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Representing *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

MICHAEL EDEN

This article explores what we can learn from creative responses to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which comprises a growing visual language, inclusive of the original images of the codex, the illustrations of popular translations, contemporary artworks that respond to the poem, and the recent film adaptation. (ME)

I will investigate the manner in which the medieval alliterative poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, circa 1370 (referred to hereafter as *SGGK*) has been represented in other creative media, discussing the original four images accompanying the manuscript (Cotton Nero A.x held at the British Library) and the illustrations that have accompanied various translations, as well as art practice and film that has taken up the themes of *SGGK* as subject matter. New works by the contemporary artists discussed have been made specifically for this project.

I argue that the intertextual nature of the poem is a direct consequence of its ideation by the *Pearl*-Poet, drawing on existing narratives and additionally in the chance physical manifestation of a multi-authored codex. The aim of this article is to show that the illustrations produced represent, in and of themselves, interpretations of the text as interesting and complex as the extant and varied academic appreciation that has existed since the first half of the twentieth century. I explore the increased emphasis on horror motifs and landscape representation in contemporary responses, which in their extremity, are attempts to bring the radical implications of the text to a modern audience. I conclude by suggesting that attributing responsibility for the text's meaning to the audience, rather than to the author, renders the text an unstable entity that changes upon re-reading. Furthermore, I argue that the desire to fix and settle meaning is a retreat from the experience of the text. This retreat mirrors, ironically, Gawain's disappointment with his burgeoning interiority and his inability to fully assume the position of a dehumanizing ideal.

My sources of reference for *SGGK* as a written text include Simon Armitage's¹ translation, which emphasizes the alliterative form, and the side-by-side translation by Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron.² The Folio Society publication includes a replica of the original codex reproduced in color, facilitating repeated viewing of the images alongside the text.

EXTENDING THE FIFTH TEXT

Paul F. Reichardt coins the term ‘fifth text’ (discussed later), regarding the illustrations of the original codex, which has four poems: *Pearl*, *Patience*, and *Cleanness*, as well as *SGGK*, suggesting that we should consider the illustrations as an additional text with its own meanings.³ Building on this idea to include Angela L. Florschuetz’s⁴ observations of *SGGK* as inherently intertextual and constituting—in its various translations and adaptations—an expanding archive defined by diverse interested parties, I have created the research hub ‘Representing *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.’⁵ All the illustrations and artworks discussed here, and many more, are available to view at that research hub with additional biographic information about the creatives, and various links and other information relevant to *SGGK*.

I intend no hierarchy in the designation of illustrator or artist, only recognition of the different demands on such creatives. The modern illustrators I discuss were employed, working with translations, and I suggest in the case of *SGGK*, their work, along with the original illustrations included in the codex, represents an established visual language. The artists I discuss were invited to produce work in the context of existing studio practices and were free to experiment and combine other themes into their responses. The practice of Clive Hicks-Jenkins I view as a potential bridge between those tendencies; although working as an illustrator and providing works for a special edition of Armitage’s 2007 translation, his interest had preceded that translation and extended to images which do not feature in the publication.⁶ The modern illustrators discussed range throughout the twentieth to the twenty-first century and represent both historic and contemporary practitioners; these include Frederic Lawrence, Herbert Cole, Dorothea Braby, Roy Morgan, and Cyril Satorsky. Contemporary illustrators include: John Howe, Clive Hicks-Jenkins, Michael Smith, Diana Sudyka, and Mark Penman. The artists approached who created works for this project include painters: David Treloar, Adam Dix, Roxana Halls, Geraint Evans, and myself. Additionally, there is a collection of sound-art pieces by film and archival researcher Dr Graeme Spurr. I draw on insights of those creatives to highlight their intentions and their reflections on their own work and the work of others. The website ‘Representing *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’ and this text are attempts to bring the ‘fifth text’ into focus and provide side-by-side comparison for scholars.

INTERTEXTUALITY: WEAVING *SGGK* INTO CULTURE

Armitage, in the introduction to his 2007 translation, reflects that the poem ‘lay dormant for over two hundred years,’ therefore avoiding the potentially totalizing attention of a literary heavyweight, citing Milton, Pope, Dr. Johnson, Keats, Coleridge, or Wordsworth as candidates for a definitive

version.⁷ His concern is that such a version would have potentially made modern translation less tempting. Accepting the concern that a totalized *SGGK* would be a terrible thing (shutting down its radical openness), I view the addition of subsequent interpretations and translations as positive and necessary for the life of the text, providing as Armitage's does key articulation that offers fresh ways to appreciate its meaning (I refer here to the use of 'haunted house' in Armitage's 2007 text discussed later).⁸

Despite its ambiguity and rich visual imagery, the text has suffered a privation of attention from fine art practice. For example, Gawain (concerning *SGGK*) or the Green Knight himself has not been the subject of any canonical work by artists or movements of the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, eluding even the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as a direct subject matter (despite their interest in Arthurian themes):

It is noteworthy that the Pre-Raphaelites neglected Sir Gawain. In their decadent refinement, they preferred the Apollonarian, French, Galahad, and a post- Chretien, ascetic, version of Perceval. Compared to these later characters, the old Celtic Gawain was too Dionysian, rugged, and temptation-prone.⁹

Laura Forsberg¹⁰ gives a convincing account of *SGGK*'s influence on Christina Rossetti's poem *The Prince's Progress* from 1866.¹¹ In doing so, Forsberg speculates about her brothers, William Michael Rossetti, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who were members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (active from 1848 to ca. 1853). It is suggested that their association with Frederick J. Furnivall introduced Rossetti to the text.¹² Furnivall was largely responsible for the second publication of *SGGK* in 1864 (edited by Richard Morris) which made *SGGK* 'widely available for the first time.'¹³

The exact reasons for the Pre-Raphaelites' lack of artistic attention regarding *SGGK*, despite their knowledge of it and the fact that they '[turned] to [m]edieval art and literature to define the spirit of the movement,' cannot be fully understood.¹⁴ However, scholars have emphasized the preference in the Victorian period for less ambiguity related to the subject than is present in *SGGK*. Even characters like the monstrous Green Knight and the sorceress Morgan le Fay can be interpreted positively within the narrative, which might have conflicted with the Victorian aesthetic sensibility.

Furthermore, 'the poem treats courtly love ironically'¹⁵ and by extension, chivalry as ironic or at least as an imperfect ideology 'in which the "love talking" courtier descends into the comically irritable prig.'¹⁶ In *SGGK* Gawain is a sympathetic but flawed subject, tested by potent women; as a result we see 'the shaping of a conscience'¹⁷ in need of maturing. Roger Wiehe contrasts the medieval texts' 'balanced' attitude to male female relations with a Victorian mentality that had 'atrophied into morality [and] reactive aestheticism.'¹⁸ Regarding that reactive aspect, Tennyson's imagining of Gawain in the *Idylls of the King* (1859–85) is 'the Victorian version'¹⁹ and is 'a sharp reversal'²⁰ of

the medieval Gawain. Furthermore, it was Tennyson's allegorical conservative imagining of the Arthurian mythos that, 'provided the Pre-Raphaelites with subject matter.'²¹ Those Victorian attitudes are reflected for Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock in Pre-Raphaelitism via 'docile girls'²² where 'woman is absent as agent'²³ and in the ways that the movement is drawn on latterly to bolster 'the workings of patriarchal power within our society.'²⁴ In *SGGK* women are authoritative, strategic, emotionally mature, and possessing agency. Morgan le Fay is an old woman possessed of a merit-based authority and served by the powerful Green Knight, while Lady Bertilak is forthright, engaging, and easily capable of gendered role-reversal. These are destabilizing qualities in relation to a masculine-centered world-view, even a romantic one, that focused on 'enigmatic'²⁵ women as muses, such as the Pre-Raphaelites represented; this alone may be enough to understand why Michael Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti neglected the artistic scoop on representing *SGGK* (newly available to a wider audience) and handed the text to their little sister. The example of the Pre-Raphaelites emphasizes how the subversive qualities of *SGGK* prevented its uptake into visual mediums concerned with creating stable ideologies.

As aforementioned, one purpose of this study is to redress that privation by asking contemporary artists to respond to the text. A further aim of this article is to show that the illustrations produced represent crystalized interpretations of the text and translations they are bound to, that they are not simply decorative. Instead, they extend the meanings communicated in those translations and help us to see and experience an emphasis other than our own—or even the translator's. For example, we will see that time represented by the inclusion of backgrounds and landscapes becomes an increasingly common theme in later illustrations, hinting at the relative smallness of human activity in the face of nature. We will also see that an emphasis on horror helps to communicate the psychic stress that is represented by the frame-breaking Green Knight and the liminal Green Chapel; I refer here to the way that deep time in the landscape—hinted at also in the regenerative power and monstrosity of the Green Knight—undermine the established psychological framing of Gawain as one bound to chivalry with a paternal/chivalric way of seeing the world. Analysis of the illustrations, art, and film with reference to said criticism is intended to establish that. I will examine what can be learned from representations of *SGGK*, especially when brought together for contemplation and comparison. I suggest that horror and specifically the notion of the 'haunted house'—an anachronism and modern trope introduced in Armitage's translation²⁶—is key to understanding the contemporary representation of the poem, bringing the poem's destabilizing qualities to a modern audience in ways that resonate. The space of the Green Chapel and the relationship between Gawain and the monstrous Green

Knight mean that the poem is proto-horrific in ways that correspond to contemporary scholarly conceptions of the haunted house, and so it is no wonder that horror, monstrosity, and destabilizing self-knowledge have an emphasis in the contemporary film, modern illustrations, and artworks that address the poem.

