych se sleztez of þewez  
 And þe teccheles termes of talkyng noble.  
 [...]

I hope þat may hym here  
 Schal lerne of luf-talkyng' (ll. 915–27).

[‘Each man said very softly to his companion: “Now shall we see becomingly skilled demonstrations of courteous manners and the faultless expressions of noble conversation. [...] I believe that anyone who has the opportunity of listening to him will learn something of the art of conversing about love”.’]

The focus on Gawain's reputation for good manners and ‘luf-talkyng’, a term that could refer to polite courtly conversation generally as well as a conversation specifically about love,<sup>58</sup> gives us a clue about one of the main topics dominating Gawain's stay in Hautdesert, i.e. the problematization of identity yet again: just as being brave does not mean chopping someone's head off, being a courtly lover does not necessarily involve sleeping with a married woman.<sup>59</sup> Through this focus, the poet is able to develop one of the best examples of dramatic irony in Middle English literature: while Gawain is in the dark about the fact that the Lady's attempts to seduce him are not truly sincere, we are let into her plot (‘ay þe lady let lyk as hym loued mych’,

56 See W. A. Davenport, *The Art of the Gawain-Poet* (London, 1978), 167.

57 On Gawain's reputation as a courtly lover, see Bartlett Jere Whiting, ‘Gawain, his Reputation, his Courtesy and his Appearance in Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*’, *Medieval Studies*, 9 (1947), 189–234.

58 See Conor McCarthy, ‘Luf-talking in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’, *Neophilologus*, 92 (2008), 155–62.

59 See Plummer, ‘Signifying the Self.’

l. 1281; ‘all the time the lady behaved as if she loved him a great deal’), although the wider ramifications of her behaviour are not made equally clear (cp. ll. 1549–50). At times Gawain seems to find it difficult not to succumb to the reputation that the Lady keeps reminding him of (cp. ll. 941–65, 1768–9; see also below), but, because we are slightly wiser about what is going on, we are in a better position to enjoy the scenes as a ‘gomen’ which Gawain can win, despite the Lady’s persistent attempts to corner him.<sup>60</sup> Speech representation is fundamental in raising our hopes for Gawain’s success. Through collective direct speech the poet has already reassured us that Gawain is capable of handling situations where his courtliness and communicative skills will be put to the test; narrated speech equally emphasizes Gawain’s ability to cope with the situation, while, at the same time, it helps to keep sexual tension under control, thus increasing his chances of success:

Pus þay meled of muchquat til mydmorn paste,  
 And ay þe lady let lyk as hym loued mych.  
 De freke ferde with defence, and feted ful fayre (ll. 1280–2)  
 [‘Thus they spoke of many things until midmorning passed, and all the time  
 the lady behaved as if she loved him a great deal. The man acted guardedly  
 and behaved most politely’]

Pus hym frayned þat fre and fondet hym ofte,  
 For to haf wonnen hym to woʒe, whatso scho þoʒt ellez;  
 Bot he defended hym so fayr þat no faut semed,  
 Ne non euel on nawþer halue, nawþer þay wysten  
 Bot blysse. (ll. 1549–53; see also ll. 1259–62 and 1506–7)  
 [‘In this way the gracious lady put him to the test and tempted him often, in  
 order to bring him to wrong, whatever else she intended; but he defended him-  
 self so fitly that no offence was apparent, nor any impropriety on either side,  
 nor were they aware of anything but pleasure.’]

