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Inglewood Forest in Three Romances from the Northern Gawain Group

Lindy Brady

Abstract

This article argues that Inglewood Forest exerts influence over the direction of events within a subset of texts in the Northern Gawain Group. Within three tales which begin with a hunt and end in adventure — *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, and *The Avowyng of Arthur* — planned hunts awaken the supernatural but supernatural portents are derailed by the aristocratic hunt, demonstrating the uncontrollability of the forest space. A strand of recent scholarship on the Northern Gawain Group has productively read these works as border romances, and this study builds on these conclusions by arguing that this regional point of view is also reflected in the narrative role of Inglewood Forest itself. The pattern present throughout the Northern Gawain Group in which the forest behaves contrary to the desires of the Arthurian court suggests a resistance to unchecked external control over the local landscape. Inglewood Forest counters the expectations of the Arthurian court, suggesting that there exists a crucial difference between entering the forest by desire and by invitation. This imbalance between the Arthurian court's desires and the ways in which the forest responds to them functions as a regional critique of the royal forest in fifteenth-century England.

The forest is a familiar presence in medieval romance,¹ yet its commonly interpreted role as a passive backdrop for adventure can be deceptive. This article argues that in three late Middle English romances united by their shared wilderness setting, Inglewood Forest holds a key narrative function and exerts influence over the direction of events. These romances belong to the Northern Gawain Group, 'a cluster of distinctly popular, predominately northern, late-medieval romances' in which Arthurian knight Gawain plays a central role.² Its location 'is almost invariably the area around Carlisle and the Inglewood forest, with which [Gawain]

¹ See Corrine J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993) for a comprehensive overview of the role of the forest in medieval romance tradition. These arguments were first presented at the New Chaucer Society conference in 2012 in Portland, Oregon, and I thank those in attendance for their comments and suggestions. I am grateful to Frederick M. Biggs, Heide Estes, and the anonymous reviewers for *Leeds Medieval Studies* for helpful advice on this article.

² Barry Windeat, 'The Fifteenth-Century Arthur', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 84–102 (p. 86). All references to these tales will be to *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. by Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 1995), by tale and line number.

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seems to have been traditionally associated'.³ This shared setting, on the borderland between Scotland and Cumberland, creates narrative and stylistic commonalities between these works while also establishing their historical and political status as border texts.⁴ Yet while Inglewood Forest has been rightly understood as a crucial characteristic of these romances — the liminal space within which adventures can occur — what has remained unnoticed is the deliberate balance between the nature of those adventures and that of the forest itself. This article argues that in the group of three tales within the Northern Gawain Group which begin with a hunt and end in adventure — *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, and *The Avowyng of Arthur* — it is the nature of the forest which determines the type of adventures that occur within it. Reading the opening scenes of these texts together reveals a broader pattern of careful structural balance between the forest as a controlled aristocratic resource and a site of unpredictable supernatural potential. Planned hunts awaken the supernatural but supernatural portents are derailed by the aristocratic hunt, demonstrating the uncontrollability of the forest space. Inglewood Forest thus has a unique narrative identity within the Northern Gawain Group: not an intrinsically supernatural place, but rather one that confounds the expectations of those who enter it.

This imbalance between the Arthurian court's desires and the ways in which the forest responds to them functions as a regional critique of the royal forest in fifteenth-century England.⁵ One strand of recent scholarship on the Northern Gawain Group has productively read these works as border romances, exploring their regional perspective, criticism of centralised power, and Gawain's local affiliations and similarities to the heroes of outlaw texts.⁶ This article adds to these studies by arguing that this regional point of view is also reflected in the narrative role of Inglewood Forest itself. The pattern present throughout the Northern Gawain Group in which the forest behaves contrary to the desires of the Arthurian court suggests a resistance to unchecked external control over the local landscape. *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, in which hunts are planned, feature supernatural disruptions that criticise the character and behaviour of the Arthurian court, while Arthur's enthusiastic response to an invitation into the forest to kill the boar which threatens its landscape and wildlife in *The Avowyng of Arthur* results in nothing but praise for his physical and mental prowess. Reading these texts together reveals that each envisions Inglewood Forest in a similar way, suggesting a regional understanding of an ideal relationship between local landscape and royal authority. The inversion of expectation and reality in the works of the Northern Gawain Group presents a clear distinction between entering the forest

³ Gillian Rogers, 'Folk Romance', in *The Arthur of the English: Arthurian Legend in Medieval English Life and Literature*, ed. by W. R. J. Barron (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. 197–224 (p. 199).

⁴ As recently suggested by Sean Pollack, 'Border States: Parody, Sovereignty, and Hybrid Identity in *The Carl of Carlisle*', *Arthuriana*, 19 (2009), 10–26.

⁵ For overviews of royal forest policies in late medieval England, see C. R. Young, *The Royal Forests of Medieval England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1979); Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'Men's Games, King's Deer: Poaching in Medieval England', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 18 (1988), 175–93; Nicholas Orme, 'Medieval Hunting: Fact and Fancy', in *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context*, ed. by Barbara A. Hanawalt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1992), pp. 133–53; William Perry Marvin, *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2006); and Jodi Grimes, 'Arboreal Politics in the *Knight's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review*, 46 (2012), 340–64.

⁶ Border romances feature a frontier setting that influences the action of the narrative. Two of the most well-known from medieval Britain are the stories of Fouke le Fitz Waryn (the Anglo-Welsh borderland) and Thomas of Erceldoune (the Anglo-Scottish borderland).

by desire and by invitation, indicating that the local wilderness should not be managed as carefully as even a king might desire.

