*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Threat of Women to Courtly Life

*ABSTRACT*

*Historians of early-nineteenth century Europe have analyzed Arthurian legends and poems for their cultural values and understanding. Cultural historians in particular have analyzed the constant adjustment of small details in each subsequent translation of* Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, specifically in regards to the role of women in Arthurian times and the period of change following Arthur’s demise. Drawing from the translation of* Sir Gawain and the Green Knight *by W.A. Neilson, this paper argues the use of this poem as a warning to readers of the period of the dangers of women to men’s chivalric values, honour, and their status as knights.*

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is an Arthurian romance, written by an anonymous author in the late fourteenth century regarding the tales of Sir Gawain over a year with a being called the Green Knight.[[1]](#footnote-1) This poem begins on Christmas Day with a challenge to Arthur’s court by an unknown visitor called the Green Knight. He issues Arthur’s court a challenge to strike him, which he will return a year later. No knights step forward to claim this challenge, and thus Arthur rises to accept, but is quickly stopped by Sir Gawain who accepts the challenge, realizing no one else will. This begins a year-long quest where Gawain’s honour, courage, and chivalry are tested, and the actors in the stories are not all that they appear, contrary to many other verses. In contrast to other medieval poems written in this time period, Arthurian romances began to incorporate the use of women into their stories, and began to feature women in prominent roles, whereas other medieval poems often featured women as minor characters, with limited influence and impact. Arthurian romances, and in particular, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* included women as a major component of the story, who drastically influenced Sir Gawain’s adventures. However, these women were often included in Arthurian romances in order to provide background and depth to the male characters of the stories, rather than for their own merits. Women were most commonly included in these works to construct men’s chivalric identities, rather for their own stories.[[2]](#footnote-2) They were not included in Arthurian romances to detail their own adventures, but rather to add an aspect or layer to a predominately male story. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, women are included to serve as a warning to readers of the dangers of women to men’s chivalric values, honour, and their status as knights.

This poem has been translated many times since its origin, and while the overall plot remains the same, the nuances of the story change each time. Older versions of this poem have been critiqued especially in the last two decades as translators and editors have drastically changed or removed women’s roles in this poem.[[3]](#footnote-3) The reduction of women’s roles in this poem has not just been limited to older editions where this might have been acceptable, but also in recent, academic publications.[[4]](#footnote-4) When the story was first written, women’s roles in the text were minimal, focusing primarily on a story that was predominately surrounding male actions. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* however, was one of the first poems during this time that utilized women and their roles as a key part of the story, although these actions were hidden until almost the conclusion. The nuances of these modified versions have changed the role of women in the story, leading to their impact on the story has been examined by historians and writers as to the original author’s intentions. These nuances change from translator to translator, but it has been noted by historians such as Paul Battles that *Gawain* historians have often reduced Lady Bertilak’s role in testing Sir Gawain.[[5]](#footnote-5) Most historians, such as Geraldine Heng focus on the impact of the change in women’s roles shown in *Sir Gawain*, specifically the temptation that Lady Bertilak represents and the impact of this on the story. While some of these nuances may have been altered unintentionally, it is clear that these changes have diminished women’s roles and made them subordinate to men, even at times that the original plot implies or states that women’s roles have been greater than men.[[6]](#footnote-6) The causes for these changes have begun to be examined by historians, and most agree that the subtleties of this verse have been changed from the original purposes. When this text was originally written, women were seen as subordinate to men, and the courtly standard was that they would not interfere with men, while this poem implies the opposite to be true. Accordingly, this poem had to balance courtly standards with the author’s underlying message that women could pose a viable threat to men through various measures. While the subtleties of the actions of the women in this story may have changed, their overall roles have still stayed the same, and demonstrate the danger that women serve to men through their actions.