Internal direct speech similarly contributes to boosting our confidence in Gawain’s success. In the temptation scenes we encounter one (possibly two) examples of such direct verbalization of thought, and this is not a practice that the poet commonly engages in. In the first case, Gawain is, rather comically, pretending to be asleep while deciding how best to deal with the Lady, who has just entered his chamber for the first time. We are not allowed any insights into his thinking process regarding the various reasons that might have led the Lady to visit him in such unusual circumstances; we are just given a glimpse of his belief in his own ability for ‘luf-talkyng’:

Þe lede lay lurked a ful longe quyle,  
 Compast in his concience to quat þat cace myʒt  
 Meue oþer amount. To meruayle hym þoʒt;  
 Bot ʒet he sayde in himself: ‘More semly hit were  
 To aspye wyth my spelle in space quat ho wolde.’ (ll. 1195–9)

60 See Anderson, *Language and Imagination*, 194.

[“The man lay snuggled down a very long time, pondered in his mind what the circumstance could portend or signify. It seemed amazing to him; but yet he said to himself: “It would be more seemly, by talking to her, to discover in due course what she wants”.’]

The second example, also part of the first temptation scene, is much less clear because it hinges around our reading of l. 1283:

And ay þe lady let lyk as hym loued mych;  
 Þe freke ferde with defence, and feted ful fayre—  
 ‘Þaȝ I were burde bryȝtest’, þe burde in mynde hade.  
 Þe lasse luf in his lode for lur þat he soȝt  
 Boute hone,  
 Þe dunte þat schulde hym deue,  
 And nedez hit most be done. (ll. 1281–7)

[‘And always the lady behaved as if she loved him a great deal. The man acted guardedly and behaved most politely—“Though I may have been the loveliest lady . . .”, the lady thought. He had brought with him much less love because of the penalty he was going to meet forthwith. The blow that should strike him down and cannot be avoided.’]

This passage has caused much trouble to editors because of the implications that the Lady’s revelation has for the story. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron prefer to replace ‘I’ with ‘ho’ and ‘burde’ with ‘burne’ in l. 1283, attributing the words to Gawain.<sup>61</sup> This move makes these lines less conspicuous in terms of the poet’s attempt not to give the game away completely (as far as we know, the Lady has no way of knowing the exact nature of the appointment that he has at the Green Chapel). It is also in keeping with the text because it is Gawain, not the Lady, who has just been mentioned. The attribution of the words to Gawain has most recently been supported by Lawrence Warner, and Ad Putter and Myra Stokes,<sup>62</sup> but this is not the only option. The lines as quoted above follow J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon’s edition and retain the manuscript readings.<sup>63</sup> With this punctuation, the Lady considers (with an elliptical sentence) her chances of success, in keeping with the fact that her lack of sincerity has recently been mentioned (l. 1281), but at the same time she does not fully let the cat out of the bag for the audience. This interpretation is supported by W. A. Davenport’s reading, where her speech extends until ‘done’.<sup>64</sup>

By skilfully playing with different types of speech representation, the poet has reassured us that Gawain is capable of handling the Lady and we are therefore not surprised when, with the delivery of her kiss in l. 1796, she seems to acknowledge final defeat in her attempts to woo Gawain. He can take this as bringing to a close

61 Andrew and Waldron, *Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, 255.

62 Lawrence Warner, ‘The Lady, The Goddess and the Text of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’, *The Chaucer Review*, 48 (2014), 334–51; and Putter and Stokes, *Works of the Gawain Poet*, 340, l. 1283.

63 Tolkien and Gordon, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 36; see also 110.

64 Davenport, *Art of the Gawain-Poet*, 166. See also Ad Putter, *An Introduction to the Gawain Poet* (London, 1996), 81–2; and Moore, *Quoting Speech in Early English*, 138–40.