THE ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE CODEX

The established visual language of *SGGK* begins with the manuscript held at the British Library in the four images which accompany the poem. These images focus on the figures present, revealing limited background features. Three are interiors (the first, second, and fourth) while the Green Chapel (site of Gawain's testing) is shown in the third image. Maidie Hilmo reminds us that the images have often been 'dismissed,'²⁷ linking this to remarks that accompanied the first publication in 1839 by Sir Frederic Madden, who described them as coarse in execution. A general (recent) reappraisal, building on Jennifer Lee's²⁸ text 'The illuminating critic: the illustrator of Cotton Nero A.x' is also key here, further drawing on Hilmo²⁹ and Reichardt³⁰ to explore the function and meaning of the images, while Murray McGillivray and Christina Duffy address the materiality of the codex.³¹

The first illustration of *SGGK* in the codex shows the Green Knight as he holds up his head after decapitation, mounted and ready to depart Arthur's court, after dumbfounding the knights and issuing the exchange of blows challenge. Gawain is seen in two positions, holding the axe at the top left following his intervention, which prevents Arthur from assuming the challenge, and again to the bottom left facing the Green Knight; this doubling introduces a rudimentary sense of temporality into the image echoed in the final (fourth) illustration.

The second image depicts Gawain sleeping at Hautdesert and Lady Bertilak's bold approach during the exchange of winnings game: 'the lady of the castle leans over Gawain in his bed and (in the illustration only, not the poem), chucks him suggestively under the chin.'³² This hand gesture has erotic connotations. The figures are enclosed behind curtains, increasing the sense of intimacy while the detailing (undulating ridges), form, and color of the fabric pulled tightly around Gawain is reminiscent of a chrysalis, symbolic of the transformation that Gawain is undergoing. That may be a projection, but the symbolism of butterflies is evoked earlier in the description of the Green Knight's clothing³³ while in the images, as in the text generally, the color green is heavily associated with nature, growth, and change; therefore the choice seems intentional. The third image shows Gawain at the Green Chapel approaching on Gringolet, while the Green Knight stands ominously above him on the right. This image takes place outside. The space is lush, and simple mark-making describes different plant life: snow-capped bull rushes,

for example are clear enough in clusters around the figures. The entrance to the Green Chapel (a circular black opening) sits immediately in front of Gawain and under the Green Knight, the color, foliage, and water depicted giving the space a feeling of damp enclosure. The fourth image shows Gawain returned to Camelot kneeling in armor before Arthur and Guenevere under an arch, and again in another position to the right of Guenevere having taken his place at the queen's side (that figure, although different from the kneeling Gawain, is identical to the figure of the two Gawains in the first image).

In this paper I accept Lee's insight that the original illustrator represents 'the first critical judgment of these poems, a medieval mind reacting to a medieval work'³⁴ and Reichardt's assertion that 'it is obvious that the selection of specific scenes from each poem for illustration reflects . . . ideas about what is interesting or significant in the four *Pearl* texts.'³⁵ Moreover, as recent technology reveals, this understanding was from a separate mind (or minds) to both the poet and the scribe: 'the paint was most likely applied by another person than the one who originally had done the ink drawings, and . . . both interventions in the manuscript were at intervals of time from the manuscript's first creation.'³⁶ For Reichardt, the images across the codex (including *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience*) serve to create links between the poems, constituting a fifth text: 'the parallels and repetitions discernible among the depicted scenes draw upon textual images and themes that transcend the separateness of the four poems.'³⁷ Accepting this as an ability of visual responses to the text and extending it with the new works produced for this article, I would hope to emphasize the creation of new links and resonances demonstrating that representation is not simply an afterthought or purely decorative act, but has an aim that Hilmo sees in the original images—namely 'a desire to broaden its interpretive scope for an audience familiar with related narratives and iconographies.'³⁸

Intertextuality via this 'fifth text'³⁹ is a quality of the codex as an object of multiple authorship, therefore differing opinions and interpretations would appear to be a fact of the object of which *SGGK* is a part (the manuscript). Reichardt insists that 'while deriving its inspiration from details of the *Pearl* poems, [the images across the codex] develop emphases and perspectives which differ slightly from those of the poems.'⁴⁰ Intertextuality is further apparent, even invited, by the author's approach (and asides), indicative of a conversation. One of these asides hints at a possible oral tradition, as the poet explains *SGGK* is a story retold from one overheard elsewhere.⁴¹ We can consider the framing the poet gives *SGGK* in its reference to the ancient world (Felix Brutus), and the references to pagan and Christian themes throughout as intertextual. Gwyn Jones explains more obvious analogues *SGGK* has to other narrative works, and the cultural influence of Irish, Welsh, French, and English texts.⁴² Furthermore, the references to Gawain's (seemingly unfitting)

reputation by Lady Bertilak, allude to pre-existing narratives: 'those the text's audience would most likely be familiar with.'⁴³

Both the fact of the object, and the written content of *SGGK* encourage the connection of the text to a network of meaning. Work such as Michael Smith's seeks to do this in a way which is relevant to the period of the poem's original creation, being influenced by '14th-century illuminations in particular . . . [to place] . . . the illustrations in the visual environment of the unknown mediaeval scribe.'⁴⁴ Elaborating on the use of hierarchical representation, Smith informed me, 'I attach an importance to replicating the naive nature of medieval illuminated manuscripts where often figures are out of proportion to themselves, other figures and to their environment.'⁴⁵ Smith is following what he sees as a similar purpose to that of the original illustrator: 'the illuminations to Cotton Nero A.x assume that the reader places more emphasis on the text and its impact rather than the illustrations.'⁴⁶ Smith's images accompany the 2018 publication of his translation of *SGGK*,⁴⁷ so there is a sense of correct comportment to the text aided by the illustrations. Alternately, there are works which make connections anachronistically; this approach may also have a basis in the original manuscript. For example, the conversational asides in *SGGK* encourage the extension of the text into a contemporaneous setting. As a result, artwork and illustrations produced which treat the text anachronistically are no less in line with its original intended purpose, as pre-empted mixing and quotation is part of the ambition of the poet's project. For example, the unresolved tensions and layers of complexity in *SGGK* invite the audience to project into scantily described episodes (such as Gawain's travels to and from Camelot and Hautdesert). The license this allows, even to commissioned illustrators, is evidenced in some of the most strange and surreal pictures responding to the lack of definition with fantastical imagery. For instance, *The Travails* (2016) by Clive Hicks-Jenkins, shows a grimacing winged serpent clawing at Gawain's shield;⁴⁸ Cyril Satorsky's towering lizard-headed giant, looming over Gawain with a large war-hammer, described as a 'weapon wielding woodwose'⁴⁹ differs hugely from the wild-man trope of the woodwose.⁵⁰

Florschuetz identifies *SGGK* as 'open-ended'⁵¹ by virtue of its 'achronic'⁵² quality: 'literature that draws and builds upon previously existing textual worlds and that allows for unlimited expansions to the textual conglomeration or archive.'⁵³ This dynamic means that the text is 'always under construction and always rife with the potential for change'⁵⁴ which creates 'an uncomfortable site of authorization.'⁵⁵ Disagreements and attempts at definition because of a 'futility of stability at the core of the archontic text,'⁵⁶ constitute the life of the text as its potentialities are pulled in various directions. For example, Clive Hicks-Jenkins (a creative whose work I discuss later) has expressed criticism,

published on his artist's website, and shared with me in correspondence, at the way *The Green Knight*⁶⁷ film reimagines the eponymous monster:

One of the several aspects of it that most bothers me is that the Green Knight in it is not presented as a 'green' man but as some second cousin to a forest spirit out of *Lord of the Rings*, and that as a result his beheading and resurrection has no sense of visceral horror.⁶⁸

Such concerns over representation remind us how much more fluid and open the text is than its crystallizations in creative practice, and it emphasizes the ways those interpretations may clash with our own. Criticism of this kind (Hicks-Jenkins) is also helpful in preventing any interpretation (such as a big budget film) from becoming totalizing concerning the poem.⁶⁹

Other scholars address this notion of an 'open' *SGGK* more skeptically. Joseph St John acknowledges that 'multiple perspectives'⁶⁰ in *SGGK* and the text's 'overstepping the boundaries of genre,'⁶¹ make the text 'transgressive,'⁶² but he resists the text being described as 'open-ended'⁶³ due to the 'overtly moral pentangle passage.'⁶⁴ For St John, this confirms an ultimate Christian and chivalric justification described as an 'ideology that is anything but transgressive.'⁶⁵ However, I would suggest the most powerful images evoked at the close of the poem are those which pose questions rather than answer them. Gawain questions himself:

'sign of my sin—I'll see it as such
when I swagger in the saddle—a sad reminder
that the frailty of his flesh is man's biggest fault,
how the touch of filth taints his tender frame.
When my pulse races with passion and pride
one look at this love-lace will lessen my ardour.'⁶⁶

I suggest this passage criticizes an image of man defined by chivalry; this is further compounded by Gawain's feelings of disappointment—which appear rooted in lived experience—as opposed to the jovial and triumphant attitude of Arthur's Knights at court, who appear to see Gawain's return as a victory: 'happiness cannoned through the echoing halls.'⁶⁷ This mirrors and recalls their hasty celebration, kicking the Green Knight's severed head at the poem's opening: 'the king's men kick it as it clatters past.'⁶⁸ It is possible to read their reaction as missing the implications of Gawain's experience. Furthermore, there is the tantalizing offer made twice from the Green Knight for Gawain to return to Hautdesert and to see first Lady Bertilak:

'my wife is waiting there who flummoxed you before.
This time you'll have in her
a friend and not a foe.'⁶⁹

Secondly, there is the case of Morgan le Fay: 'So I ask you again, come and greet your aunt,'⁷⁰ which Gawain refuses emphatically, giving a sense

of a missed opportunity, a powerful what-if, remaining in the mind of the reader. The tensions described by St John, which led to the fulfilment of the pentangle ideal, represent a neat interpretation. However, there is for example Christianity, represented by praxis which itself transgresses institutionalized (hierarchical) Christianity, and which the Green Knight could be said to embody (the monstrosity of Christ intruding into the court)⁷¹ and which Gawain experiences only after his erring. The illustrations as 'fifth text'⁷² would support that reading linking the court of Arthur to the court of Belshazzar, where a divine disembodied hand writes a portent on the king's wall, and more generally 'to the morality of kings and royal courts.'⁷³ Taken in this way *SGGK* can be read as a transgressive—imminent—critique of ideologies that justify corrupt hierarchies, that of the church, of Arthur's court or Belshazzar's: lived experience versus praxis. Such tarrying over Gawain's character, of which this is one example, follows Florschuetz and the interplay she describes:

A result of this dynamic, in spite of the messaging of the pentangle on his shield, Gawain's identity is increasingly represented as malleable and situational, the result of a sort of communal authorship of Gawain: his status is collectively created and archontic. As such, he is constantly subject to reassessment and revision by his audience/critics.⁷⁴

I do not deny St John's interpretation, but as with viewing an artwork, illustration, or film, I attribute those crystallizations to the interpreter, and see them as extensions of the text rather than as keys to determine a true meaning based on authorial intention. Following Su Fang Ng and Kenneth Hodges, I see the poet's handling as 'provocative rather than programmatic statements for particular ideologies or interests.'⁷⁵ The radical implication of an open-ended *SGGK* is reader responsibility for its meaning, which I suggest cannot be offloaded onto the anonymous, ambivalent author.