Chivalry was an essential part of courtly life, and guided the way that knights conducted themselves both on the battlefield, and at home. Chivalry referred to knight’s ideals and values, and was supposed to be the basis for their life.[[7]](#footnote-7) Arthur’s knights in particular were seen to live the ideals of chivalry, yet this was not always the case, as demonstrated by Guinevere’s extra-marital affair with Lancelot, Gawain being dishonest with Lord Bertilak, amongst others. Gawain was seen as one of the most honest, chivalric knights, and was thus used extensively in stories regarding chivalry due to his charisma and openness to which some academics believe made him a target for attacks on knighthood.[[8]](#footnote-8) He was noted as the perfect knight for a romance specifically, as he displayed “a willing restrain of available force of a refusal of authority of position…his courtesy makes his conquests all the more complete, for they entail not annihilation or brute suppression, but the ungrudging concession of Gawain’s superiority.”[[9]](#footnote-9) While the ‘code of chivalry’ was not always adhered too, it provided the foundation and origin of knight’s life.[[10]](#footnote-10) Chivalry had been engrained in English society for some centuries, guiding English nobility and could not afford to be lost.[[11]](#footnote-11) It was seen in court that if a king was able to control chivalric practices, they could demonstrate that they were in sync with court and current practices, and chivalric values were used as political tool.[[12]](#footnote-12)

However, women were not seen to possess these same chivalric values, and while Arthurian romances emphasized knight’s courtly values and chivalric nature, women were seen as simply a person to seduce or desire, rather than providing any use to chivalric adventures.[[13]](#footnote-13) At the time that Arthurian tales were written, women were becoming increasingly involved and present at court life, leading to levels of concern among male attendees that it was becoming increasingly female-driven, whether directly, or through the seduction of males in attendance. Thomas Walsingham stated that knights and courtiers of Richard II were “more knights of Venus than of Bellona, more vigorous in the bedroom than on the field of battle, armed with words rather than the lance.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Observers of the court were becoming increasingly worried of the temptation that women posed to knights and courtiers both directly and indirectly, and were concerned of the impacts that this would have on their chivalric values if they were more focused on women than their codes of honour and chivalry. This poem was written during the late fourteenth century and reflects these values, subtly trying to remind readers of the increasing dangers that women posed to knights, and the loss of truth that Gawain demonstrates is representative of the loss of focus on chivalric values at court life.

There are three women of importance in this story, all of whom drastically alter Gawain’s quest. At approximately the middle of the story, the reader is introduced to the physically beautiful, young Lady Bertilak and immediately after, her antithesis, the physically unattractive and old Morgan.[[15]](#footnote-15) The third lady is Guinevere, Arthur’s wife, who begets little mention in this poem, but her presence is highly significant in regards to the other ladies conduct and representations. Guinevere is the first woman mentioned in this story, described as “full beauteous…set in the midst…truly no man could say that he ever beheld a comelier lady than she.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Guinevere is mentioned little in this work, aside from her beauty and how she compares in physical appearance to the other ladies in this poem. Lady Bertilak is the next lady mentioned in this verse, and she is instantly compared to Guinevere’s physical beauty, described as the more attractive of the two women.[[17]](#footnote-17) Her companion, an old lady, later revealed to be Morgan, is also described in terms of her physical appearance with rough and harsh features.[[18]](#footnote-18) None of these ladies are described in terms of their personality, characteristics or deeds, and it is only later in the story that we truly begin to see Lady Bertilak affecting Sir Gawain. Only at the story’s end is it discovered that without each of these ladies, Sir Gawain’s quest would not have taken place in the form that it did, and that female characters were driving this poem from the outset, contrary to what most of the poem reveals, and the audience believes. Women were not used as driving forces behind any story, and “not until the end does Gawain realize, nor do we, that his treatment of the two women determined…the outcome of the quest itself.”[[19]](#footnote-19) The decision to reveal that it was Morgan who engineered this plot at the end of the story could possibly be attributed to the author’s desire to establish an audience for this story. If the story acted too far outside normal parameters, the audience may not have wanted to read or see it, and the message would be lost. By establishing that this plot was due to a woman at the end of the story, and reducing her role, the author maintains his audience through the poem, while still promoting his message that women can be dangerous.