some of the dangers of ‘luf-talking’ and his concern about ‘his meschef zif he schulde make synne / And be traytor to þat tolke þat þat telde aʒt’ (ll. 1774–5; ‘his guilt if he were to commit sin and be a traitor to the man who owned the house’). This leaves ‘talkyng noble’ as the only type of ‘talking’ that he needs to worry about so as not to act as a ‘craþayn’ (l. 1773; ‘boorish [person]’). He definitely needs his expertise in this art when handling the Lady’s departing requests to give or, at least, accept a keepsake to remind her / him of their time together. Different types of speech representation help the poet navigate the multifaceted demands in this situation to remain true to the characters and his text. Gawain does eventually accept the Lady’s girdle which, supposedly, can protect whoever wears it against violent death (ll. 1853–4). He does so even though we have just been told that ‘he nay þat he nolde neghe in no wyse / Nauþer golde ne garysoun’ (ll. 1836–7; ‘he said [that] he would by no means touch either gold or treasure’). This clause, with distal deictic markers (third person singular pronoun, past verbal forms) and, at the same time, an overabundance of negatives, including the verbal form ‘nay’, which is the past tense of ME *naien* ‘to refuse’ and a homonym of the interjection ME *nai*, could be understood as an example of mixed speech.<sup>65</sup> This blurred way of representing speech allows the poet, on the one hand, to move closer to a ‘demonstration’ rather than a mere ‘description’ of Gawain’s unwillingness to accept anything from the Lady and hence make it more emphatic than pure (non-expressive) indirect or narrated speech (cp. ll. 1822–3, where a similar message has been given in direct speech).<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, it also gives the poet a chance to present the refusal as somewhat less important than Gawain’s intention to keep his ‘termes of talkyng noble’ ‘teccheles’ by not upsetting the Lady, his concern about not displeasing her being presented in direct speech immediately after, without any *inquit* clause to mark the distinction between the two modes:

‘And þerfore I pray yow displese yow noʒt  
 And lettez be your bisnesse, for I bayþe hit yow neuer  
 To graunte.  
 I am derely to yow biholde  
 Bicause of your sembelaunt,  
 And euer in hot and colde  
 To be your trwe seruauent.’ (ll. 1839–45)  
 [“And therefore, I pray you, do not be displeased, and stop your importunity,  
 for I shall never agree to grant it to you. I am deeply beholden to you because  
 of your kindness, and [obliged] always to be your servant in all  
 circumstances.”.]

- 65 Anderson, *Language and Imagination*, 192–3, identifies another example of mixed speech (he actually calls it free indirect speech) in ll. 1044–5 (‘To hym answez Gawayn / Bi non way þat he myʒt’; ‘Gawain answers him that he could by no means stay longer’). Both here and in ll. 1836–7, Gawain finds himself in a situation where accepting an offer could put him in danger of failing to fulfil a promise.
- 66 *Demonstration* and *description* refer to the differences between the aims of direct and indirect speech established by Clark and Gerrig, ‘Quotations as Demonstrations’. On the transition from indirect to direct speech in this context, see also Moore, *Quoting Speech in Early English*, 137.

Although his fear of death is blamed time and again for Gawain's breach of *treuth* by not giving the girdle as well as the kisses to Bertilak (by Gawain himself in ll. 2379–80, by the narrator in ll. 2040–2 and by the Green Knight in ll. 2366–8), the prominence that direct speech gives to Gawain's attempt to keep his good manners with the Lady (ll. 1839–45) leads us to focus on this feeling of obligation towards her as an important element in his behaviour and final acceptance of her gift. That is, the acceptance of the girdle is, after all, also an act of courtesy, regardless of whether we believe that in the end Gawain is fully infatuated with the Lady,<sup>67</sup> or we see his actions towards her just as another manifestation of his generosity of spirit.<sup>68</sup> Direct speech brings his attachment to the Lady to the foreground and, hence, it is consistent with the fact that the girdle is referred to as a 'luf-lace' (ll. 1874, 2438) and never as a *\*lif-lās*. Thus, these lines exemplify what Gerald Richman calls 'artful slipping' between different modes of speech representation.<sup>69</sup> They signal not an author who cannot fully control speech representation but an author who is finely attuned to its significance for establishing emphasis and the 'aboutness' of the narrative.

Besides helping Gawain manoeuvre around the various courtly expectations, the poet also needs to handle his audience, who, for the narrative to have full effect, cannot be allowed to recognize the significance of Gawain's stay in Hautdesert for the overall adventure. He manages to prevent (at least partially) any recognition that this episode might be something other than an interlude to the main action by reducing the moral significance of Gawain's acceptance of the girdle and by projecting Hautdesert as a Christian household where Gawain can enjoy generous hospitality before facing his 'true' challenge. He uses the various effects of speech representation in his attempts to achieve both aims.