THE ESTABLISHED LANGUAGE: KEY ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

As Barbara Lupack and Alan Lupack observe in *Illustrating Camelot*,⁷⁶ illustrated versions of *SGGK* appear early in the twentieth century following Jessie Weston's 1898 modernized edition.⁷⁷ Lupack and Lupack discuss illustrator Frederic Lawrence, who created five images and various decorations in an Arts and Crafts style, for the pages of Ernst J.B. Kirtlan's *SGGK*.⁷⁸ These images include 'Gawain's journey to find the Green Knight, with a pentangle prominently displayed on his shield; one of the temptations by Bertilak's wife; and Gawain awaiting the return strike by the Green Knight.'⁷⁹ There is also an image of Lady Bertilak with Morgan le Fay side by side. The pentangle is also included on the hem of a curtain as Gawain is seen praying before a priest. Those images stress the aforementioned 'pentangle passage'⁸⁰ and the significance of the symbol, in that case standing for interconnected virtue

and chivalry ‘just as the pentangle is a unity in which all the parts are inter-related . . . so spiritual, moral, and social qualities are united in Gawain.’⁸¹ Images that build on the geometric icon as indicative of order against chaos or monstrosity are also evident in Smith’s *Gawain and the Wodwose* and John Howe’s *SGGK* (1995, discussed later). In Smith’s image the contrast between a well-ordered compact heroic knight and a monstrous wodwose is clear enough (fig. 1). The wodwose displaying wild hair all over the body, bare-footed and grimacing, could also be seen to contrast animality to civilization, and predator to prey. Smith explains he has,

chosen a disproportionate imagery where the knight appears to have his arms held in an awkward fashion; similarly, the wodwose appears displaced, emotionally, from his environment although it is clear that he is afraid of Gawain.⁸²



FIGURE 1: *GAWAIN AND THE WODWOSE* (2018) BY MICHAEL SMITH, IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

The extent to which the pentangle is a positive symbol, and the extent to which Gawain is defined by it, is, as Florschuetz described, an ‘uncomfortable site of authorization.’⁸³ For Geraldine Heng this symbol is representative of a closing off to otherness, ‘never requiring to be tied, untied, or retied, the pentangle is the ultimate guarantee, on the symbolic level, for the existence of fixed and stable identity’⁸⁴—one which the whole poem, and its challenges and games could be seen to question and radically undermine. Despite the pentangle’s potential as a remote icon of hyper-masculine power it remains,

when it appears in imagery, as a marker on the aforementioned (and more common) dichotomy: civilized vs. wild. Noteworthy is Dorothea Braby (whom I discuss more fully later), and her juxtaposition of the pentangle and the green girdle which offers some ironic comment on the implied perfection of the geometric form with the green girdle encircling it suggestively. This foreshadows, in that publication,⁸⁵ the influence of Morgan le Fay and the agency of Lady Bertilak, conveying a feminine critique on imagined male perfection. The clear dichotomy of animality to civilization that the pentangle (in isolation) seems to demarcate is undermined by the eponymous Green Knight as a complex, composite character and variation of the wild man. Smith's arresting image, *The Green Knight in the Woods* (fig. 2), could be said to conflate the opposition of *Gawain and the Wodwose* (2018), incorporating the aspects of the formal knight with the monstrous wodwose, Smith emphasizes his magical and ambiguous aspects: 'I wanted to capture the sense of him in the woodland landscape to which he disappears to "who knows where" twice in the poem.'⁸⁶ As in the original poem Smith's Green Knight is armed but carrying a symbol of peace, a holly bob, and a rarely-communicated detail (in images): he is barefoot, like the wodwose.



FIGURE 2: *THE GREEN KNIGHT IN THE WOODS* (2018) BY MICHAEL SMITH, IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

HERBERT COLE AND DIANA SUDYKA

Herbert Cole produced a commanding and formal image of the Green Knight entering Arthur's court in *English Fairy Tales*.⁸⁷ The image shows the Green Knight brandishing the holly branch, an ambivalent symbol with Christian and pagan resonances: on the one hand peace, on the other a gateway to 'creatures from the other world.'⁸⁸ Diana Sudyka's front cover design for *SGGK*⁸⁹ depicts the same moment; the holly bob is held out like a torch, emphasized instead of the axe (also present) foreshadowing the Green Knight's statement, 'be assured by this hollin stem here in my hand that I mean no menace. So expect no malice.'⁹⁰ These images are formal and stern, and the Green Knight is shown with a serious expression, a dignified long beard combined with normal proportions. This lessens the monstrosity of the figure, playing up instead the idea of a teacher or tester of the court, a role that Ng and Hodges see as potentially stemming from an Islamic tradition where the figure of al-Khidir (the green one) has an ambivalence similar to that of the Green Knight: 'al-Khidr acts inexplicably; in each case, unbeknown . . . al-Khidr has a benevolent reason'⁹¹ and parallel antecedents as a figure surviving into monotheism from an older polytheist religion. In the case of al-Khidr, the antecedent is one originating in 'Sumeria'⁹² adding to the more commonly accepted pagan antecedents of the Green Knight, the 'green man' and 'wild man.'⁹³ I discuss those in detail later in relation to John Howe's image. The teacher motif used in these works, I would suggest, is a result in Cole's work of its intended audience, as it is aimed at children, and in Sudyka's for a similar reason: Sudyka is primarily an illustrator of children's books.

DOROTHEA BRABY

The romantic resonances of the text are more obviously emphasized in the images of British artist and designer Dorothea Braby, who produced six color engravings for *SGGK* (Jones, 1952): 'renaissance in style, they added, said Sandford, "visual beauty to a monumental work."⁹⁴ Included are a frontispiece, showing the exchanging of gifts (fig. 3), a title page, with the pentangle and green girdle intertwined, the Green Knight issuing his challenge to the court, Lady Bertilak accompanying Morgan le Fay, a temptation scene juxtaposed with a hunt, and Gawain at the Green Chapel awaiting the return blow. Gawain's characterization is evident in these images as his face is expressively and tenderly rendered showing distinct emotions, such as curious interest as he observes Arthur and the Green Knight, polite resistance as he negotiates Lady Bertilak's advances, and pensive regret, head hanging, as he contemplates his personal failing. Achieving this range in small etched lines is a sign of Braby's skill in communication with an economy of detail. The color scheme is primarily rose, teal, and green-gold. Lupack and Lupack drawing on Muriel Whitaker⁹⁵ describe these choices as being representative

of the text's fundamental oppositions, listing: 'warmth and coldness, natural and supernatural, courtliness and barbarity, sensuous castle life and rigorous forest hunts.'⁹⁶ As the leaflet for Braby's memorial exhibition indicates, these images are 'in four colors, with additional tones from over-printing one upon the other, and with no outlines in black.'⁹⁷



FIGURE 3: *FRONTISPIECE, SHOWING THE EXCHANGING OF GIFTS* (1952) BY DOROTHEA BRABY. COURTESY OF THE BRABY ESTATE.

This means that the figures are not cut away from the backgrounds and the whole image is emphasized. Braby's compositions make full use of the relationship between the background, mid-ground, and foreground, utilizing an undulating S shaped sweep (most obviously in the final image, but recurrent throughout). The result of this combination (lack of definite black outline and sweeping composition) is a sense of movement and animation, as the eye is directed around the image and back. This is further developed in vistas that give a sense of everyday life going on and reference other registers of time, inclusive of servants, animals, and detailed patterns on fabric, which show plant life and heraldic symbols. For example, the frontispiece (fig. 3) shows women talking while wearing escoffion⁹⁸ style headwear (true to the period of the poem's writing), which details are picked up in the colors of the main figures: green lines and pink-and-white patterns with yellow (or green-gold) detailing. In the adjacent archway, a minstrel is seen carrying a lute. Elsewhere, a dog in the foreground shows an interest in a bone, indifferent to the human intrigue behind him. This creates a sense of immersion and is enjoyable for its own sake, but also reminds us that other things are happening, that there is a world beyond the drama we are focusing on, which sprawls out as the indicated hallways or woodland disappear. The figures in Braby's compositions are not a part of a still life, but a dynamic lyrical environment.