This poem in particular points to the danger of women to knights chivalry, honour and values through the three women’s various roles in this story. This story was written after a majority of Arthurian romances and story tellers had begun to examine the fall of the Round Table and its causes. Through the examination of such poems, historians have discovered that these storytellers believe women are centrally responsible for the collapse of the Round table, and the resulting end of Arthur and the Arthurian age. *Sir Gawain* in particular is believed to have been written after other Arthurian romances in an attempt to display the danger of women to one of the most famous knight’s of the Round Table in order at a time when people were still mourning the passing of one of Britain’s most popular and fabled king’s.[[20]](#footnote-20) Rather than a typical Arthurian romantic tale regarding a knight’s heroic quest, this author instead uses this work as a warning to the readers of the dangers women posed to society and court life, and specifically to knights upon whom society depended. Sexual desire is represented in this poem by Lady Bertilak, who attempts to seduce Sir Gawain, and this is tied to the theory of original sin.[[21]](#footnote-21) While Sir Gawain tries to resist Lady Bertilak’s seduction, he is not completely successful, and this affects the actions taken by the Green Knight at the end of the poem. When the Green Knight reveals that Lady Bertilak’s seduction of Sir Gawain was a ploy, Sir Gawain instantly turns anti-feminist, blaming her for the stroke that he receives from the Green Knight as payment for lying to the Green Knight, refusing to acknowledge his fear of death and face humiliation.[[22]](#footnote-22) The Green Knight concurs with Sir Gawain, blaming women for man’s mistakes: “For so was Adam beguiled by one, and Solomon by many, indeed; and Samson also…and all they were beguiled by women whom they had to do with.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Rather than Sir Gawain admitting that he had not adhered to his agreement with Sir Bertilak, he instead blamed Lady Bertilak for her seduction of him, casting the blame to her alone, and thus the loss of his values.

Women were expected to act according to courtly values, and it was rare that women escaped these roles in poems or stories, and if they did, they were immediately personified as evil, such as Morgan Le Fay. The role of Lady Bertilak is often examined as to whether she was forced by her husband to seduce Sir Gawain and was a pawn in his plan, or whether she was merely evil. When Lord Bertilak reveals Lady Bertilak’s treachery, Sir Gawain erupts into what has been deemed his antifeminist tirade, describing how women alter and shape the lives of men.[[24]](#footnote-24) This view of women was one of the first of its time, as most poems viewed women as minor characters who had limited, if no influence, on male’s adventures. Men were viewed as superior to women, and most did not believe that a woman could have a drastic impact on their life, contrary to Sir Gawain’s rant. After the Green Knight delivers his three blows against Sir Gawain, Sir Gawain’s concern is primarily the loss of his honour, rather than his close encounter with death. This is due to his courtly values of knighthood, of which honour is one of the most important, which is seen through the trials of the Green Knight and Lady Bertilak, testing Sir Gawain’s ability to be the perfect knight which his reputation proclaims.[[25]](#footnote-25) When the Green Knight states that Sir Gawain did not give him repayment of kind for the girdle, Gawain attempts to throw the girdle away, attributing falsities to it and using it as an example of all women’s evil.[[26]](#footnote-26) Sir Gawain seeks to throw away the girdle as it reminds him of his failure to adhere to courtly values, most specifically honour and trust, and the attempt to throw this away indicates his attempt to regain his honour. He blames Lady Bertilak and her ‘feminine wiles’ for his failure of demonstrating courtly values, but is reassured by Lord Bertilak that many other men have been led astray by women. This is a subtle reference by the author to the increase of women in court life and the corresponding turn of knight’s from adventures and politics to wooing women, and the dangers this could pose. This passage indicates that even at the basest of human desires, women can pose a threat to men, which was not comprehended by Sir Gawain. This is only subtly revealed at the end of the poem however, and the reader still views the Green Knight as the major opponent.