Putter comments on a series of stylistic choices that the poet makes to lead the audience away from thinking that Gawain's acceptance of the girdle is a moral problem.<sup>70</sup> Notable for our purposes here is the fact that we see Gawain accept it almost without realizing: rather than actively engaging in the discussion of the virtues of the girdle, he simply 'pulged with hir þrepe and þoled hir to speke' (l. 1859; 'gave in to her insistence and allowed her to speak'). Because of the very limited information that we get from the narrator's representation of voice, what else she said or for how long, we will never know. Before Gawain knows it, he has accepted the girdle and agreed not to let her husband know about it. Just as Gawain does not seem to realise (at least immediately; see below) the implications of his new agreement, nor do we, to a great extent because her request is presented through indirect speech, which normally backgrounds rather than foregrounds information: 'And bisoȝt hym for hir sake disceuer hit neuer / Bot to lelly layne fro hir lorde' (ll. 1862–3; 'and she implored him, for her sake, never to reveal it, but faithfully to conceal it from her lord'). The terms of the other agreements that Gawain makes in the course of his adventure are established through direct speech (ll. 387–403, 1105–12), and are classed

67 See Thomas D. Hill, 'Gawain's Jesting Lie: Towards an Interpretation of the Confessional Scene in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Studia Neophilologica*, 52 (1980), 279–86; and Bukarov, 'False Speech', 120.

68 See Gerald Morgan, 'Medieval Misogyny and Gawain's Outburst against Women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Modern Language Review*, 97 (2002), 265–78, at 272; and McCarthy, 'Luf-talking', 159.

69 Gerald Richman, 'Artful Slipping in Old English', *Neophilologus*, 70 (1986), 279–90.

70 Putter, *Introduction to the Gawain Poet*, 90–6.

as ME *covenant* or *fōrewārd*,<sup>71</sup> both of which are missing from this context; thus, we are led to consider this one as much less significant.

Similarly, his confession to the priest is relegated to six lines of non-direct speech, with the representation of Gawain's words moving from indirect speech for the description of his reasons for seeking confession to the narrator's representation of various speech acts for the actual confession:

Preuély aproched to a prest and prayed hym þere  
 Pat he wolde lyste his lyf and lern hym better  
 How his sawle schulde be sauéd when he schuld seye heþen.  
 Pere he schrof hym schyrly and schewed his mysdedez,  
 Of þe more and þe mynne, and merci besechez,  
 And of absolucioun he on þe segge calles (ll. 1877–82)  
 [‘[He] approached a priest in private and asked him there if he would hear his confession and teach him how his soul should be saved when he should pass away. He made a clean confession there and revealed his sins, the greater and lesser, and begs for forgiveness and asks the man for absolution’].

Because of the minimal information that we are given about the confession, we don't know what Gawain might have said to the priest, whether he ever mentioned the girdle. Instead, the poet is able to shift our attention from it to Gawain's concern with certain death, which is the main reason for attending confession and, therefore, for requesting absolution. Given that we have been told that Gawain 'cryed for his mysdede' (l. 760; 'wept for his sin') when he was looking for somewhere to attend mass to celebrate Christmas, we are not necessarily asked to identify his sins with his recent behaviour. Accordingly, the girdle only resurfaces in the narrative when Gawain is getting ready to depart from Hautdesert (ll. 2030–1).

Putter does not refer to the collective speech of Hautdesert's courtiers regarding Gawain's happiness as one of the strategies used by the poet to make us put the girdle to the back of our minds:

Vche mon hade daynté þare  
 Of hym, and sayde: 'Twyssé,  
 Pus myry he watz neuer are,  
 Syn he com hider, er þis.' (ll. 1889–92)  
 [‘Everyone there took delight in him, and said: “Indeed, he was never yet so merry, since he came here, before this”.’]