ROY MORGAN

The work of Roy Morgan continues the sense of immersion, for the first time extending the picture plane to include greater reference to the landscape (see fig. 4). Morgan produced twelve colored lithographs for *SGGK*.⁹⁹ As well as an increased emphasis on landscape and wider compositions, these lithographs show the interaction of figures and some sequential development in the same spaces (the court and the bower). There appears to be an influence of Braby's Morgan le Fay, with a heavily wrinkled expression (itself reminiscent of Frederic Lawrence's rendering), and the same choice of a grey-brown line to describe her face. Morgan also depicts the hunt scenes, which are emphasized and linked in sequence to the bedroom encounters, again a possible influence from Braby there, as her *A Temptation Scene Juxtaposed with a Hunt* (1952) also displays these events; Braby shows the hunt glimpsed through a window, whereas in Morgan the interior melts away surrealistically—a leaf pattern on the wall of the bower becomes actual treetops—to reveal the land and hunting party. Morgan takes a more naturalistic approach to color than previous illustrators, which indicates seasonal change, vast overhead skies, and images of hills, mountains, and woodland are 'a sign [in the work] that nature dwarfs the world of knights and chivalry.'¹⁰⁰

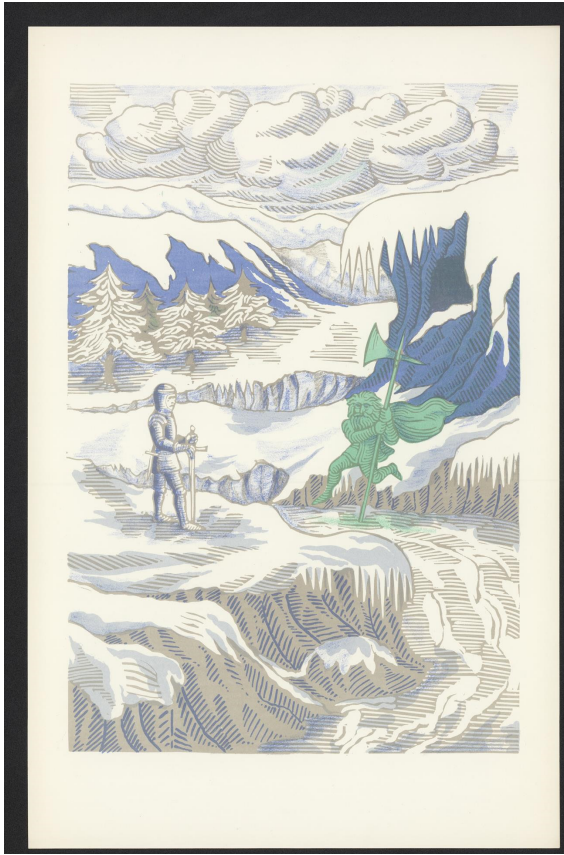


FIGURE 4: *AT THE GREEN CHAPEL*, ROY MORGAN (1956). IMAGE COURTESY OF ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART ARCHIVE. © ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART. PHOTO CREDIT: ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

CYRIL SATORSKY

Cyril Satorsky illustrated *SGGK*¹⁰¹ with a two-page title spread and twelve drawings; these images are much darker than previous illustrations and depict a brutal Green Knight. There is a more graphic portrayal of violence: the aforementioned lizard warrior, and a graphic image of Bertilak stabbing a wild boar. The figures are shown staring, giving them a confrontational accent; the impressive *The Green Knight on his Steed* (1971) shows the headless intruder and his demonic-seeming horse grimacing malignantly. The title page includes a landscape where Gawain arrives at castle Hautdesert and is surrounded by the natural landscape, and there is a glimpse of wild land behind Bertilak as

he kills the boar. However, Satorsky is interested in tighter compositions that frame figures in close-up for emphasis.

JOHN HOWE

An impressive and familiar image by Illustrator John Howe is *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (1995) (fig. 5), originally a 69cm by 44.5 cm painting, included in a range of media, most notably in the popular translation *SGGK, Pearl and Sir Orfeo*¹⁰² by J.R.R. Tolkien, published by HarperCollins. This image also features in two audio (cassette tape and cd) versions of the same translation while a detail of the painting (a close image of the Green Knight) provides the cover for another of Tolkien's works, *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*.¹⁰³



FIGURE 5: *SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT* (1995) BY JOHN HOWE. COVER ART FOR THE HARPERCOLLINS 1996 EDITION OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S TRANSLATION OF *SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT*.

In Howe's image, the Green Knight is the focus, facing the viewer and dwarfing Gawain, whose back is displaying his shield emblazoned with the pentangle. That symbol, standing for interconnected virtue and chivalric perfection—as Gerald Morgan asserts in his study of the significance of the pentangle, 'Gawain (embodying to the full the values of Camelot) is a perfect representative of Christian chivalry'¹⁰⁴—could also be a symbol for civilization and order, against the Green Knight and nature. The Green Knight here is arguably aligned as 'wild man' (as I explore below). Howe's image is naturalistic in presentation, and unlike those works which emulate medieval rendering,

such as flattened space or hierarchal proportion (Michael Smith, and Dorothea Braby for example). There is instead an expansive landscape that includes what are standing stones and a heavy, wet sky overhead. The Green Knight is shown as a giant, more than twice the size of Gawain, muscular and heavily bearded with an expression of morbid seriousness.

For John S. Gentile the Green Knight is partly a conflation of the 'Green Man' and 'Wild Man'; this symbolism is evident for him in Howe's illustration, with the emphasis on the symbolism of the Wild Man: 'the Green Man connects humanity with the vegetable world, the Wild Man connects us with that of the animals.'¹⁰⁵ Howe's figure is seen standing solidly, holding his axe in both hands horizontally across his waist while meeting the gaze of Gawain, who is elevated on a mound of earth and leaning on his sword. Howe's Green Knight is not adorned in the elaborately patterned fabrics described in the early passages of the text,¹⁰⁶ and is instead covered in hair, not just around his face but in thick hair reminiscent of a pelt (albeit a green one) about his person. Howe's Green Knight is also not 'slender and sleek'¹⁰⁷ in the stomach, but rather is as wide there as in the shoulders, presenting a solid mountain of a figure and constituting a clear artistic license of Howe's interpretation. Gentile offers a convincing visual antecedent for Howe's image: *Wild Man From a Furnace Tile*¹⁰⁸ from the National Museum in Zurich which shows a male figure standing with a shaft in hand, and where the clumps of hair are clearly emanating from the body, much like the fur of an animal. Upon seeing the Wild Man depicted there, it is difficult not to see Howe's Green Knight as more primitive and animalistic. To take primitive-animal resonances further, we might consider the figure as representing an earlier powerful ancestor, which the standing stones positioned around Sir Gawain in Howe's image would support. Gwyn Jones observes that the site of the final testing of Gawain (which Howe's cover image shows), is reminiscent of a burial site, indicating the presence of ancestors, a source of ambiguity and fear.¹⁰⁹ Alternatively, Gawain dressed and adorned with his geometric symbol stands for a (then) contemporaneous 'rational soul,' such as Morgan suggests.¹¹⁰ Making two additions to Gentile's assertion, I would argue that Howe's image conflates four aspects of the Green Knight (although the text includes others): giant, ancestor, Wild Man and Green Man.

John Timberlake's *Landscape and the Science Fiction Imaginary*¹¹¹ helps strengthen the association of these elements. In his chapter, 'Land of the Giants: Size and Scale, Macroscopy and Microscopy in the Landscapes of Science Fiction,' he discusses the giant as linked to the parent, to time and space, and as one 'gone before.'¹¹² Timberlake's text analyzes, among other things, many front cover illustrations and paintings, so its use here to discuss Howe's image seems appropriate. The color green and wild references in Howe's image of the Green Knight (bearded, hairy, and muscular) are enough

to make a direct reference as Gentile does to the Green Man and Wild Man. It is Howe's Green Knight as giant, I would emphasize, that provides the outline or form which contains the other conflated references; where the tone of the surrounding land is defined 'it is through the giant that landscape is constituted.'¹¹³ Timberlake asserts that the giant makes the everyday (understood here to be the windswept rainy backdrop of Howe's landscape) 'extraordinary and fantastical.'¹¹⁴ The giant Green Knight in Howe's image 'preserves the particular iconicity of a representation, whilst fundamentally transforming the viewer's relationship with it.'¹¹⁵

Howe's website displays an abandoned composition in a preliminary sketch which also highlights the Green Knight as a giant. The sketch has a tighter focus; it shows the Green Knight in a similar stance at the center of a thick grove of great trees, perhaps to strengthen the link with nature. In this earlier iteration Gawain is shown on level ground mounted on Gringolet, and as such 'parental size infers our own immaturity, then giants become symbols of time, but also time's first victim: those who have gone before.'¹¹⁶ Gawain on horseback is still only half the size of the Green Knight who looms over him menacingly. An effect of this arrangement is that Gawain appears much less confident and immediately vulnerable. That iteration, Howe informs us, was rejected by the publisher who requested that the steed and trees be scrapped and ditched in that order,¹¹⁷ an example of an intervention particular to the illustrator.

CLIVE HICKS-JENKINS

Clive Hicks-Jenkins' fourteen images, produced between 2015 and 2018 for Armitage's special edition of *SGGK*,¹¹⁸ are complex and varied. They combine iconic representations of Gawain as a heroic epitome of chivalry, such as *Gawain Arrives at Fair Castle* (2015–18), and *The Travalis* (2015–18). Those images make use of knightly armor to convey a male outline ready for violence. There are also romantic references, expressed in light naturalistic tones, such as *The Temptations* (2015–18) that show Gawain and the lady in his bed chamber wherein a subtle reference to mating rabbits in the wall decorations hint at what Gawain is tempted by but resists. Hicks-Jenkins also shows us introspection, in *Gawain Staunches the Wound to His Neck* (2015–18), and *The Stain of Sin* (2015–18). In those images, the knight's face is visible and has a sorrowful, pained expression, reminiscent of Braby's *Gawain at the Green Chapel Awaiting the Return Blow* (1952). The expression, key in both images, conveys a changed man.