The setting of the Northern Gawain Group of tales is notable for its longstanding identity as a borderland and frontier zone. Carlisle was an established British settlement before being taken over by the Romans as the largest garrison of Hadrian's Wall. After the collapse of Roman rule, the surrounding region of Cumbria changed hands frequently. It was first part of the British kingdom of Rheged before being claimed by the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria by around the seventh century. The next few hundred years would see Cumbria fought over by Northumbria and the British kingdom of Strathclyde; in later centuries, Viking settlements in the region added further contenders to the mix. Cumbria was part of Scotland at the time of the Norman Conquest but was quickly conquered by William Rufus in 1092 and incorporated back into England. As a frontier city, Carlisle was a frequent site of conflict between England and Scotland, and parts of Cumbria changed hands between the two nations many times over the course of the high Middle Ages. Due to these centuries of conflict, the later medieval and early modern periods also saw the rise of powerful marcher families who frequently raided across the border, giving the region a reputation for lawlessness.⁷ Inglewood was named a royal forest shortly after the Norman Conquest, and, like Cumbria, its boundaries shifted frequently throughout the medieval period.⁸ By the time the Northern Gawain Group of Arthurian romances were written, Inglewood Forest and the landscape which surrounded it had a long history as a borderland whose boundaries and identity were fluid and unstable.⁹

Early criticism on the texts of the Northern Gawain Group was fairly limited due to their marginalisation and dismissal as popular romance.¹⁰ More recent scholarship has productively reclaimed these works as border texts, noting Gawain's role as a thoughtful local hero who can contrast the centralised power of Arthur's rule. As Margaret Robson has argued, Gawain 'belongs to these marginal areas and texts where Arthur does not' and 'deals with all that centralised authority leaves behind [...] the repressed and dispossessed'.¹¹ Recent criticism has also read these works as reflecting the regional viewpoint of the Anglo-Scottish march in the fifteenth century rather than the broader nationalistic or imperialistic perspectives of

⁷ See classic studies by Angus J. L. Winchester, *Landscape and Society in Medieval Cumbria* (Edinburgh: Donald, 1987) and Henry Summerson, *Medieval Carlisle: The City and the Borders from the Late Eleventh to the Mid-Sixteenth Century*, Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society: Extra Series, 25, 2 vols (Kendal: Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, 1993) and more recently Mike McCarthy, *Carlisle: A Frontier and Border City* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁸ On the history of Inglewood Forest, see Young, *Royal Forests of Medieval England* and N. J. Higham, 'The Origins of Inglewood Forest', *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, 86 (1986), 85–100. On its modern resonances, see Kathleen Coyne Kelly, 'Lost Geographies, Remembrance, and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', in *The Politics of Ecology: Land, Life, and Law in Medieval Britain*, ed. by Randy P. Schiff and Joseph Taylor (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2016), pp. 232–65.

⁹ On the fluidity of the Anglo-Scottish border in a literary context, see *The Anglo-Scottish Border and the Shaping of Identity, 1300–1600*, ed. by Mark P. Bruce and Katherine H. Terrell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹⁰ On which see *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. by Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) and *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, ed. by Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: Brewer, 2009).

¹¹ Margaret Robson, 'Local Hero: Gawain and the Politics of Arthurianism', *Arthurian Literature*, 23 (2006), 81–94 (p. 86). Rosamund Allen, 'Place-Names in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*: Corruption, Conjecture, Coincidence', in *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P. J. C. Field*, ed. by Bonnie Wheeler, *Arthurian Studies*, 57 (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 181–98 (p. 181), has argued that 'place-names identify *The Awntyrs off Arthure* with a magnate audience which is both admonished about landed wealth and celebrated in wordplay on land tenure'.

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many medieval English Arthurian works (and other later medieval romances).¹² As Thomas Hahn has commented in his edition of these works:

A last characteristic that marks the Gawain romances as a unified group [...] centers on their frequent resort to geography to locate their meaning. Almost all the poems explicitly set their adventures in or near Carlisle, a city with long-standing Arthurian associations, located in Cumbria [...] In short, Carlisle with its environs is preeminently a border territory, a contested area of mixed populations and of shifting and changing alliances [...] These Arthurian romances themselves constitute a "border writing" of sorts.¹³

Randy P. Schiff has argued that *The Awntyrs off Arthure* and *Golagros and Gawane* 'resist classification by nation and are read more readily as texts tied to militarized borderlands' and 'literary meditations on the dangers of imperialism',¹⁴ while Sean Pollack sees *The Carl of Carlisle* as 'a border text that both comes from and explores the ambiguity of boundaries: political, geographic, class, and literary'.¹⁵ Such studies have illuminated the crucial relationship between the political and geographical identities of these texts, and indeed, the landscape of the Northern Gawain Group is highlighted by the key role of the hunt. Thorlac Turville-Petre,¹⁶ Rosamund Allen,¹⁷ Andrew R. Walkling,¹⁸ and Virginia A. P. Lowe, among others, have called attention to the 'use of the hunt as a narrative framework',¹⁹ and as Thomas Hahn notes, it 'furnishes [...] a pretext for adventure'.²⁰ Thus, the forest has been understood as the means by which the supernatural is introduced.²¹ These texts evoke not just a generic forest of romance, but the specific location of Inglewood, which as

¹² On imperialism in Middle English romance, see Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) and Sif Rikhardsdottir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse: The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012).

¹³ Hahn, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, p. 29.

¹⁴ Randy P. Schiff, 'Borderland Subversions: Anti-imperial Energies in *The Awntyrs off Arthure* and *Golagros and Gawane*', *Speculum*, 84 (2009), 613–32 (pp. 615, 618, 621); see also Randy P. Schiff, *Revivalist Fantasy: Alliterative Verse and Nationalist Literary History* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011). For discussion of *Awntyrs* in relation to medieval political conceptions of sovereignty, see Lee Manion, 'Sovereign Recognition: Contesting Political Claims in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* and *The Awntyrs off Arthur*', in *Law and Sovereignty in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by Robert S. Sturges, *Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, 28 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 69–91.