Yet we should interpret this speech in a similar light. We have just witnessed Gawain defeat the Lady in, supposedly, his biggest challenge in Hautdesert (i.e. his ability to engage in 'luf-talkyng'); emerge from such a challenge all the better off because he has remained courteous towards her (and, by doing that, he has been given an object that will help him protect his life); and piously attend confession. Thus, this comment by Hautdesert's courtiers seems to invite us to identify ourselves with Gawain,

71 See Sara M. Pons-Sanz, 'Terms for SPEECH in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', forthcoming in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*.

give a big sigh of relief and share, at least momentarily, his happiness with the prospect of survival.

However, we know that the suspension of Gawain's moral compass and hence ours cannot last long; direct speech tells us this is the case. The initial speech by Hautdesert's courtiers (ll. 915–27) confirms that we are right in our perception of Gawain as a master of 'talkyng noble', an opinion that we have been encouraged to develop as soon as Gawain enters the story: although he knows that his message can be summarized in one sentence ('I beseche now with saȝez sene / Þis melly mot be myne', ll. 341–2; 'I besech you now with plain words that this quarrel may be mine'), he chooses instead to make his first involvement with the action one that is hard to forget. Through (somewhat overworked) self-deprecation, he manages to counteract the Green Knight's attempt to destabilize Arthur's position as Camelot's leader (the visitor refuses to acknowledge clear signs such as his position in the high dais, turns down his hospitality, etc.; ll. 224–7, 256–7). Gawain also slows down the state of affairs, which had taken a rather frantic turn with Arthur's swinging of the axe; and defines (at least momentarily) the identity of the court, moving away from the martial straightjacket that Arthur has allowed the Green Knight to impose on them and towards the centrality of courtesy and social manners. Because we have been allowed to develop our own opinion, because it has been given the seal of approval by those inhabiting the same world as the hero and because, as we have seen above, his concern with 'talkyng noble' has also been emphasized through other means, we are all the more surprised when Gawain steers away from such polite and eloquent speech. While we can understand that he is not going to behave equally politely towards the Green Knight and that, at times, he might lose patience with the Lady because of her constant prodding (e.g. ll. 1487, 1492–3, and 1790–1) or with his host when he tries to overstep the boundaries of their agreement (e.g. ll. 1395–7), his reply to Bertilak during the third exchange of winnings is much more unexpected and, therefore, foregrounded: "Inoȝ," quoth Sir Gawayn, / "I þonk yow, bi þe Rode" (ll. 1948–9; "Enough", said Sir Gawain, "I thank you by the Cross"). This brusque response to Bertilak's (teasing) comparison between the three kisses that Gawain has just delivered and the fox pelt that he offers in return, together with Gawain's eagerness to start the exchange despite the fact that on the other two occasions his host has handed out his winnings first, can be interpreted as an indication of the hero's bad conscience for keeping the girdle.<sup>72</sup> The first word he utters might remind us of the way in which the Green Knight tells Gawain that he should stop talking and get on with the challenge ('Þat is innogh in Nwe Ȝer—hit nedes no more', l. 404; 'That is enough for the New Year—no more is needed'), while his short expression of gratitude, with no intensification and with an oath that could be interpreted as an expletive,<sup>73</sup> casts some doubt on the honesty of his gratitude. His response seems to highlight instead his wish not to talk any more about the winnings that they have exchanged. The lack of response from his host and the swift change in

72 See Rüdiger Zimmermann, 'Verbal Syntax and Style in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *English Studies*, 54 (1973), 533–43, at 542.