KEY SHIFT TO HORROR AS A METHOD TO REPRESENT *SGGK*

I would like to focus on five of Hicks-Jenkins' images that show a key shift from romance and fairytale-like imagery to a horror aesthetic, which is indicative of a trend in the representation of *SGGK* more broadly. *The Green Knight Bows to Gawain's Blow* (2015–18) shows Gawain preparing to strike his monstrous opponent, while around him are what James Russell describes as an 'unsettling pair of onlookers . . . [a] carved architectural figure—Green Man as caryatid . . . [and a] gryphon-like creature atop a sepulchre,'¹¹⁹ further elaborated as possible familiars and as 'ancient beings.'¹²⁰ Those figures loom over the knight, both referencing older registers of time and mortality. Russell goes so far as to say that Gawain is 'like the protagonist of a horror film who wanders into a nightmare.'¹²¹ In *The Green Knight's Head Lives* (2015–18) (fig. 6), a gouache and pencil artwork study for the Penfold Press *Sir Gawain*, that nightmare comes to an early peak. The image shows us the Green Knight holding his severed head, but it is the arboriform, or fungus-like form unnaturally created by spuing blood from his wound, that is eerily unsettling, as it protrudes like a growth in a body-horror film. In *The Travalis* (2015–18) the heroic outline of the knight confronts a grinning serpentine fiend whose elongated head and vicious teeth are full of implied brutal violence. This is also the case with the depiction in *Morgan le Fay* (2015–18) of the matriarch's 'nightmare beast,'¹²² in which her steed, a hulking monster, lends threat to her wily expression. In line with Armitage's translation, *The Green Chapel* (2015–18) shows a natural space but with interior aspects: cave openings, and high wall-like rock faces. Russell described the Knight's presence as 'sinister' and sees Gawain as a sacrificial victim, an observation that is analogous with Hicks-Jenkins' comparison of Gawain with Sgt. Howie (Edward Woodward) of *The Wicker Man* (1973).¹²³ Howie, a devout Christian, is a sacrifice in a pagan ceremony (also an influence on artist Adam Dix, discussed later):

Gawain is not everyman. He's not 'one of the boys' who we identify with because he's just like us. His code of honor drives him and would make him uneasy company in any age. He has something in common with the character played by Edward Woodward in another film with roots in what's now known as folk/horror, *The Wicker Man*.¹²⁴



FIGURE 6: *THE GREEN KNIGHT'S HEAD LIVES* (2015–18) BY CLIVE HICKS-JENKINS.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

Armitage has Gawain exclaim upon his approach to the Green Chapel, 'this is a haunted house—may it go to hell.'¹²⁵ His interpretation is based on lines 2185–96 of *SGGK*.¹²⁶ The Green Chapel is described as a place where the Devil might recite matins at midnight: 'Dele his matynnes telle!'¹²⁷ Gawain also declares, 'this is a chapel of doom; ill fortune befall it!'¹²⁸ using the term 'corsedest'¹²⁹ as in 'accursed.' Armitage has taken the semi-structural, semi-landscape features of the Green Chapel and evoked a haunted house to communicate the disturbing properties of the interior aspects and its effect on Gawain. Anthony Vilder describes the 'paradigmatic haunted house'¹³⁰ as being a 'repository of centuries of memory,'¹³¹ and 'tomb[-like]'¹³² or 'crypt[-like],'¹³³ and interestingly—given the status of the Green Chapel as a fissure—he makes a point of drawing attention to the presence of a 'fissure,' which foreshadows collapse in his example, Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*.¹³⁴ This chimes with Gwyn Jones'¹³⁵ observation that the Green Chapel implies the presence of pagan ancestors, while the status of the Green Chapel as a natural enclosure links to Barry Curtis' thesis, that haunted houses mediate between 'geological time and human time.'¹³⁶ Furthermore, Curtis asserts

that such spaces are ‘reactivated’¹³⁷ by intrusion, which is relevant to Gawain’s approach to the space that prompts the second appearance of the Green Knight. My purpose is not to justify Armitage’s use of that term, but rather to highlight what thinking about the Green Chapel as a ‘haunted house’ opens for interpretations of the poem, to re-invigorate the tale with its true menace, this is an uncanny task that has ‘the effect [of making] disturbing unfamiliarity of the evidently familiar.’¹³⁸ I would argue the relevance of horror as a potential and appropriate medium for the poem is because the original text is concerned with a breakdown in relation to underlying forces that affect subjectivity. This is apparent in the role of nature as an intruding force on society—in the form of the Green Knight entering Arthur’s court—and again as an environment that decenters and dwarfs human civilization, rather than as simply benign, balanced, or God-given. Furthermore, the poem addresses ideology (chivalry) linked to perception and normalcy. The questioning of ideology is expressed through the unstable role of women, who in the poem are complex and surprising, and through the uncanny nature of the Green Knight, who is both a monster and the man Bertilak. As a result of those unstable entities, the limits of chivalry as a way of seeing the world are exposed, and lead to Gawain’s self-image breaking down. In *SGGK*, I suggest we have psychologically distressing changes in a fundamentally unstable reality.

MARK PENMAN

As a further example of the contemporary uptake of horror themes, Mark Penman’s images are the most recent illustrations discussed in this article; his digital renderings for a graphic novel adaptation of *SGGK*¹³⁹ express a strong horror aspect. The Green Knight’s appearance is menacing, and he sports a maniacal smile and bulging eyes. This is influenced by modern comic book art; the Joker comes to mind. Penman confronts the viewer with the Green Knight’s stare in extreme close-up (fig. 7). The face takes on a mask-like quality, an abstraction that emphasizes the monstrous status of the figure. There are also nightmare sequences where Gawain is menaced by green ghouls, and a general relish in gore—for example, the Green Knight’s gushing blood spewing out from his neck as he grins and spilling over the corner of his mouth. This representation chimes with Dale Randall’s view that the Green Knight is a “fende” [fiend] from hell.¹⁴⁰



FIGURE 7: PAGE FROM *SGGK* ILLUSTRATED BY MARK PENMAN (2021). IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

Beyond simple shock, horror in its extended sense, as we have come to understand it, is present in several ways in *SGGK*: the thingness of the Green Knight who disturbs the normality of Arthur's court, the uncanny, that is *heimlich* (homely) and *unheimlich* (unhomely)¹⁴¹ qualities of being in Hautdesert, hinted at in the original hyperreal description.¹⁴² That is where Gawain is welcomed and comforted (*heimlich*), but also where his sense of normality is severely undermined by way of reversed gender roles, homoerotic

exchanges and ever-closer mortality drawing in (*unheimlich*). Finally, there is the evocation of the haunted house in the moniker 'Green Chapel.' Conflating natural space with a fabricated structure evokes the inside-outside dichotomy that is both a feature of structures and shelters in the landscape, and which is also psychological, the haunted house as a metaphor for sites of compressed trauma and the recall of memory. Emphasizing horror in representing the Green Knight allows the seriousness of his gesture in the beheading game—and his disturbing presence generally—to be comprehended by a contemporary audience accustomed to fantastical imagery. The tonal darkness that references to horror allows in representation is an aspect of Lowery's *The Green Knight*¹⁴³ (discussed later), and present in ritual black magic, frequent visual memento mori, the wheel of fortune crowns, the macabre puppet show, the lost scull, and hallucinogenic visions. Most obviously, Lowery's film includes an actual haunted house (not present in the original text) where a ghostly Saint Winifred searches for her corporeal head, removed in unjust circumstances. That episode is Lowery's clear attempt to layer the film with an intertextual reference, a story that may be a possible influence on the text. As Mary-Ann Stouck observes concerning *SGGK*, themes of sexual temptation, regeneration, and a miraculous severed head 'reattached to their bodies'¹⁴⁴ are aspects of Winifred's hagiography.

EXPANDING THE 'FIFTH TEXT': FINE ART RESPONSES TO *SGGK*

The fine artworks discussed here were produced especially for the 'Representing Sir Gawain and the Green Knight' online Research hub.¹⁴⁵ This selection of artists were those who replied to a call-out that asked them to create work in response to the text. As I have previously stated, their works and my own on this theme are attempts to redress the lack of attention that the text has received from fine art practice.

To offer some explanation for the ways that breakdown and change are both horrific and linked to changes in the subject, I will draw on Henri Bergson and his elaboration of the subject's interiority. Bergson highlights the importance of mental change¹⁴⁶ and cautions against embracing a view of time as linear, or, in other words, 'mechanistic causality.' This is because for Bergson if we do that, 'our life unfolds in space rather than in time; we live for the external world rather than for ourselves; we speak rather than think; we "are acted" rather than act ourselves. To act freely is to recover possession of oneself, and to get back into pure duration.'¹⁴⁷ Regarding the nature of 'duration' Bergson is clear to separate it from a common-sense notion of separate segments of time in a causal relationship, instead highlighting the activity of the mind. Bergson argues that we should 'grasp our inner states as living things, constantly becoming, as states not amenable to measure, which

permeate one another and of which the succession in duration has nothing in common with juxtaposition in homogeneous space.¹⁴⁸

BREAKDOWNS AND BECOMING

This strategy—using Bergson to understand the responses—separates the practices as concerned with a particular emphasis, and it links them as having a shared concern with subjective change. The categories I propose are: first, iconoclastic, aiming directly at the figure of the knight, including responses from painters Adam Dix, Geraint Evans, and Roxana Halls; and second, responses concerned with temporality and immersion in the landscape, themes evident in my own paintings, in David Treloar's, and in Graeme Spurr's sound compositions.

Reference to Bergson to explore *SGGK*, specifically referencing themes of time as I do here, but also to comedy, is present in a range of academic texts. For Edward Trostle Jones 'comedy is based on the social at the expense of the individual, as Henri Bergson among others has pointed out. So it is with courtiers' laughter at the end of *Gawain*.¹⁴⁹ That laughter limits for Jones '[Gawain's] potential for priggishness.'¹⁵⁰ Other academic responses include Putter,¹⁵¹ who has explored the comedic in *SGGK* (and the other poems of the *Pearl* manuscript), drawing on Bergson. Furthermore, Richard H. Godden¹⁵² drawing on John K. Crane in 'The Four Levels of Time in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*' from 1969, in his 'Gawain and the Nick of Time: Fame, History, and the Green Knight' credits Bergson as influential on Crane and on his differentiation between 'intuition and concepts'¹⁵³ when interpreting the poem and Gawain's subjectivity.