¹⁵ Pollack, 'Border States', 11. T. Brandsen, 'Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle', *Neophilologus*, 81 (1997), 299–307, has also explored the ambiguity of class boundaries within the text, arguing that it reflects local concerns as an allegory of mutual cooperation between nobility and commoners to respect one another's rights.

¹⁶ Thorlac Turville-Petre, "'Summer Sunday'", "De Tribus Regibus Mortuis", and "The Awntyrs off Arthure": Three Poems in the Thirteen-Line Stanza", *The Review of English Studies*, n. s. 25 (1974), 1–14 (p. 3); for further discussion of these poems in light of alliterative verse, see Nicola Royan, 'The Alliterative *Awntyrs* stanza in Older Scots verse', in *Medieval Alliterative Poetry: Essays in Honour of Thorlac Turville-Petre*, ed. by John A. Burrow and Hoyt N. Duggan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), pp. 185–94.

¹⁷ Allen, 'Place-Names in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', p. 195.

¹⁸ Andrew R. Walkling, 'The Problem of "Rondolesette Halle" in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', *Studies in Philology*, 100 (2003), 105–22.

¹⁹ Virginia A. P. Lowe, 'Folklore as a Unifying Factor in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', *Folklore Forum*, 13 (1980), 199–223.

²⁰ Hahn, *Eleven Romances*, p. 26–27.

²¹ While John Finlayson, 'The Marvellous in Middle English Romance', *The Chaucer Review*, 33 (1999), 363–408, has recently argued that the marvellous has a much less central role to play in medieval romances than prior criticism has assumed, his study entirely omits discussion of this group of tales, where indeed, the marvellous so often does have a significant role to play. The significant presence of the supernatural within this group of texts might also be a result of the fact that they feature Gawain as the hero: as Roger Dalrymple, 'Sir Gawain in Middle

Ralph Hanna notes ‘should almost certainly be understood as a place with spectral or magical connotations’.²²

The prominence of the natural landscape in the Northern Gawain Group has led to another strand of recent scholarship which reads these stories through an ecocritical lens. Following on the publication of Gillian Rudd’s groundbreaking *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature*,²³ ecocritical readings of later medieval texts have become popular, most notably *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,²⁴ and the texts of the Northern Gawain Group have recently begun to receive similar attention. Joseph Taylor’s biopolitical reading of *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* takes a similar approach to this article in its attention to the regional status of Inglewood Forest but arrives at the opposite conclusion, arguing that the tale functions as a ‘biopolitical discursus on managing the porous identities of marchers for the betterment of the English imperial state’ and that the Northern Gawain tales as a whole ‘reaffirm an Arthurian teleology of power that perpetuates and regenerates itself in juxtaposition with the real English Crown’.²⁵

The present argument is more closely aligned with ecocritical readings of the Northern Gawain Group and other romances which have argued that wilderness spaces represent sites of challenge or opposition to the will of the court in these texts. Chelsea S. Henson has thoughtfully highlighted the way in which the wasteful behaviour of the Arthurian court in *The Awntyrs off Arthure* is used by the poem to critique the court’s actions,²⁶ to which I would add that Inglewood Forest is itself given an active role in this critique. Andrew Murray Richmond has argued that the Tarn Wadling in *The Awntyrs off Arthure* is one example of ‘a late medieval understanding of tarns, rivers, and seas as explicitly alien, yet intimately physical embodiments of divine power in the natural world’,²⁷ aligning with this article’s conclusions that Inglewood Forest demonstrates an agency of its own within the Northern Gawain Group of romances. Indeed, Jessica Barr has argued for the wilderness as a site of opposition to the court in *Le Roman de Silence*,²⁸ and the conclusions drawn here underscore its similar role in the texts of the Northern Gawain Group.

English Romance’, in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. by Helen Fulton (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 265–77 (p. 275), argues, Gawain’s ‘early associations with magic and the supernatural were perpetuated through English literary tradition’. Robson, ‘Local Hero’, p. 91, has similarly noted Gawain’s strong ties to the world of the supernatural.

²² Ralph Hanna III, ‘*The Awntyrs off Arthure*: An Interpretation’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 31 (1970), 275–97 (p. 281).

²³ Gillian Rudd, *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

²⁴ See i.e. Michael W. George, ‘Gawain’s Struggle with Ecology: Attitudes toward the Natural World in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’, *Journal of Ecocriticism*, 2 (2010), 30–44; Susan Crane, ‘Chivalry and the Pre/Post-Modern’, *postmedieval*, 2 (2011), 69–87; and Carolyn Dinshaw, ‘Ecology’, in *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*, ed. by Marion Turner (Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, 2013), pp. 347–62.

²⁵ Joseph Taylor, ‘Arthurian Biopolitics: Sovereignty and Ecology in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 59 (2017), 182–208 (pp. 185 and 202).

²⁶ Chelsea S. Henson, ‘“Under a holte so here”: Noble Waste in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*’, *Arthuriana*, 28 (2018), 3–24.

²⁷ Andrew Murray Richmond, ‘Fluid Boundaries in *The Awntyrs off Arthure* and *Sir Isumbras*’, *Open Library of Humanities*, 4 (2018), 1–30 (p. 2).

²⁸ Jessica Barr, ‘The Idea of the Wilderness: Gender and Resistance in *Le Roman de Silence*’, *Arthuriana*, 30 (2020), 3–25.