73 On the role of oaths in medieval swearing expressions, see Melissa Mohr, *Holy Sh\*t: A Brief History of Swearing* (Oxford, 2013), 88–128. Gawain's reference to Christ's cross here is all the more important because it is precisely to the cross that he commends himself just before arriving to Hautdesert (see below).

topic to a recount of the hunt (ll. 1950–1), which can be reduced to a short stretch of indirect speech because we have already been told about it in detail, similarly give this impression. Gawain's utterance is very far from his reported gratitude after receiving the girdle, which still rings in the audience's ears at this point: 'He þonkked hir oft ful swyþe, / Ful þro with hert and þoʒt' (ll. 1866–7; 'he thanked her often very much, most earnestly with heart and thought'). With this report of a speech (and thought?) act, the poet can show the momentary relief that Gawain feels when being offered some hope of survival and, at the same time, avoid an open expression from the hero's mouth, which would have jarred with the courageous image that the text and Gawain are keen to project. It is better that such a direct acknowledgement comes from the courtiers (see above).

It is only in Fitt IV that we learn about the significance of Gawain's actions at Hautdesert. As noted above, our temporary lack of awareness is to a great extent the result of the focus in the previous lines on Gawain's talking rather than fighting prowess, which leads us to see his stay in Bertilak's castle on the whole as an episode subordinated to the original, apparently more physical, challenge. Yet, the tricks that the poet plays in his presentation of Hautdesert as a court deserving of God's approval are also very important for the text's attempts to cover up any association of its inhabitants with the pagan-looking challenger.<sup>74</sup> Following the common topos in medieval (English) romances of divine intervention,<sup>75</sup> the castle is seemingly portrayed as the direct response to Gawain's prayer to find a place where he can attend mass as part of his celebration of Christmas and in preparation for facing his enemy:

And þerfore sykyng he sayde: 'I beseche þe, Lorde,  
And Mary, þat is myldest moder so dere,  
Of sum herber þer heʒly I myʒt here masse  
Ande þy matyneʒ tomorne, mekely I ask,  
And þerto prestly I pray my Pater and Aue  
And Crede.'

He rode in his prayere,

And cryed for his mysdede.

He sayned hym in syþes sere

And sayde: 'Cros Kryst me spede!' (ll. 753–62)

[ 'And, therefore, sighing, he said: "I beseech You, Lord and Mary, who is the mildest mother so dear, for some lodging where I might solemnly hear mass and Your matins tomorrow, I meekly ask, and accordingly promptly I pray my Lord's Prayer, Ave Maria, and Creed". He rode in prayer and wept for his sin. He crossed himself several times and said: "Christ's cross speed me". ]

The previous reference to a prayer to Mary (whether it is the same prayer or a different one), with no mention of Gawain's religious intentions and presented only in indirect speech (ll. 737–9), does not receive any obvious answer. In the quoted lines,

74 For an overview of the different pagan entities that the Green Knight has been associated with, see Derek Brewer, 'The Colour Green', in Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (eds), *A Companion to the Gawain Poet* (Cambridge, 1997), 181–90, with references.

75 See Corinne J. Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romances* (Cambridge, 2010), 207–33.



direct speech helps to make Gawain's prayer more vivid and thus strengthens the suggestion of his coming across the castle as God's direct response to his plea.

Moreover, the first words that we hear from the inhabitants of the castle reinforce Gawain's and our initial expectation of the castle as a Christian and, hence, welcoming and safe place: "Ȝe, Peter!" quop þe porter, "and purely I trowee / Þat Ȝe be, wyȜe, welcum to won quyle yow lykez" (ll. 813–4; "Yes, by Peter!" said the porter, "and truly I believe that you are welcome, sir, to stay as long as it pleases you"). It is fully to be expected that a porter might invoke St Peter.<sup>76</sup> What is more unexpected is that a servant of the court is granted direct speech, the porter and Gawain's guide to the Green Chapel being the only two individual servants whose voices we hear. Otherwise, they do not normally speak; instead, they are spoken to and mainly through narrated speech: e.g.

Til þat hit watz tyme  
 Þe lord comaundet lyȝt (ll. 991–2)  
 ['until it was time the lord ordered lights']

Gestes þat go wolde hor gromez þay calden (l. 1127)  
 ['Guests who wanted to go called their servants'].