EVANS, DIX, AND HALLS: FRACTURING AND COLLAPSING ICONS

Humor and irony are key in Geraint Evans', Adam Dix's, and Roxana Halls' responses where an emphasis on iconoclasm via a deflationary gesture is the joke that—in the mode of satire—hopes to prevent our identification with stereotypical heroism. Evans presents two images, *The Green Knight* (2023) and *The Green Chapel* (2023) where we see the eponymous figures in contemporary dress, standing in suburban garden spaces (a motif that occurs in Evans' oeuvre). Both figures could be said to be playing their parts as it were; an air of the ordinary pervades alongside a feeling of staging something mythic—Gawain looks off into the distance, head tilted upwards contemplating something important—and the decking might be the stage of a theatre and the rockery the set of an opera, but we know it isn't, and so he is faintly ridiculous. The Green Knight could be a hipster counterpoint to Evans' Gawain, but he retains an air of the supernatural in his coloring (all green) and by virtue of having his own head on a stick (fig. 8). The Green Knight's steed in Evans' image refers to the Mari Lwyd, a Welsh folk custom

associated with Christmas whereby revelers exchange songs with strangers to gain entry to a house. The custom has contested origins, potentially Christian or pagan,¹⁵⁴ and the real equine skull used for the hobby horse is a morbid and fierce reference, possibly a remainder from pagan horse ceremonies or a female monster in a practice now associated with the Virgin Mary.¹⁵⁵



FIGURE 8: *THE GREEN KNIGHT* (2023) BY GERAINT EVANS. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

These are apt themes, as *SGGK* includes the layering of pagan and Christian motifs, a tension which has proven influential on Adam Dix in his responses. Dix stated regarding his works: ‘I was looking at the Mummings plays and clips from the *Wicker Man* when reading the text.’¹⁵⁶ Dix’s works, *Study for Gawain* (2021) and *Sir Gawain* (2021) (fig. 9) are more somber in tone than Evans’, but they also play on an ironic placement of the usually heroic knight as an

example of a failed seriousness. In Dix's case, I would suggest this is used to make an emphatic statement about the fragility of masculinity. Mounted on his model-seeming horse, and propped up on a badly veiled table, Gawain has the look of a novice awaiting calamity, not unlike the protagonist from Dix's named folk-horror influence, the foredoomed Sgt. Neil Howie of *The Wicker Man* (1973).¹⁵⁷ Robin Hardy's film is another example of the combination of horror and bleak comedy that mixes Christian and pagan themes. Mummers' plays were a form of folk performance in which two opponents would fight in mock combat, one would be slain and resurrected by a 'doctor.' For Ernest Theodore Kirby 'the cure, not the combat, is the basic element in the performance'; the doctor is a shamanic variant who cures 'soul loss.'¹⁵⁸ I suggest that Dix is making a reference to both the fantastical resurrection of the Green Knight following his beheading, and the testing of Gawain, a naive youth, a cypher who by the end of the poem has come closer to having a soul by way of suffering and redemption.



FIGURE 9: *SIR GAWAIN* (2021) BY ADAM DIX. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

In Roxana Halls' painting *Laughing While Digging* (2022) (fig. 10) the focus is first shifted to conspiring women (a repeated trope in Halls' works) that allude to the figures of Morgan le Fay and Lady Bertilak. We can conjecture about what they bury there in the woodland that envelopes them—chivalric masculinity? Here is a link to the iconoclasm explored by Dix and Evans but where the male hero is no longer contested but buried instead. Moreover, that dense green background, a uterine space full of life, is the entity into which the bodies of people (men for Halls) enrich the soil.



FIGURE 10: *LAUGHING WHILE DIGGING* (2022) BY ROXANA HALLS. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

TRELOAR, EDEN AND SPURR: PSYCHOACTIVE LANDSCAPES

Temporality in the poem is interesting. There are clear references to: linear time, in Gawain's anticipation of the confrontation in a year and day from his beheading of the Green Knight; cyclical time, in the changes of seasons; and spiraling time, as Jeffery Jerome Cohen states: 'the poem insists that seasons spiral rather than circle back or merely repeat.'¹⁵⁹ Spiraling time emphasizes a dread of the end of nature.¹⁶⁰ Morton Bloomfield in '*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: An Appraisal,' writes of the layering of cyclical and linear time and hints at, but does not name, the idea of spiraling time: 'the winter to come is not merely the same as last winter but different.'¹⁶¹ This is because despite drawing on Bergson, he states, 'it is a large question whether any poet could be a kind of Bergson in the fourteenth century . . . it seems extraordinarily un-medieval to me.'¹⁶² This reticence can be explained by Bloomfield's conclusion, where he sees a return to order at the close of the poem: 'this decorous, calm, and aristocratic world [Arthur's court] is menaced by the indecorous, wonders, and mysteries, but only for a while. Order and decorum re-establish themselves.'¹⁶³ In my reading of the poem, there is no return to order. Gawain has not cycled back, he has changed, and that change shows up the limitations of Camelot for the reader.

In the works of the illustrators Dorothea Braby, Roy Morgan, and John Howe, we see an increased importance on backgrounds which extend away from the protagonist. Those backgrounds are an indication of a world in motion beyond the close framing of the hero and his immediate concerns. The landscapes of these works give us room to extrapolate, interpret, and relate our reality to the themes of the narrative; this activation, I suggest, is a common factor linking the fine art responses of David Treloar, Graeme Spurr, and myself with a greater emphasis on immersion. Those responses include sequences of related works and wilderness aspects as a key factor of the work. Notably, this is the case with Treloar's works *Wilderness* (2020), *Through the Woodland* (2020), and *Undergrowth* (2020), all of which present dense close images of woodlands and tangled fauna with light impressionistically breaking through. Treloar stated,

whenever I paint from the landscape there is a contemplation (of the worth of art, the act of making, me against time and space) and a battle both with nature and creating something worthwhile. They are then psychological spaces and a tangle of ideas and intentions.¹⁶⁴

They are forbidding, dense spaces, the layers of mark-making give a sense of animation to the sessile forms (fig. 11). Those works are accompanied by two images that have the quality of remembered encounters: *Giving the Stolen*

Kiss Back (2020) (fig1. 2), a close-up image of two figures embracing, and *Gringolet* (2020) showing a hooded horse, Treloar describes the inspiration:

I saw the horse with a horsefly hood on smell me on the wind. We had a stand-off where this great beast was nervously pawing the ground and at the mercy of the unknown. Seeing the horse in that mental space reflecting back my COVID nightmare made me think about Sir Gawain and his confrontation with death.¹⁶⁵



FIGURE 11: *UNDERGROWTH* (2020) BY DAVID TRELOAR. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

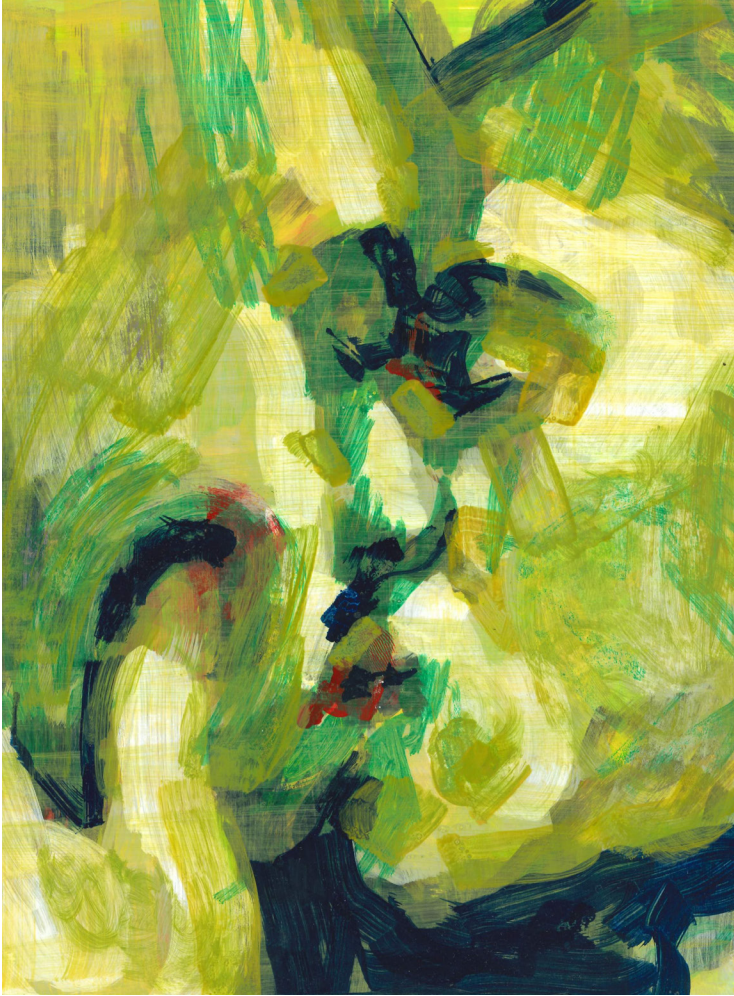


FIGURE 12: *GIVING THE STOLEN KISS BACK* (2020) BY DAVID TRELOAR. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

Sequential development is an aspect of my responses to the poem, in which an entirely marginalized nature in *Attendants Dressing and Armouring Gawain* (2021) is seen only in the background window that opens onto blue sky, while a typically bourgeois pattern rests at the feet of Gawain, an indication of a repressed natural world in the controlled space of the court (where Gawain begins his journey). In *The Slime of Life Clings to Sir Gawain* (2021), the land rises above and threatens to envelop the protagonist from below. At

the same time we see the untested youth approach the Green Chapel. Like Treloar, I was painting during the pandemic, and the works were affected. For example, having no access to a model, my son posed in the role. His reticence gives Gawain an apt expression in *Attendants*, and my natural paternal empathy toward him meant the image of Gawain approaching the chapel is more sympathetic than I had initially intended. Subsequently, I have come to think of that tension as preventing the image from being entirely iconoclastic and inadvertently more ambivalent, in line with my conflicted feelings about the knight. In *Green Chapel* (2021) the viewer is placed before the fissure. I included references to moss and slime as well as rock to indicate different registers of time, and an eerily back-lit wall and disembodied hand are attempts to create an unsettling atmosphere. These sequences of works create a sense of unfolding events and communicate an uncertain temporality between the images. In both Treloar's works and my own, the figure is not always present. In those cases, the viewer is positioned before the wilderness spaces—the Green Chapel's moss-covered recesses, or the thick intricate woodlands of Treloar's undergrowth paintings—and this gives them a direct appeal to the viewer's interiority, emphasizing a sense of immersion.