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Of course, connections between the forest, the hunt, and the supernatural are hardly unusual in medieval romance.²⁹ Yet what, paradoxically, distinguishes the texts of the Northern Gawain Group is that Inglewood Forest is not a predictable site of the supernatural. Rather, there exists an inverse relationship between what the members of the Arthurian court expect and what they encounter. The organised hunts described at the beginnings of *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* and *The Awntyrs off Arthure* seem intended to showcase the chivalric values of the Arthurian court, while the preternaturally fierce boar in the opening scenes of *The Avowyng of Arthur* seems to clearly be of supernatural origin (it is even given demonic connotations). Yet in *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*³⁰ and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, carefully managed aristocratic hunts are disrupted by the supernatural,³¹ while its absence in *The Avowyng of Arthur* is surprising because the tale begins when Arthur's huntsman pleads for help killing the supernaturally large and ferocious boar who threatens to disrupt the forest space. In these texts, Inglewood Forest counters the expectations of the Arthurian court, suggesting that there exists a crucial difference between entering the forest by desire and by invitation.

Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle showcases Gawain's perfect courtesy even in the face of a supernaturally discourteous host, yet within this text, the forest serves as the pivot point on which its main themes turn. Lost on a hunt, Gawain finds himself a guest in the home of a mysterious churl whose strange commands he must obey. Much early scholarship on the work focused on its relationship to the motif of disenchantment via beheading present in its later recension from the Percy Folio,³² although recent critics have examined the work in light of class and regional politics.³³ As Sean Pollack has recently argued, the tale's ambiguous geographical opening underscores its identity as a regional text. He writes:

As many have noted, the geography of Arthur's itinerary poses some problems: a journey from Cardiff in Wales to Carlisle in "Ynglonde" is simply impossible to make on horseback in one day. The possibility remains that these lines refer not to Cardiff, but Carlisle, and to Inglewood, rather than England. But even if the text is meant to refer to Carlisle as part of "Ynglonde," the choice is an interesting one, as it places Carlisle under the military, governmental, and cultural umbrella of Arthur's England. There is a tension in these opening lines, however, that calls attention to Britain as a distinct geographical and cultural region, separate from both England and Scotland [...] Arguably, this poem's opening emphasizes its interest in the region that is neither England nor Scotland, the border land between the two where people considered themselves British rather than English or Scots.³⁴

The poem's opening scene is thus generally understood, like many of the Northern Gawain Group texts, to take place in Inglewood Forest, with an Arthurian hunt whose massive scale

²⁹ See Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*.

³⁰ While the same pattern is also present in *The Carle of Carlisle* from the Percy Folio, this article will omit discussion of this later, post-medieval text.

³¹ The same pattern also occurs in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* (and presumably, its post-medieval version *The Marriage of Sir Gawain* from the Percy Folio — the beginning scene of this text is lost so this is impossible to state with certainty, though the extant parts of the text parallel the plot of *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* quite closely). However, I will not be discussing these works as a part of this essay given their parodic nature, which makes discussion of genre conventions different.

³² Paul Beekman Taylor, 'Icelandic Analogues to the Northern English Gawain Cycle', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 4 (1970), 93–106.

³³ Brandsen, 'Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle'; Pollack, 'Border States', p. 17; Taylor, 'Arthurian Biopolitics'.

³⁴ Pollack, 'Border States', p. 15.

testifies to its well-managed nature. Arthur and his court take to the forest to hunt deer at their fattest:

Kinge Arttor to his lordis gan saye
As a lorde ryall that well maye,
'Do us to have a Masse.
Byschope Bawdewyn schall hit don;
Then to the forrest woll we gon,
All that evyr her ys,
For nowe is grece-tyme of the year,
That baruns bolde schulde hont the der,
And reyse hem of her reste'.³⁵

The tale's multiple descriptions of the Arthurian court's five-hundred-member hunting party make clear its overwhelming scale:

Knyghttus kene fast they rane;
The Kyngge followyd wytt mony a man,
Fife hunderd and moo, I wene.

Folke followyd wytt fedyrft flonus,
Nobull archarrus for the nons,
To fell the fallow der so cleyn.³⁶

Finally, the extent of the spoils similarly emphasises that this is a well-planned operation and a substantial undertaking indeed:

Barrons gan her hornnus blowe;
The der cam rekyngge on a rowe,
Bothe hert and eke heynde.
Be that tyme was pryme of the day
Fife hunderd der dede on a lond lay
Alonge undur a lynde.³⁷

As Pollack notes, 'Arthur enters Carlisle with something like an invasion force of five hundred knights (a bit too large for a hunting party) and Arthur's men take five hundred deer, both hart and hind [...] Such a large deer kill in a relatively small area definitely represents what we would today call poaching, the excessive taking of wild game from lands belonging to another'.³⁸ Yet the Arthurian court's activities seem far more aggressive than poaching, which is usually understood both to involve some measure of stealth and to be conducted at a small-scale, subsistence level. In contrast, Arthur and his knights make no attempt to conceal their activities from the carl upon whose lands they are intruding, while the egregious scope of their slaughter — one deer per knight — is surely more than would be required to keep the

³⁵ *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, ll. 25–33.

³⁶ *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, ll. 103–8.

³⁷ *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, ll. 109–14.

³⁸ Pollack, 'Border States', p. 16.