These references to speech, like other cases of narrated speech associated with the courtiers' conversations in Camelot and Hautdesert (e.g. ll. 107–8, 974–6, 1010–5), are not unimportant. As Jane Emberson indicates, they 'demonstrate the workings of an ordered and polite society, in which the relative positions of persons are generally fixed and known'.<sup>77</sup> Against this background, the words of the porter (and, of course, those of the servant guiding Gawain) are all the more significant.

Like Gawain's welcome to Hautdesert, his departure equally invites us to retain a positive image of this other court. The lack of an *inquit* clause introducing (internal?) direct speech is important in this respect:

His habel on hors watz þenne,  
 Þat bere his spere and launce.  
 'Þis kastel to Kryst I kenne,'  
 He gef hit ay god chaunce (ll. 2065–8)  
 ['His man [i.e. Gawain], who bore his spear and lance, was then mounted.  
 "I commend this castle to Christ"—he wished it good fortune forever'].

Studies of speech representation in medieval texts have emphasized the key role of the *inquit* clause in marking direct speech as well as identifying who the speaker of a particular utterance might be, to the extent that Brandsma has shown that both poetic and prose romances seem to prefer to avoid ambiguity and mark out direct discourse and its speaker either by positioning the *inquit* clause before the speech

76 See Ronald Tamplin, 'The Saints in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Speculum*, 44 (1969), 403–20, at 403–4.

77 Emberson, 'Reported Speech', 109.

(rather than in between a starter element and the rest of the quote),<sup>78</sup> or by making it follow immediately from non-direct speech.<sup>79</sup> In the lines quoted above we do not have either, for narrated speech follows rather than precedes direct speech, and this helps to create some initial uncertainty about whose voice we are hearing: Gawain's or the narrator's. The latter's emotional involvement in Gawain's circumstances has been signalled through various uses of the ethical dative,<sup>80</sup> as well as through interjections in the narrative appropriating Gawain's thoughts (cp. ll. 964–5). The facts that Gawain is granted eight lines of (internal?) direct speech to spell out further his feelings towards Hautdesert's inhabitants (ll. 2052–9) while Camelot did not receive a similar treatment, and that the porter is allowed to speak again (albeit not in direct speech this time), wishing him good-bye as politely as when he welcomed Gawain a few days before (ll. 2071–3), reinforce the feelings of mutual respect and admiration.

The long exchange between Gawain and his guide (ll. 2091–151) turns our attention away from the hospitality that Gawain has received and back to the initial challenge. It is only with the benefit of knowing what happens in the Green Chapel that we realize the significance of Gawain's actions at Hautdesert and make full sense of all the clues that we have been given, such as the similarities between the Green Knight and the Lord of the castle in their appearance and idiolects,<sup>81</sup> the fact that the girdle is green and gold, like the Green Knight's attire, or the fact that 'alle þe hæpeles' in Hautdesert might have covertly warned Gawain about the possibility that his actions there are directly connected with his encounter in the Green Chapel the first time we hear them speak:

De freke calde hit a fest ful frely and ofte  
Ful hendely, quen alle þe hæpeles rehayted hym at onez  
As hende:

'Pis penaunce now ze take  
And eft hit schal amende.' (ll. 894–8)

[“The knight very courteously and graciously called it a feast, when all together the men, equally courteously, exhorted him “Take this penance now and next time it will improve”.’]

Although ME *penaunce* has here a dietary meaning ('meagre meal'), its main meaning has clear religious and moral connotations (cp. l. 2392).<sup>82</sup>

Once Gawain leaves the Green Chapel, the poem comes quickly to an end. Gawain first tells the court about his experiences; like Bertilak's account of his hunts (see above), they are presented through non-direct speech (ll. 2494–500) because we have already heard about them in full. Notably, though, his explanation about the meaning that he has chosen to give to the girdle-turned-baldric, as 'þe token of

78 Brandsma, 'Knight's Talk'. L. 252 ('And sayde, "Wyze, welcum iwys to þis place"; 'and said, "sir, welcome indeed to this dwelling") exemplifies the former, while l. 1050 ("Forsøþe, sir," quop þe segge, "ze sayn bot þe trawþe"; "Indeed, sir," said the knight, "you speak only the truth") is an example of the latter.

