Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Story of Al Khidr:
A Comparative Study

By
Deema Nasser Athammneh
BA English Language and Literature, Yarmouk University, 2002

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts (Literature and criticism) in the Department of English Language and Literature. Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan.

Approved by:

Dr. Ibrahiim Dawood ..................(Chairman)

Dr. Fadia Syoufii ......................(Member)

Dr. Muhammad Al-Khaz’ali ............(Member)

Dr. Abdel Elah Al Nahar ...............(Member)

2006
Abstract

This is a comparative study of two popular traditions: the narrative of Moses and Al Khidr in the medieval Arab-Muslim tradition and that of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in the medieval English popular tradition.

Investigation shows significant parallelism between the two narratives. Parallelism involves: the narrative content and leitmotifs in them, the characters of their protagonists, and the major theme(s) that each of them treats.

In terms of motifs, both narratives have the motifs of testing and challenge, mystery and discovery, the quest journey and a superhuman agent edifying Man. As for the characters of the protagonists, both Moses and Gawain are far from being a static or simple characters. Both narratives picture the protagonist as an over-confident character who learns after an encounter with a superhuman agent that he is imperfect. And finally comes the most significant element shared by the two stories, that is the major theme developed in the course of combining more than one legend and adapting more than one source to build up the story. The major theme in both narratives is moral edification through self knowledge. In both cases, the sources feature fertility myths, and keeping one's word as a sign of integrity. And in their present forms, the two stories are turned into tales of edification and self knowledge where a great man learns that, great though he maybe, he should know his limits and remember that the essence of being human lies in being imperfect.

Though both works have so much in common, I can not go beyond speculation when it comes to the possibility of influence on the anonymous 14th century English poet by the oriental story which dates back to the 7th century.