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court fed. Chelsea S. Henson has commented on the wastefulness of this hunt, noting that *Awntyrs* ‘does not address the butchering or use value of the deer [...] there is no sustainable “recycling” of materials, and the potential for overhunting it suggests lingers, touching upon the idea of waste as void or valueless’.³⁹ This hunt is no idle diversion, but a carefully controlled operation that suggests a military-scale intrusion into, and show of force upon, someone else’s land, bringing the Arthurian court’s activities closer to *chevauchée* tactics in warfare than an aristocratic hunt.⁴⁰

However, this well-planned hunt soon goes awry with the sudden materialisation of a reindeer:

Then Syr Gawen and Syr Key
And Beschope Baudewyn, as I yow say,
After a raynder they rode.
Frowe that tym was prym of the day
Tyl myde-undur-non, as I yow saye,
Never styll hit abode.
A myst gan ryse in a mor;
Barrons blowe her hornis store.
Meche mon Syr Key made:
The reyneder wolde not dwelle.
Herkon what averter hem befelle.⁴¹

The reindeer leads Gawain, Kay, and Baldwin on a wild chase until, lost, they must seek shelter in the castle of the enigmatic Carl of Carlisle. Clearly, the supernatural enters this tale at the same moment as the reindeer materialises, and its role as a lure which separates them from the main hunting party and drives them to the Carl’s castle as the mist rises up and the adventure begins only further emphasises that the ‘real’ world of the Arthurian court has been left behind. Reindeer have been extinct in Britain for 8,000 years,⁴² making the very existence of this animal just as supernatural as its sudden appearance.⁴³ Moreover, the reindeer’s clear associations with the supernatural space of the north heightens the otherworldly nature of the Carl’s castle, where Kay and Baldwin fail a series of bizarre courtesy tests which Gawain succeeds at by obeying their host’s strange commands with unquestioning obedience.

The opening scene of a carefully controlled, aristocratic hunt in *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* is thus deliberately disrupted within the narrative by the intrusion of the supernatural within the forest. Yet this disruption sends Gawain and his companions on a very specific set of adventures. As many critics of this tale have noted, the point of the Carl’s tests — strange as they may seem — is to teach Arthur’s knights how to behave courteously as a guest in someone else’s home. A guest must unquestioningly obey his host, because he alone has the right to dictate what occurs in his own domain. The members of the Arthurian

³⁹ Henson, ‘Noble Waste’, p. 12.

⁴⁰ I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for *Leeds Medieval Studies* for pointing out this parallel.

⁴¹ *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, ll. 115–25.

⁴² Juliet Clutton-Brock and Arthur MacGregor, ‘An End to Medieval Reindeer in Scotland’, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 118 (1988), 23–35.

⁴³ The *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. *rein-dēr* lists nine occurrences in total, all from the late fifteenth century onward. In almost all other occurrences (six out of nine) it seems to be a stock alliterative phrase with *rō* (roe deer), as lines reference the hunting of ‘the reindeer and the roe’ or vice versa. A reindeer is once mentioned alongside a unicorn as part of ‘a parke of bestys with horn’, and once as a mounted hunting trophy.

court are behaving in precisely the opposite way in their uninvited entry and slaughter of deer in Inglewood Forest, and the bulk of the narrative, at the Carl's residence, provides a model of correction to this initial error of judgement. In behaving contrary to the Arthurian court's expectations, the narrative role of Inglewood Forest in *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* functions as a critique of Arthur's actions within the forest. The text presents a narrative of resistance to unchecked external intrusion into the local forest landscape. Indeed, even the detail that the Arthurian court's slaughter of the Carl's deer is mirrored by the appearance of a supernatural reindeer who leads them astray suggests this pattern. Arthur's court has entered the forest by desire and not by invitation. The forest responds supernaturally to this breach of courteous behaviour, confounding the court's expectations to show that the forest landscape cannot be bent to royal will and that regional customs and desires ought to be respected.

As is the case in *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, the action of *The Awntyrs off Arthur* commences when Arthur's court sets out on an aristocratic hunting trip that is disrupted when Inglewood Forest counters their expectations to derail the hunt with a manifestation of the supernatural. This text couples a grim warning from the ghost of Guinevere's mother on the dangers of over-expanding the boundaries of the Arthurian court with a joust between Gawain and a challenger who has come to reclaim his lands, which Arthur had redistributed to Gawain as a member of his own court.⁴⁴ While the poem is metrically and alliteratively complex, its unusual structure led to its dismissal by earlier critics,⁴⁵ until A.C. Spearing argued for its structural unity as a diptych.⁴⁶ Criticism has also explored the theological implications of its ghostly apparition,⁴⁷ its treatment of women,⁴⁸ and its unusually detailed enumerations of

- ⁴⁴ The text survives in four manuscripts, none of which precisely agree with one another. I follow Hahn's edition.
- ⁴⁵ Hanna, 'The Awntyrs off Arthure: An Interpretation' and 'A la Recherche du temps bien perdu: The Text of *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', *Text*, 5 (1988), 189–205; see also Rosamund Allen, 'Some Sceptical Observations on the Editing of *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', in *Manuscripts and Texts: Editorial Problems in Later Middle English Literature: Essays from the 1985 Conference at the University of York*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987), pp. 5–25.
- ⁴⁶ A. C. Spearing, 'The Awntyrs off Arthure', in *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1981), pp. 183–202 and 'Central and Displaced Sovereignty in Three Medieval Poems', *The Review of English Studies*, n. s. 33 (1982), 247–61. A tripartite structure was proposed by Helen Phillips, 'The Awntyrs off Arthure: Structure and Meaning. A Reassessment', *Arthurian Literature*, 12 (1993), 63–89. Krista Sue-Lo Twu, 'The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne: Reliquary for Romance', *Arthurian Literature*, 20 (2003), 103–22 has also argued for the poem's structural and thematic unity, and Alexander J. Zawacki, 'A Dark Mirror: Death and The Cadaver Tomb in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', *Arthuriana*, 27 (2017), 87–101 has built on Spearing's arguments to argue that the structure of the poem is analogous to that of a medieval cadaver tomb.
- ⁴⁷ Carl Grey Martin, 'The Awntyrs off Arthure, an Economy of Pain', *Modern Philology*, 108 (2010), 177–98; see also Helen Phillips, 'The Ghost's Baptism in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', *Medium Ævum*, 58 (1989), 49–58. Most scholarship on *The Awntyrs off Arthure* discusses its relationship to *The Trentals of St. Gregory*; see particularly David N. Klausner, 'Exempla and *The Awntyrs of Arthure*', *Mediaeval Studies*, 34 (1972), 307–25 and Martin Connolly, 'Promise-Postponement Device in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*: A Possible Narrative Model', *Arthurian Literature*, 23 (2006), 95–108.
- ⁴⁸ Leah Haught, 'Ghostly Mothers and Fated Fathers: Gender and Genre in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', *Arthuriana*, 20 (2010), 3–24; for other readings on fortune's wheel, see Takami Matsuda, 'The Awntyrs off Arthure and the Arthurian History', *Poetica*, 19 (1983), 48–62. For other feminist readings, see Jeanne T. Mathewson, 'Displacement of the Feminine in *Golagros and Gawane* and the *Awntyrs off Arthure*', *Arthurian Interpretations*, 1 (1987), 23–28 and Maureen Fries, 'The Characterization of Women in the Alliterative Tradition', in *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1981), pp. 25–45; for a heavily theoretical reading of the poem, see Alexander L. Kaufman, 'There is Horror: *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, the Face of the Dead, and the Maternal Other', in *Levinas and Medieval Literature: The 'Difficult Reading' of English and Rabbinic Texts*, ed. by Ann W. Astell and Justin A. Jackson