79 Cp. ll. 1031–6, 1372–80 and 1836–45.

80 E.g. l. 1932, as Gawain is about to break his agreement with Bertilak; and l. 2014, as he is getting ready to leave Hautdesert.

81 See Clark, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'; and Pons-Sanz, 'Terms for SPEECH'.

82 See MED, s.v. *penaunce*, sense 6.

vntrawþe' (l. 2509; 'the token of infidelity'), is presented in direct speech (ll. 2505–12), even though he has already made his decision clear, again through direct speech, in ll. 2429–38. Thus, it is this deeply personal interpretation of his new chivalric token that the text highlights at the end, rather than passing explicit judgement on which of the three interpretations of Gawain's actions we should adopt: the Green Knight's suggestion that he 'lakked a lyttel' (l. 2366), Gawain's harsher self-judgement on his failure to adhere to chivalric ideals, or the court's celebration of the adventure as a success boosting their renown (l. 2519).<sup>83</sup> While the moral implications of the story remain unclear and we are not much wiser about how best to bring together chivalric ideals and practicalities, speech representation seems to lend support to Mark Amodio's argument that '*Sir Gawain* is ultimately more interested in exploring the hermeneutics of the self than questions of the soul'.<sup>84</sup> The contrast between Gawain's somewhat repetitive direct speech, and the narrator's representation of speech act and indirect speech to refer to Arthur's and Camelot's reactions, respectively (ll. 2513 and 2514–8), foregrounds 'this newly emerged self [...] based on unique, recently formed and internal precepts' against the background of 'the collective, traditional, external ones still operating for Arthur and the rest of the court'.<sup>85</sup>

By presenting a typology of modes of speech representation that reflects the distinctive features of medieval texts, and carefully scrutinizing their use as a narrative technique, this paper has gone beyond the common scholarly focus on the world-building functions of speech in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to explore instead its stylistic and pragmatic effects. Our medieval ancestors might have lacked the clear and consistent typographical markers of direct speech that we now use in written texts and this might have blurred the boundaries between direct and indirect speech (consider the examples that have been identified above as mixed speech). However, we should not conclude that authors were not aware of their different effects. On the contrary, this paper has shown that the *Gawain*-poet skilfully played with different modes of speech representation in order to manage his audience's interpretation of the verbal exchanges and events being presented in front of them, to a great extent to give his audience a false sense of security and relief before the actual nature of Gawain's quest is revealed and its implications for self-development hinted at. Moreover, this approach and the careful study of speech representation in connection with particular lexical choices have also brought to light various nuances in this well-known poem.

The careful distinction between strategies of speech representation pioneered by modern stylistics has been shown to further our understanding of the text's success in presenting its story and could be applied to other medieval compositions. At the same time, this paper has also given further proof of the general robustness of Leech and Short's widely used framework, as well as a note of caution regarding its direct

83 On these interpretations and the possible prevalence of Gawain's judgement, see John Burrow, 'The Conclusion of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: Three Knightly Verdicts', *Essays in Criticism*, 67 (2017), 103–15. For an argument against the religious suitability of Gawain's interpretation, see, however, Ross G. Arthur, *Medieval Sign Theory and Sir Gawain the Green Knight* (Toronto, 1987), 106–58.

84 Amodio, 'Tradition, Modernity, and the Emergence of the Self', 58.

85 Amodio, 'Tradition, Modernity, and the Emergence of the Self', 61.

applicability to medieval texts. It is hoped that the typology suggested here and its application will benefit medieval literary critics and historical stylisticians alike by setting the way for further discussions about the forms and uses of discourse representation in pre-modern texts.

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