FIGURE 13: *THE SLIME OF LIFE CLINGS TO SIR GAWAIN* (2020) BY MICHAEL EDEN.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

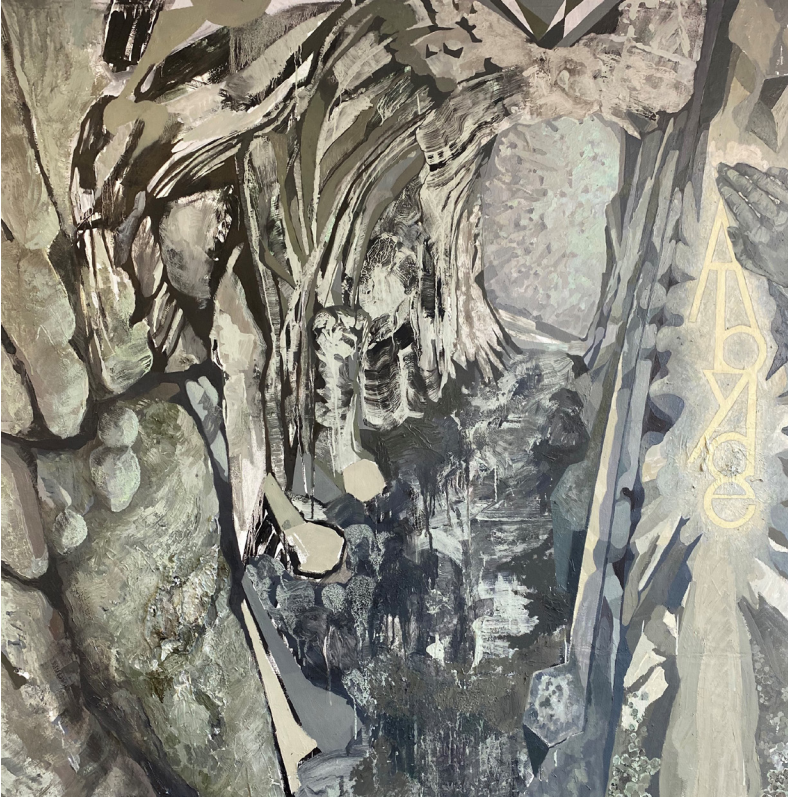


FIGURE 14: *GREEN CHAPEL* (2021) BY MICHAEL EDEN. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

I think of those images as being about somatic and mental reactions to wild nature, crystallizations of moments of apprehension, and imagined memories from Gawain's perspective. This appeal to interiority culminates in the seven evocative soundscapes of Graeme Spurr, where the layering of environmental noise and animals (recorded from outings in his locale) are accompanied by Spurr's haunting compositions. Repetitions of musical sequences combined with synth interruptions and ominous bass vibrations make the pieces unnerving, despite decorative flourishes. In these works, any imagery is conjured in the listener's mind's eye. The pieces are atmospheric, and it is easy to picture scenes inspired by the titles. Spurr is responding to both Armitage's¹⁶⁶ translation as well as Keith Harrison's,¹⁶⁷ and the titles combine aspects of both, to create something new (see below). Spurr explained that he was interested in the ways translation shifts emphasis and affects meaning.

Title: Fitt 2. 'Now every hedgerow brims with blossom and with bud';
'New bird-sounds run, pell-mell,'

3. 509–15

Birds burble with life and build busily
as summer spreads, settling on slopes as it should.
Now every hedgerow brims
with blossom and with bud,
and lively songbirds sing
from lovely, leafy woods.

Harrison Translation

Birds start building, they call out loudly
For the calm of summer that spreads its balm on valleys and slopes.
Rich hawthorn-blossoms swell
And burst in rows; in the copse
New bird-sounds run, pell-mell,
Through the glorious full tree-tops [notes shared by Spurr].¹⁶⁸

SUMMARY OF WHAT IS LEARNED FROM THE ARTISTIC RESPONSES

In the fine art responses of Treloar, Spurr and myself representations of wilderness as something beyond the subject into which an audience can project is present. Contemporary artistic responses to the poem can begin to draw out these poetic resonances that insist on change and the development of a complex subjectivity in time. This has allowed features of the poem's imagery to add to a language of criticism regarding idealized masculinity and power. Gawain as a living subject is separated from the two-dimensional idea of the heroic knight, and this both allows the painful subjective change he endures to happen and opens the space for a criticism of the societal forces that sought to position him as an epitome of chivalric power.

Human beings are brought into context with the magnitude of nature, with issues of scale being indicators of subjective awareness that we are not the locus of reality, but minor aspects of its unfolding. This is as true of the powerful—Gawain an anointed knight—and of the animals who are chased down and slaughtered for food. The famous juxtaposition in the poem of Gawain's encounters with the Lady and Bertilak's hunts makes this humbling perspective of human endeavor noticeably clear. The consolation for this humbling, though, is that we, as unfinished projects, are capable of psychic change for which the landscape comes to stand; therefore, we are not doomed to be as perfect icons or statues, such as those critiqued by Evans, Dix, and Halls.

BROADER CONTEXT & INFLUENCE OF *SGGK*

The release of *The Green Knight* (2021), a film written, directed, and produced by David Lowery, and based on *SGGK* in the guise of an epic fantasy retelling, brought the poem and some of its most arresting and impactful imagery to a wide mainstream audience. That audience is outside those primarily interested in poetry or medieval writing and beyond the ongoing academic criticism of the text. However, medieval spectacle is a common feature of mass-consumed film and television, and *SGGK* enters an existing dynamic. Those aesthetic dynamics are of relevance to the other mediums, of illustration and fine art, discussed here as they concern the use of historic and fantastical imagery utilized in a modern context and help us to understand a tension between revanchism, a tendency to want to seek and restore a bygone period; and what I suggest is a progressive use of those aesthetics, to criticize outmoded values that are incubated in our culture.

Fantasy and the past as fantasy, Timberlake argues, is asserted as either nostalgia, 'an attempt to stop time or shut out the contemporary',¹⁶⁹ or as a 're-reading'¹⁷⁰ whereby the fantasy-past is asserted 'to re-articulate our perception of the present and our sense of place.'¹⁷¹ Writing in 2018 he warns of the ethical choices that arise from such a dichotomy, making specific references to 'spectacles of neo-medievalist revanchism—in real world politics the self-proclaimed caliphate of Islamic State, in fiction, the televisual saga of George R.R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* fantasy.'¹⁷² Timberlake's point regarding conservative readings of *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019) is clear enough. However, I would argue that the television series does emphasize the tension between those figures concerned with what is referred to in *Game of Thrones*¹⁷³ as the continuation of 'the wheel'—that being the continuous and violent circulation of elites¹⁷⁴—which sees the brutal replacement of one ruling class with another, contrasting this with the desire to break 'the wheel' by the progressive eunuch Lord Varys (Conleth Hill) and the disgraced noble Tyrion Lannister (Peter Dinklage), who view the process as futile. As a result, I prefer *The Last Kingdom*¹⁷⁵ (2015–2020), based on Bernard Cornwell's *The Saxon Stories* (2004–2020), as an example of revanchism. The program is concerned with the reign of Alfred the Great and Cornwell has stated that 'the idea of writing a series about the creation of England was in my head for a long time.'¹⁷⁶ *The Last Kingdom* has been popular, being first produced by Carnival Films, which company also produced the pastoral reduction of England, *Downton Abbey*, for the BBC.¹⁷⁷ Timberlake's concerns regarding revanchism appear to have been a constant: in fiction, a fifth series of *The Last Kingdom* has been confirmed for Netflix, while Ridley Scott's *The Last Duel*,¹⁷⁸ a film which deals with an accusation of rape in 1386, attests to use of an imagined medieval past to address uncomfortable contemporary

gender politics.¹⁷⁹ I suggest there is a desire to search for something foundational, especially regarding masculinity in the medieval period, in part due to the opportunity to imagine conflict as violent physical combat between individuals (an arresting visual motif utilized in all aforementioned examples), in which opposed men engage in agonistic struggles for power, and where women and the community at large are very much dependent on the personal powers of reproach of individuals with strong moral cores and/or existing power. This kind of fiction is especially comforting during times of rapid social change (where once side-lined communities contest traditional societal hierarchies) and in the face of globalization to 'shut out the contemporary'¹⁸⁰ and seek after individual and national myths that re-state a foundational hyper-masculine right to power. As a counter to revanchism, *SGGK* as a potentially foundational text written in the medieval period does not offer any kind of firm platform either for masculinity or on behalf of institutionalized hierarchical power (both are questioned throughout the text), and even traditional and conservative readings of *SGGK* acknowledge its potential for multiple interpretations and its presentation of a doubtful, flawed, and self-questioning central protagonist.

THE GREEN KNIGHT 2021

It is in this context that Lowery's *The Green Knight* (2021), which sees Dev Patel as Gawain and Ralph Ineson as the eponymous monster, is understood. Lowery's film is true to some of the core themes of *SGGK*, which sets it apart from expressions of nostalgia and/or comforting normative displays of masculinity. The film achieves this primarily as it includes the presence of strong female characters, namely Morgan Le Fay (played by Sarita Choudhury as Gawain's mother), Essel, an additional character conceived by Lowery (played by Alicia Vikander, as Gawain's unofficial lover) and Lady Bertilak (referred to as the Lady, also played by Vikander in significantly different costume). These women, who evince a strong and stable sense of self, challenge Gawain's autonomy (Morgan's manipulation and positioning of him to attain power) and his moral and social outlook (Essel's questioning of Gawain's desire for greatness), and furthermore, force him to question his world view and expectations (the Lady's displays of confidence and worldly insight). These women are represented sympathetically and feature significantly in Lowery's film. Cohen, reflecting on the poem, lamented the way that although 'the romance derives from Morgan's agency,' there was a significant 'movement away from feminist reappraisals of the poem,' which in part he sees taken up in postcolonial readings; Cohen's text, in exploring Morgan le Fay's impact and antecedents, redresses this.¹⁸¹ Choudhury's brooding and determined Morgan, along with Vikander's dual performance as jocular antagonists

from two clearly distinct class positions, are redressing the move away from feminist readings in popular culture and bringing those to a mass audience.¹⁸²

In a key scene, Morgan manifests the Green Knight in an act of summoning, which chimes with Cohen's reminder that some feminist scholars have asserted, 'the words of the Green Knight ought to be taken seriously when he reveals himself Morgan's subordinate . . . critics ought to stop following Gawain's lead in making the poem only about its male characters.'¹⁸³ While the words referred to are not spoken by Lowery's Green Knight, the triad of scene-stealing mother, lover, and rival gives Lowery's interpretation a feminist layer. As if to strengthen this interpretation, the film includes an entirely negative alternative future (imagined by Gawain as he considers renegeing on his oath), where a trophy wife (described as Gawain's young queen, played by Megan Tiernan), represented in dehumanizing pomp (reminiscent of Elizabeth I's famous public image), accompanies Gawain in the guise of a corrupt leader into greater power and ultimate downfall (thus Gawain rejects and disabuses Essel of any faith in him). In this alternative future, Gawain uses the green girdle as a token of power, leading him into a hubristic defeat. Lowery, in showing us this glimpse into Gawain's interiority, places his film on the side of a re-reading—in this case, a re-reading of masculinity and normative ideas of greatness. In *The Green Knight* (2021) those qualities are seen as being dubious, uncertain, constructed (rather than innate), and finally, idealized subject-positions impossible to live up to.