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place names.⁴⁹ *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, like *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, begins with a detailed narrative of the entire Arthurian court on a large and carefully orchestrated hunt:

In the tyme of Arthur an aunter bytydde,
By the Turne Wathelan, as the boke telles,
Whan he to Carlele was comen, that conquerour kydde,
With dukes and dussiperes that with the dere dwelles.
To hunte at the herdes that longe had ben hydde,
On a day thei hem dight to the depe delles,
To fall of the femailes in forest were frydde,
Fayre by the fermesones in frithes and felles.
Thus to wode arm thei went, the wlonkest in wedes,
Bothe the Kyng and the Quene,
And al the doughthi bydene.⁵⁰

The work's description of this enterprise is detailed enough to take up the first eighty lines of the seven-hundred line poem and emphasises the centrality of the hunt to the Arthurian chivalric identity. However, the real narrative action begins when Guinevere and Gawain remain behind the hunt to rest in a grove. Suddenly, at high noon, the supernatural yet again intrudes into a carefully planned courtly pastime:

Now wol I of this mervaile mele, if I mote.
The day wex als dirke
As hit were midnight myrke;
Thereof the King was irke
And light on his fote.⁵¹

The hunt is impeded when the weather turns dark and cold, while driving hail sends knights fleeing to the shelter of nearby rocks. As the Arthurian court watches in horror, an apparition rises wailing from the centre of Tarn Wadling:

There come a lowe one the loughe — in londe is not to layne —
In the lyknes of Lucyfere, laytheste in Helle,
And glides to Sir Gawayn the gates to gayne,
Yauland and yomerand, with many loude yelle[...]⁵²

This spectre, described by Gawain as 'the grisselist goost that ever herd I grede' (l. 99), is the spirit of Guinevere's mother, who delivers a grim warning that the Arthurian court will

(Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2009), pp. 85–106.

⁴⁹ Andrew Breeze, 'The Awntyrs off Arthure, Caerphilly, Oysterlow, and Wexford', *Arthuriana*, 9 (1999), 63–68; Susan Kelly, 'Place-Names in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', *Literary Onomastics Studies*, 6 (1979), 1–38; John Eadie, 'Two Notes on the Awntyrs off Arthure', *English Language Notes*, 21 (1983), 3–7. Rosamund Allen, 'The Awntyrs off Arthure: Jests and Jousts', in *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*, ed. by Jennifer Fellows et al (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), 129–42 (p. 131), has dated the poem to 'establish the poem in the context of the Anglo-French and Anglo-Scottish wars of the first quarter of the fifteenth century and locate it in the Border politics of northern England, the northernmost front of the Hundred Years' War'.

⁵⁰ *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ll. 1–11.

⁵¹ *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ll. 74–78.

⁵² *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ll. 83–86.

inevitably fall if its current path of unchecked power continues. Here too, a hunt carefully planned as a chivalric pastime leads to unexpected consequences for the members of the Arthurian court, who find themselves confronting the supernatural instead of hunting deer.

As was the case in *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, the narrative of *The Awntyrs off Arthure* is structured so that the supernatural intervenes directly in the hunt, in order to correct the court's bad behaviour. The spirit's interference in the hunt is made clear by the fact that the Arthurian court's hunting dogs, in addition to the animals in the forest, are all also stricken with fear at the grisly appearance of this spectre:

The houndes highen to the holtes, and her hede hides,
For the grisly goost made a grym bere.
The grete greundes wer agast of the grym bere.
The birdes in the bowes,
That on the goost glowes,
Thei skryke in the skowes
That hateles may here.⁵³

The ghostly apparition of Guinevere's mother remarks on her own sins of pride and predicts the downfall of the Arthurian court if they continue down their current self-centred path. Gawain asks her spirit,

'How shal we fare', quod the freke, 'that fonden to fight,
And thus defoulen the folke on fele kinges londes,
And riches over reymes withouten eny right,
Wynnen worshipp in werre thorgh wightnesse of hondes?'⁵⁴

The ghost of Guinevere's mother responds 'your King is to covetous, I warne the sir knight' (l. 265), speaking specifically of the Arthurian court's unchecked quest for power via control over the lands of others.