Female characters are described in accordance of loyalty to their male foil, and is good or evil depending on whether she is loyal or betrays her male counterpart, who represents general society.[[27]](#footnote-27) Regardless of the reasons for a female character’s actions, her conduct is based on her relationship to her lover, and if she is false in this relationship, such as Lady Bertilak and Sir Gawain, she is deemed false and therefore a less honorable person. In this poem, the writer “register[s] an anxiety about women and about the ways in which women can make and unmake men…they show the dangers that arise when women attempt to make their own deals.”[[28]](#footnote-28) Lady Bertilak’s attempts to seduce Sir Gawain are seen as contrary by the reader to how women’s conduct should be, and due to this, Sir Gawain is ultimately humiliated by the Green Knight because he did not adhere to his bargain with Lord Bertilak, thus diminishing his honour and chivalric values. There were strict guidelines for women in society and if a woman did not adhere to those guidelines, she was blamed for the knight’s actions and his failure to achieve high status, whether it was in society or chivalric values.[[29]](#footnote-29) Sir Gawain blamed Lady Bertilak’s seduction for his failings and thus the broken agreement with Lord Bertilak, ignoring that he had submitted to temptation. The author uses this relationship between Lady Bertilak and Sir Gawain to demonstrate how dangerous it was to Knights if women stepped out of the roles that society demanded of them, shown by Sir Gawain’s humiliation by the Green Knight. Lady Bertilak is seen as a temptress by Sir Gawain, which held strong religious connotations of original sin by Eve, and thus she is seen as guilty and already wrong, even while Sir Gawain submitted to her seduction.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Lady Bertilak’s character has been analyzed extensively as to whether her role in Sir Gawain’s adventure was planned by her husband, or whether she was equally involved in Morgan’s plot. Either way, her character is seen as extremely dangerous as her role shifts during the poem between that of male courtly lover wooing a lady, to being desirable and feminine. It was unseemly for courtly women to attempt to seduce a man, and Lady Bertilak’s actions are viewed as those of a man. Thus, she “erodes the categories of masculine and feminine, destabilizing traditional courtly gender roles.”[[31]](#footnote-31) The author tries to subtly hint to the audience that knight’s interest in women due to their increased presence at court has detracted them from courtly values and honour, leading to potential threats. The author moves her out of typical feminine roles however, and has her performing what were viewed as male actions. This proves a threat to Sir Gawain as Lady Bertilak has assumed male characteristics, leaving no choice but for Sir Gawain to assume the female role in Lady Bertilak’s seduction. When it is revealed at the end of the poem that Lady Bertilak’s seduction was part of a careful plan, Sir Gawain is able to regain his masculine role with wounded pride, but the author demonstrates that typical gender roles are not always adhered too. Through Lady Bertilak’s and Sir Gawain’s actions, the author examines the concept of love, and whether love is worth the problems caused to the characters. While Sir Gawain did not love Lady Bertilak, he appeared to have a fondness for her, and she ultimately betrayed him, whether it was willingly, or a plan concocted by her husband and Morgan. However, this aspect of the story forces the reader to ask whether the affection between the two characters was worthy of the problems it caused, and whether the amount of love was equal to the recipient’s characteristics or their surface attributes, and whether the recipient was worthy of the love.[[32]](#footnote-32) The blow that actually landed on Sir Gawain was in retribution for his broken promise to the Green Knight for not giving repayment for the girdle that Lady Bertilak gave him as a token of her supposed love. The author provokes the reader into questioning whether this was truly love between the two characters, and was it worth the problems that it caused for Sir Gawain. The author attempts to warn the reader again of the dangers of love, and whether the recipient of one’s love is worthy.

Secondly, women’s proper roles in society are used by this author as a warning to males of the consequences of women subverting those roles. As discussed, Lady Bertilak acts contrary to most females by attempting to seduce Sir Gawain. While this is revealed to have been a ploy by Sir Bertilak, as Lady Bertilak executed the plot, she is blamed for Sir Gawain’s downfall and humiliation at the hands of the Green Knight. When Sir Gawain discovers this ploy by the Bertilak’s he,

Adduces the Lady as an Eve-like temptress, thereby restoring his proper gendered role: the victimized hero is a hero nonetheless…Gawain accordingly reconfigures both the sin and its motivation…to reclaim his own masculinity once the threat of his becoming feminized is brought to the fore.[[33]](#footnote-33)

As Sir Gawain succumbed to Lady Bertilak’s seduction, readers see a gender reversal between Lady Bertilak and Sir Gawain, that Lady Bertilak is in control of the situation and has used Sir Gawain for her own advantage. However, when Sir Gawain likens Lady Bertilak to Eve and thus original sin, proper gender roles are seen to revert that just as Eve’s seduction by the snake resulted in Adam’s downfall, Lady Bertilak’s seduction of Sir Gawain resulted in his downfall. By admitting that he was seduced after the Green Knight has already revealed knowledge of the broken agreement of Sir Bertilak and Sir Gawain, Sir Gawain’s honour is restored somewhat with the reader as he does confess this, and thus some honour is returned to him. The resulting discussion of women who have caused downfalls for powerful men is seen as a reflection of how men should view women, resulting in a manly attitude of being able to love a woman, but not to believe her.[[34]](#footnote-34) While Sir Gawain could have loved Lady Bertilak, he should not have trusted her, as this led to humiliation at the hands of the Green Knight. Lady Bertilak’s operation outside the societal roles of women misled Sir Gawain, and the while the author allows Sir Gawain redemption in this poem, the knowledge that women could be dangerous is still apparent to the reader.

