

In many of the texts we read in class, if not all, there is a significant amount of change in the story because of generations of translating. Most of these stories began as early as the sixth century. Others come a little later. For example, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, written by an unknown poet, was written in the fourteenth century. There is now a movie titled “The Green Knight” written, produced, and edited by David Lowery that came out in 2021. These two, while they are the same story, have vast differences that change how the story is read. Especially when it comes to religion, it is portrayed much differently now than it was in earlier centuries. Another example would be *Beowulf*, a poem written somewhere between 975-1025 by an anonymous author just like the *Green Knight*. This story has hints of Paganism and rituals but has an overlaying theme of Christianity. The *Green Knight* also has a mix of these two completely different religions, and it is interesting to see the differences in the early versions of these texts and more modern takes.

The *Green Knight* was originally titled “*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*” written by an anonymous poet in the fourteenth century. The original follows the youngest knight, Sir Gawain on a quest to fulfill a challenge given to him by the Green Knight. The legend is that at a New Year’s feast, the Green Knight crashed a party in Camelot. Sir Gawain is Arthur’s nephew and is at this feast when the knight shows up. The Green Knight says, “One of you gets to strike me now, then in one year, I get to strike you back the same way” (Edelman, 2021). In response to this, Sir Gawain beheads the knight. The Green Knight then proceeds to pick up his own head and tell Gawain to meet him at the Green Chapel in exactly one year. A year later, Gawain makes the difficult journey to the Green Chapel. Towards the end of his journey, he meets Lord and Lady Bertilak. They allow him to rest and Lord Bertilak makes a deal with Gawain. This deal was that the Lord would bring back whatever he hunted that day and give it to Gawain, but in return Gawain must give anything he receives while the Lord is away to him when he gets back. Gawain agrees to this deal.

The first time Lord Bertilak goes hunting, he leaves Gawain with his wife, Lady Bertilak. While the Lord is away, Lady Bertilak attempts to seduce Gawain but gets away with only one kiss because Gawain rejects her. When the Lord returns, Gawain gives him one kiss to keep their deal. The next day, Lady Bertilak manages to get two kisses from Gawain, so when the Lord returns, Gawain gives him two kisses as well. On the third day, Lady Bertilak kisses him three times, but also gifts him a green silk girdle. She claims this girdle is magic and will protect him from death and harm. Gawain accepts this gift, but does not give it to the Lord, therefore breaking their deal.

Once Gawain finally made it to face the Green Knight, the knight attempts to slay him in the same way Gawain slayed him: by beheading him. But he swings once and stops just short of his neck. On his second swing he did the same thing. And on the third swing he strikes Gawain but only enough to make a small cut on the back of his neck. The Knight then reveals himself as Lord Bertilak, and that he had done this with sorcery done by Morgan Le Fay. He says the blood that was drawn on the third strike was punishment for not returning the gift on the third day. Gawain was unknowingly going through a chivalry test. After this realization, he is sent home with the girdle still wrapped around his arm.

So, in the original, sorcery and witchcraft are very prevalent. The *Green Knight* itself was sorcery done by Morgan Le Fay and even the girdle holds its’ own “magic.” The movie

adaptation focuses more on the Christianity aspect than the original poem. In the movie, the green Knight is created by Morgan Le Fay using a ritual involving bone, a blindfold, and fire. But, on top of this, Lowery includes many Christian symbols that are not originally used in the poem. For example, Lowery makes the Green Knight appear on Christmas day compared to New Years in the original. This is an immediate hint towards the switch of traditions. Lowery also includes Christian sentiments in King Arthor's speech. He says, "I thank thee for breaking bread with me on this blessed day" (Lowery, 2021). The king also mentions celebrating the birth of Christ. The villagers all attend mass, and Sir Gawain even uses a shield with an image of Mary blessed with holy water. None of those religious aspects are present in the poem.

Another difference is Margan Le Fay. In the original, she is a sorcerer who creates the Green Knight. In the movie version, while she is still the sorcerer who made the Green Knight, she is also Gawain's mother. This adds an interesting aspect to the story as Morgan is now much closer to Gawain than in the original. Morgan Le Fay shows an opposition between two traditions, and has the Green Knight created with pagan roots versus the rest of the knights that the king claims to be Christian. This poem is based during the fall of the western Roman Empire and Christianity was on the rise. People who were Pagan for centuries started to accept and consider Christian beliefs.

By the end of the movie, Gawain does not have the same fate. In the original, he keeps the girdle and goes home. But, in the movie, Gawain gives the girdle back to the Green Knight, and this is what determines that he "passed the test." It ends with the Green Knight saying, "now off with your head!" before the screen goes black so we are not totally sure about Gawain's fate. What we do know is that it was seen as "honorable" for him to give the girdle back as it meant he would no longer be under its' protection. The girdle represents an attachment to mortal life, so giving it away is another sign of religion as well.

Similarly, the original Beowulf has many topics that oppose Christianity. It is originally about Beowulf defeating Grendel, and Grendel's mother then proceeding to attack. Beowulf defeats both and becomes King of the Geats. Fifty years later, Beowulf must defeat a dragon and he does, but dies in the process. It is argued whether Beowulf predates Christian ideologies, but it is a fact that both Paganism and Christianity are present here. The idea that you survive through God and everything good you receive comes from God. In the original, he says, "The fight would have ended straightaway if God had not guarded me." (Little, 1). But there is also selfishness, and pride that gets in the way of these ideologies. Beowulf has this need to "prove" himself and gloat about his accomplishments. This does not align with Christian beliefs.

Grendel, on the other hand, represents Pagan beliefs as she is seen as the "evil" and Beowulf is seen as the "good." The importance they put on the swords and other weapons is also an example of Paganism. In Maria Dahvana Headley's translation, she changes these concepts by using modern language like "bro" and commonly used swears. She also sees and writes this with a more feminist point of view. In her introduction, she says, "Beowulf is usually seen as a masculine text, but I think that's somewhat unfair. The poem, while (with one exception) not constructed around the actions of women, does contain extensive portrayals of motherhood and peace-weaving marital compromise, female warriors, and speculation on what it means to lose a son." (Headley, xxiii).

Headley, just like Lowery in the *Green Knight*, changes the depiction of Beowulf based on her own ideals. Seeing texts translated over time and seeing the differences made by these translations is remarkably interesting especially when it comes to the religion aspect. Times have changed so much that it is inevitable that there will be changes in the depiction of religion and religious characters, and David Lowery's depiction of "The Green Knight" and Maria Headley's depiction of "Beowulf" do just that.

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