As A. C. Spearing noted in his argument about the unity of the poem's structure, the second half of *The Awntyrs off Arthure* reflects the Arthurian court's ability to learn and change from the warnings given in the work's first half. After the ghost of Guinevere's mother has disrupted the aristocratic hunt with her grim warning, the second half of *The Awntyrs off Arthure* focuses on the challenge posed to the Arthurian court by a local knight, Sir Galeron of Galloway. He claims that Gawain has unfairly taken possession of his lands and demands a combat to settle the issue, telling the Arthurian court,

'Mi name is Sir Galaron, withouten eny gile,
The grettest of Galwey of greves and gyllis,
Of Connok, of Conyngham, and also Kyle,
Of Lomond, of Losex, of Loyan hilles.
Thou has wonen hem in werre with a wrange wile
And geven hem to Sir Gawayn — that my hert grylles.'⁵⁵

⁵³ *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ll. 124–30.

⁵⁴ *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ll. 261–64.

⁵⁵ *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ll. 417–22.

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His claim is a true one — Arthur has in fact given away Galeron's land, which he had no right to give, to Gawain. Gawain and Galeron fight, but their brawl is halted before anyone is killed thanks to the interventions of Guinevere and Galeron's lady. The tale ends with the land conflict resolved peacefully when Arthur gives Galeron back his lands and grants new lands to Gawain instead (though the tale's audience might wonder just where this new set of lands is coming from). Finally, Galeron joins Arthur's court as a knight of the Round Table. The conflict over land depicted in the second half of this tale vividly illustrates the message that the ghost of Guinevere's mother brought to the Arthurian court in the tale's beginning: Arthur's court has been guilty of the pride of thinking that they had the right to control, without permission, resources which ultimately did not belong to them.

There are significant parallels between the intrusion of the supernatural in *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*. Both works feature a supernatural entity that is not simply a passive cause of a marvellous adventure, but instead actively challenges the members of the Arthurian court to face the shortcomings of their own behaviour head on. Both texts also feature regional knights who suffer at the hands of Arthur's expansionist policies when the king encroaches upon their own lands. Moreover, just as the Carl challenges the ostensible courtly ethos of Arthur's knights by revealing the glaring flaws in Kay's and Baldwin's characters and actions, so too does the ghost of Guinevere's mother implicitly criticise her own daughter's adultery while explicitly condemning the Arthurian court's unchecked quest for power. Thus, not only are the plans of Arthur's court disrupted by the supernatural within Inglewood Forest, but the supernatural also takes forms that actively challenge the identity and behaviour of the court itself in response to their unwanted intrusion into the regional landscape of lands belonging to others.

Like the plot of *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, the central conflict in *The Awntyrs off Arthure* focuses on the Arthurian court's improper use of land which belongs to someone else. The tale's narrative critiques unwanted intrusion into the forest by the Arthurian court. Once again, their carefully planned and elaborate hunt is derailed by the appearance of a supernatural apparition, and in the tale's second half, Arthur's policies towards the lands of others are critiqued and reversed. Inglewood Forest again resists unchecked royal control. Like *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, the Arthurian court's attempt to enter the forest to satisfy their own desires is thwarted, suggesting the importance of local autonomy over the landscape in the narrative of this tale.

The Avowynge of Arthur inverts this pattern. Inglewood Forest once again subverts expectation, this time displacing the supernatural with the courtly hunt. This text is focused on the fulfilment of a series of knightly vows and has received little critical attention, although Patricia Clare Ingham has recently argued that it 'links military brotherhoods to the materiality of region and land'.⁵⁶ The tale begins when the king's huntsman disrupts the Arthurian court with news of a boar terrorising the land:

The King atte Carlele he lay;

⁵⁶ Patricia Clare Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 180. See also J. A. Burrow, 'The Avowing of King Arthur', in *Medieval Literature and Antiquities: Studies in Honor of Basil Cottle*, ed. by Myra Stokes and T. L. Burton (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Brewer, 1987), pp. 99–109 and David Johnson, 'The Real and the Ideal: Attitudes to Love and Chivalry in *The Avowing of King Arthur*', in *Companion to Middle English Romance*, ed. by Henk Aertsen and Alasdair A. MacDonald (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1990), pp. 189–208.

The hunter cummys on a day —
 Sayd, ‘Sir, ther walkes in my way
 A well grim gryse.
 ‘He is a balefull bare —
 Seche on segh I nevr are:
 He hase wroghte me mycull care
 And hurte of my howundes,
 Slayn hom downe slely
 Wyth feghting full furcely.
 Wasse ther none so hardi
 Durst bide in his bandus.
 On him spild I my spere
 And mycull of my nothir gere.
 Ther moue no dintus him dere,
 Ne wurche him no wowundes.
 He is masly made —
 All offellus that he bade.
 Ther is no bulle so brade
 That in frith foundes.

‘He is hegher thenne a horse,
 That uncumly corse;
 In fayth, him faylis no force
 Quen that he schalle feghte!
 And therto, blake as a bere,
 Feye folk will he fere:
 Ther may no dyntus him dere,
 Ne him to dethe dighte.
 Quen he quettus his tusses,
 Thenne he betus on the busshes:
 All he rives and he russhes,
 That the rote is unryghte.
 He hase a laythelych luffe:
 Quen he castus uppe his stuffe,
 Quo durst abide him a buffe,
 Iwisse he were wighte’.⁵⁷

From its description — unnaturally large, fierce, and impervious to death — the members of the Arthurian court (and the tale’s audience) seem likely to expect something akin to the events of the Welsh *Culhwch ac Olwen*, in which Arthur battles the supernatural boar Twrch Trwyth across Britain at the bidding of the giant Ysbaddaden.⁵⁸ Yet in *The Avowyng of Arthur*, despite the boar’s preternatural size and ferocity, Arthur’s successful hunt is no more supernatural than that of Sir Bertilak in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.⁵⁹ Arthur swears to kill the boar himself and directs Kay and Gawain to make vows of their own, at which point Gawain pledges to remain awake and keep watch over Tarn Wadling all night (implying that

⁵⁷ *The Avowyng of Arthur*, ll. 29–64.