CONCLUSION

Armitage emphasizes what I will call a necessary void in the text: 'the lack of definitive authorship seems to serve as an invitation, opening up a space within the poem.'¹⁸⁴ This void is necessary because it guarantees the meaning of the text cannot be easily settled by recourse to author intention, and as Cohen infers, this is a quality of the writing also: '[*SGGK* is] a poem that demands to be read at least twice before it is possible to know how full its story is with alternative narratives from the very start, seeds lying dormant the first time through, awaiting a second season.'¹⁸⁵ The illustrations and artworks serve as 'seeds' in the sense that Cohen means. They reveal interpretations that crystallize characteristics of the text, offering the viewer/reader constructs that may chime with or challenge their own opinion of the work. Those crystallizations help us to see and experience other interpretations than our own in ways that are fleshed out by the imagination, criticality, and values of another subject. Moreover, by setting up multiple tensions, it helps us to give some of our own, less conscious ('dormant') interpretations a life.

This quality of the illustrations provides (alongside the translations) a commentary which is akin to criticism and appreciation; careful looking can disclose this commentary without holding it from a critical distance. Thus,

such commentary is integrated into the object of the texts. There is also an aspect of curation to certain illustrations that coincides with Reichardt's idea of a 'fifth text.'¹⁸⁶ This differentiates the act of illustration from academic criticism, but is also different from simple decoration, expressing a clear attempt to bring *SGGK* to a viewer with a renewed effort in representation (to match the effort and purpose of translation), usually characterized in a greater number of key scenes being picked out or particular features being represented in detail. The illustrations examined here from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries show the growing emphasis on the landscape as a key force in the text. This interplay of background (with landscape elements) and foreground subject is a minor aspect emerging in Braby's works, while it becomes a key element of Morgan's and, later, Howe's images. I suggest this tendency is a result of our ecological concerns, and our increased sense of the landscape as linked to subjectivity. I have suggested that subjective development via iconoclasm and pathetic fallacy are urgent concerns of the artistic responses. Landscape is used to represent a conflation of internal psychic space and temporality (deep time, cyclical, and spiraling time) peppered by memories of key moments and anachronistic (contemporary) references that encourage identification with the questing Gawain, but also highlight instants of personal reflection.

Roxana Halls' piece *Laughing While Digging* (2022) questions the idea of unassailable male power, and celebrates rather than mourns its imagined passing. The construction of flawed or superficial identity is stultifying, as is shown in Evan's suburban adventurer, or in Dix's diptych with the faintly tragi-comic Gawain (and in the more unsure Gawain of Lowery's film): the intent is to help us to change by undoing a slavish thrall to heroic stereotypes.

The multiple layers of meaning and the anonymity of the author are essential factors in the life of the text. Without these mysterious elements the so-called correct context and motivation would be attributed to the text and settle it. I suggest it would be fixed in time and place and institutionalized as either secular or religious to its detriment. *SGGK*'s potential for personal interpretation or use as a vehicle for social/moral criticism would be severely weakened. Effectively, it would be less relevant to contemporary people. In its current form there is a core of emptiness which is filled in by the reader.

A general sense of the horrific may be one way to understand how modern translators, film makers, illustrators, and artists are currently filling in that void in the text. I have tried to show how horror in a modern sense is a fitting medium for the text, which I have called horrific in ways that are surprisingly relevant to notions of modern horror studies: the haunted house (for example) and anxiety around masculinity and gender. I have linked the horror of *SGGK* to forces that destabilize ideologically infused perception and bring discomfort to the subject who is subsequently changed, Gawain as proxy for the reader/

viewer undergoes such an experience. In our time, with its sense of pending ecological disaster and its increased tensions around fixed gender categories and roles, a sense of horrific breakdown makes sense when contemplating the implications of the poem.

It is impossible to know for sure if the author wished to remain anonymous or if she/he/they intended the text to be as ambiguous as it has come to be in its appreciation by critics, illustrators, and artists. However, on balance, the form of the text, its multiple potentialities, and its lack of a named author (though common at the time) suggest to me that those factors were a key part of its conception and that its meaning was not a case of correct discernment of its symbolic codes with an emphasis on what the writer meant; what is key is the matter of personal emphasis via selecting the aspects of the text that matter most to the reader, with an emphasis on what the reader makes of it (responsibility for the interpretations and responsibility for implications are on the reader/viewer). *SGGK* is a living text, whereby its meaning will change with, and in relation to, the times in which it is appreciated in and by whom.

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- 142 Freud describes this feeling as one of experiencing something that had been ordinary and known as odd, frightening, or unsettling 'the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' (1919, p. 219) further stating that '[the] uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression' (1919 p. 240). At Hautdesert Gawain is in his aunt's home though he does not recognize her as a relative, and his host Bertilak is also his monstrous adversary the Green Knight, likewise unknown to him.
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- 145 Michael Eden 'Representing *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.'
- 146 Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, translated by T.E. Hulme (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), p. 44.
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- 148 Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, p. 231.
- 149 Edward Trostle Jones, 'The Sound of Laughter in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,' *Mediaeval Studies* 31.1 (1969): 343 [343–345].
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- 152 Richard H. Godden, 'Gawain and the Nick of Time: Fame, History, and the Untimely in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,' *Arthuriana* 26.4 (2016): 152–173.
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- 157 *The Wicker Man*, directed by Robin Hardy.
- 158 Ernest Theodore Kirby, 'The Origin of the Mummers' play,' *The Journal of American Folklore* 84.333 (1971): 277 [275–288].
- 159 Jeffrey J. Cohen 'The Love of Life: Reading *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Close to Home,' in *Premodern Ecologies in the Modern Literary Imagination*, ed. Vin Nardizzi and Tiffany Jo Werth (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2019), p. 39 [25–58].
- 160 See also Susan L. Clark and Julian N. Wasserman, 'The Passing of the Seasons and the Apocalyptic in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,' *South Central Review* 3.1 (1986): 5–22.
- 161 Bloomfield, 'An appraisal,' *PMLA* 76.1 (March 1961): 18 [7–19].
- 162 Bloomfield, 'An appraisal,' 16.
- 163 Bloomfield, 'An appraisal,' 19.
- 164 Treloar in correspondence with the author on 9 December 2021.
- 165 Treloar in correspondence with the author on 9 December 2021.
- 166 Armitage, *Sir Gawain*, *passim*.
- 167 Keith Harrison, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008).
- 168 All Spurr's compositions can be listened to at: <https://www.representing-sir-gawain-and-the-green-knight.com/graeme-spurr> (accessed 12 May 2024).
- 169 Timberlake, *Landscape*, p. 172.
- 170 Timberlake, *Landscape*, p. 172.
- 171 Timberlake, *Landscape*, p. 172.
- 172 Timberlake, *Landscape*, p. 172.
- 173 *Game of Thrones*, HBO, April 17, 2011–May 19, 2019.
- 174 The phenomenon of brutal replacement of one elite class by another is outlined as an inevitable aspect of human relations in the work of the fascistic Pareto Vilfredo and his theory of 'the circulation of elite' in *The Mind and Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935). Further tension with that view of human power structures in *Game of Thrones* was the controversial decision to develop the messianic Daenerys Targaryen (a very popular character) into a tyrant who must be prevented from further mass killing, this was the cause of much consternation in the audience, and I would argue represented an ethical decision on the part of the team behind *Game of Thrones* to opt for a 're-reading' rather than asserting 'nostalgia' (Timberlake, *Landscape*, p. 172), which would have seen a heteronormative elite couple, Jon Snow (Kit Harington) and Daenerys making all well in Westeros.
- 175 *The Last Kingdom*, BBC 2, 10 October 2015–9 March 2022.
- 176 Hanna Lafferty, 'Bernard Cornwell Talks the Pagan Lord, The Challenges of Historical Fiction, And Future Plans - Entertainment Monthly, 2014', <https://web.archive.org/web/20140622142945/http://entertainmentmonthly.com/2014/01/31/bernard-cornwell-talks-the-pagan-lord-the-challenges-of-historical-fiction-and-future-plans/> (accessed 16 October 2021).

- 177 *Downton Abbey*, ITV, 26 September 2010–25 December 2015.
- 178 *The Last Duel*, directed by Ridley Scott (UK: 20th Century Studios, 2021) Film.
- 179 Further contemporary iterations asserting a foundational masculine identity, combined with national (or broadly western) identity in a medieval setting, can be found in *The King* (2019) a popular Netflix film which conflates several Shakespeare plays, and is also a component of Ridley Scott's oeuvre in *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), and *Robin Hood* (2010), while *Gladiator* (2000), which obeys a similar logic, takes place in an ancient Roman setting.
- 180 Timberlake, *Landscape*, p. 172.
- 181 Cohen 'The Love of Life,' p. 9.
- 182 Essel is represented as a peasant, subordinate in status to Gawain, while the lady is clearly shown as a learned and sophisticated individual.
- 183 Cohen 'The Love of Life,' pp. 10–11.
- 184 Armitage, *Sir Gawain*, p. 5.
- 185 Cohen 'The Love of Life,' p. 9.
- 186 Reichardt, "Several Illuminations, Coarsely Executed," 129.

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