Guinevere becomes an important female figure in this poem, because she is the sole female character who fits the societal standard of women, and is used by the author to demonstrate how women should act, especially at court or predominately male gatherings. When Guinevere is introduced, the readers are given a brief description of her beauty, but no characteristics. However, due to details already known about her, she represents the highest ideal woman as she is married to a king, and is seen to be morally truthful and physically attractive.[[35]](#footnote-35) Regardless of other tales about her character in other stories, such as her affair with Lancelot, in this poem, she is seen as the sole woman who acts within societal standards. She is seen as an ideal woman, chaste and silent and is used little in the poem.[[36]](#footnote-36) Guinevere is seen little throughout this story, and yet it is revealed at the end that Morgan devised the whole plot to both test the courage of the knights of the Round Table, and equally, to upset Guinevere and cause “her to die through fright.”[[37]](#footnote-37) The readers are then aware that Sir Gawain’s quest has been conducted due to one woman’s desire to hurt another, and Sir Gawain’s honour has been lost due to this quest. The trickery that Morgan displays sets her outside societal roles for women, whereas Guinevere’s limited action and standards of her beauty set her within societal parameters, and display her as the one female character who did not damage Sir Gawain’s reputation directly.

Morgan is the last female character in this poem, and it is revealed only at the poem’s end that she has been responsible for the entire construction of the events of this poem. While the author reveals Morgan’s trickery however, it “has been marginalized to the point that it appears irrelevant…by being projected onto Morgan’s jealousy of Arthur’s wife.”[[38]](#footnote-38) While the author tries to display how women can be a danger to men, it still remains as a subtle message, promoting the idea that Morgan engaged in this trickery to harm Guinevere, rather than directly to harm Sir Gawain. However, although the author used this poem to warn society of the dangers that women posed to men’s knighthood and chivalric values, due to needing to retain an audience for this poem, this had to be a subtle message, and so the author demonstrates these dangers in a loose manner, rather than as an overtone. The author tries to demonstrate that men must be aware of the true nature of women regardless of their physical appearance, as demonstrated by Morgan Le Fay disguising herself as an old woman, only to appear at the end of the poem as a driving force behind Sir Gawain’s quest.[[39]](#footnote-39) This poem warns that the societal assumption of male superiority over women was incorrect, and that males could be misled by females who acted outside of societal norms.[[40]](#footnote-40) While other medieval poems primarily focused on the danger of men to other men, this author promotes the idea that women could be just as dangerous, especially those women who acted outside of societal norms, and how dangerous this could be to a Knight’s chivalric honour and knighthood.

Finally, this poem reveals the author’s belief that women could challenge men’s masculinity, both directly and indirectly. When the Green Knight arrives at Arthur’s court, he is seen by the readers to be under his own influence, which is only revealed at almost the end of the poem that this whole plan was orchestrated by Morgan. The Green Knight arrives at Arthur’s court, challenging the manhood of the Round Table on a day observing circumcision.”[[41]](#footnote-41) While this is seen by readers initially as a male challenging a male, it is revealed only at the end that this was an indirect attack by a female on the Round Table’s masculinity, and it can be seen through Sir Gawain’s breach of contract with Sir Bertilak that Morgan succeeded. The audience believes almost throughout this poem that the events have been orchestrated by the Green Knight, and thus Sir Gawain’s adventures have been directed by a male’s intervention. This is only proved false at the end of the poem, and the author softens this blow by explaining Morgan’s actions to be an attempt to threaten Guinevere, rather than the Round Table itself. Sir Gawain’s actions throughout this poem display the dangers of women however, specifically in his actions towards Lady Bertilak and her seduction. When the Green Knight reveals himself and the trickery at the end of this poem, Sir Gawain blames Lady Bertilak for his loss of honour, and also insinuates the old woman (Morgan Le Fay) who was seen little through this story, and had no contact with Lady Bertilak aside from her first introduction.[[42]](#footnote-42) When it is revealed that this old woman was actually Morgan in disguise, Sir Gawain is somewhat appeased as she was the mastermind behind the plot, but still attempts to blame both women for the loss of his honour and thus chivalric values and honesty.