⁵⁸ *Culhwch and Olwen: An Edition and Study of the Oldest Arthurian Tale*, ed. by Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992).

⁵⁹ *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, ed. by Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, 5th edn (Exeter: University

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he expects to encounter the supernatural), while Kay declares that he will ride forth and battle anyone who stands in his way. Baldwin does not undertake a quest, but rather makes a series of pledges: never to be jealous of a woman, never to deny anyone food or material aid, and never to fear death. Yet despite the tale's suggestive beginning, each adventure stubbornly resists the supernatural.

King Arthur departs in search of the boar, hunting enthusiastically and skilfully. His adventure climaxes in a lengthy, but completely realistic, battle in which the king bravely kills and expertly butchers the boar:

The Kinge, wyth a nobull brande,
He mette the bore comande:
On his squrd, till his hande,
 He rennes full rathe.
He bare him inne atte the throte:
He hade no myrth of that mote —
He began to dotur and dote
 Os he hade keghet scathe.
Wyth sit siles he adowne.
To brittun him the King was bowne,
And sundurt in that sesun
 His brode schildus bothe.

The King couthe of venery:
Colurt him full kyndely.
The hed of that hardy
 He sette on a stake.
Sethun brittuns he the best
As venesun in forest;
Bothe the thonge and lees
 He hongus on a noke.⁶⁰

Indeed, in contrast to the other tales of the Northern Gawain Group, in which the supernatural intervenes in order to expose flaws in the conduct of Arthur's court, here the king's exemplary actions highlight his prowess as a leader — he is brave, physically strong, and skilful and knowledgeable in the noble art of hunting. Likewise, as an opponent, the boar is Arthur's equal, of sorts — an aggressor and a fighter, in contrast to the more passive supernatural manifestations of the reindeer and the ghost of Guinevere's mother, which, as non-equals, challenge Arthur's knights in ways that do not match the power and skills of the court or the hunt. Yet at the same time, in each of these three tales in the Northern Gawain Group, *Inglewood Forest* sends an opponent that 'mirrors' the Arthurian court in some way. *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* sends a reindeer after the members of the Arthurian court have butchered five hundred deer in the forest; *The Awntyrs off Arthure* sends the ghost of Guinevere's mother to warn about sins at a moment where Guinevere herself seems potentially likely to slip into adultery; and the boar in *The Avowyng of Arthur* is a match for a warrior-king's skill and strength. The narratives of each of these stories are carefully constructed so

of Exeter Press, 2007).

⁶⁰ *The Avowyng of Arthur*, ll. 245–64.

that Inglewood Forest mirrors and comments on the Arthurian court's activities in the rest of the tale.

After his kill, exhausted, Arthur falls asleep. Again, contrary to romance conventions, he experiences no dream vision, merely a well-earned rest: 'Forwerré, slidus he on slepe: / No lengur myghte he wake. / The King hase fillut his avowe' (*The Avowyng of Arthur*, ll. 271–73). Nor do his knights encounter the supernatural during the fulfilment of their own vows, either. Kay attempts to rescue a maiden but is defeated by her captor and asks the victorious knight if they may ride to Tarn Wadling so that Gawain may avenge him, which he successfully does, fulfilling his own vow without the slightest hint of the supernatural. The marvellous is also not present at all in the tale's second half, a series of fabliaux that illustrate the rationale behind Baldwin's assertions.

The supernatural fails to appear in *The Avowyng of Arthur* despite the tale's suggestive opening. A key difference between Arthur's actions in this text and his actions in *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* and *The Awntyrs off Arthure* is that in *The Avowyng of Arthur*, Arthur does not enter the forest to satisfy his own desires. On the contrary, his adventure is prompted by the heartfelt plea of the king's huntsman, who details at some length the irreparable damage that the boar is doing to the landscape of the king's forest — a landscape in which he has a right to intervene. In this text, Arthur does not seek to damage the landscape of another through a slaughter of deer. Implicitly, because he enters the forest on an invitation, Arthur's quest is successful. *The Avowyng of Arthur* depicts him as a good king, one who has protected his land from harm.

Thus, *The Avowyng of Arthur* defies the suggestive expectations of its opening scene to produce a tale entirely devoid of the supernatural, while the carefully managed aristocratic hunts which open *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* and *The Awntyrs off Arthure* are disrupted by the intrusion of otherworldly figures. While Inglewood Forest has a distinct identity within the Northern Gawain Group, then, it is not that of an inherently supernatural space, but rather, one that behaves contrary to expectation. The imbalance between the Arthurian court's desires and the reality of what they encounter within Inglewood Forest reflects a regional critique of the royal forest in fifteenth-century England within the tales of the Northern Gawain Group. The regional perspective of these border romances critiques the expansionist policies of Arthur's court, which are seen to cause tensions between the centre and the periphery of the English state. In their central character of Gawain, they offer a hero who stands apart from Arthur's rule, showing the king how to properly respect local customs and the lands of others. The pattern present throughout the Northern Gawain Group, in which the forest behaves contrary to the desires of the Arthurian court, reflects a resistance to unchecked external control over the local forest landscape. The two texts in which hunts are planned feature supernatural disruptions that criticise the character and behaviour of the Arthurian court, while Arthur's enthusiastic response to an invitation into the forest to kill the boar which threatens its landscape and wildlife results in nothing but praise for his physical and mental prowess. Although these texts do not respond directly to one another, reading them together reveals that each envisions the forest in a similar way. The texts of the Northern Gawain Group reflect a regional understanding of an ideal relationship between local forest and royal authority. The inversion of expectation and experience in Inglewood Forest within the works of the Northern Gawain Group draws a clear distinction between entering the forest by desire and by invitation. Together, these tales send the message that even the king does not have the right to exert his will unbidden over the local forest landscape.