The true nature of women’s love is attacked by the author, and whether women could be capable of true love, or whether it was merely trickery by women. Due to Lady Bertilak’s actions, “a sense of personal injury,” afflicts Sir Gawain, as he believed that Lady Bertilak’s seduction was real and that she had come to care for him.[[43]](#footnote-43) Her ultimate trickery leads Sir Gawain and the audience to believe that her love had not been true and that instead it was merely “corruption of the flesh.”[[44]](#footnote-44) While men were seen to be capable of courtly love, and were supposed to use the frameworks of courtly love to guide their relationships, this poem demonstrates that women did not have to adhere to the constructs of courtly love, to men’s downfall which could be seen in courtly life. This is further emphasized with Guinevere’s treachery, revealed in other poems, of her relationship with Sir Lancelot, and continues the author’s warnings of the threat posed to men by women. It is noted by many scholars that if Guinevere had adhered to society’s ideals of women, then the Round Table would not have collapsed, and while Guinevere is shown as a meek, silent, beautiful woman in this poem, readers would have been aware of other poems that detailed Guinevere’s relationship with Lancelot.[[45]](#footnote-45) The author attempts to subvert Morgan’s control over the males in this story however, when the Green Knight is revealed as Lord Bertilak and strikes Sir Gawain three times, but refuses to kill him. “If men could redefine and thereby control experience for other men…then Morgan’s power would be diffused,” and gender roles would assume their natural order, according to societal norms.[[46]](#footnote-46)

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was written during a time where courtly values and gender structures were necessary to society, but were under attack by the increasing number of women at court and knights turned their attention to seducing these women rather than their courtly values. Sir Gawain was seen as one of the most heroic knights of the Round Table, which is enhanced in this story when he is the only knight willing to accept the Green Knight’s challenge. The beginning of the story introduces a male protagonist and antagonist, typical to most other poems of the time, and it is only at the poem’s conclusion that it is revealed the whole plot was conducted due to a woman, but her role is diminished. The author attempts to stay within societal guidelines, while still trying to promote the underlying theme of this poem which proves that women can be dangerous to men’s chivalric honour and values. While women were involved in other medieval poems, they were minor characters who often held little sway in the plot, contrary to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*  Morgan’s role is diminished at the end of the story, and this can be seen as an attempt by the author to maintain readership, but still to ensure that he illustrates the idea that women can be dangerous. The author uses the three women in this poem to indicate these themes, using Guinevere as an example of what a courtly woman should be, and the Old Lady, or Morgan, and Lady Bertilak as the examples of what not to be. Through these different women, the author proves that women who do not follow courtly values can greatly harm males, and in Sir Gawain’s case, his honour which was highly prized. While the author had to reduce the impact of women’s roles in this story, possibly in an attempt to ensure readership, his point is clearly proven that women can be dangerous to men and their chivalric values and honour.

In conclusion, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was an attempt from the author to demonstrate to readers of the dangers of women to men’s chivalric values, honour, and their status as knights. The increasing number of women at court had led to knights turning their attention away from their courtly values and chivalry, to attempts to seduce women, causing potential threats to political life and distractions for these knights, which this author tries to subtly hint to his audience. While the author had to adhere to societal norms in his poem, using a male character as the main protagonist, he reveals at the end of the poem that these events were orchestrated by a woman, which is softened when it appears that Morgan’s goal was to upset Guinevere. By limiting Morgan’s treachery to Guinevere, the author subtly tries to demonstrate to the audience that women could be a threat to men, even while they were attempting to harm another woman. The author recognized that this poem still had to stay within societal norms in order to be liked by the audience, but at the same time included subtle hints that demonstrated the danger that women could pose to men’s knighthood, honour, and chivalric values. The three women mentioned in this story either acted outside of societal norms, or in Guinevere’s case, her character was adjusted to suit the author’s purpose. The changing nature of society was reflected in these characters, and the threat to men that was caused by women acting outside of societal norms, such as the seduction of Sir Gawain by Lady Bertilak. This seduction was finally admitted by Sir Gawain after Lord Bertilak revealed that he knew of the broken agreement between them, and Sir Gawain attempts to shift the blame to Lady Bertilak for her treachery and making him succumb to her wiles. While the author has to remain primarily within societal norms and customs with this poem, he is able to introduce undertones to this story that demonstrate to the reader the dangers that women could pose to men’s chivalric honour and values.

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