**Comparative analysis of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and its 2021 film adaptation: the evolution of the image of female characters**

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There is no doubt that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is one of the greatest masterpieces of medieval literature. This literary work impressively weaves female roles into its narrative, presenting them as key characters and reflecting the social values of the medieval period. The 2021 film adaptation, based on the original poem, reflects the evaluation of female roles in medieval literature and their perception within the society of that time. This study is an attempt to analyze and differentiate the reflection of the social roles of female characters in the alliterative poem and the 2021 film adaptation.

Guinevere, the wife of King Arthur, is probably one of the most famous female characters in the entire scope of Aurthurian legends. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* the woman does not receive great attention, yet her characterization is crucial for understanding the role of women in the Middle Ages. The Queen is the first woman present in the narrative. The woman occupies a place in the middle of the table, which implies her central position in relation to other heroines and even knights. Guinevere indeed serves as an example of an ideal of femininity and moral uprightness. What is more important, it is the lack of independence and her own voice that constitutes this perfection.

By contrast, David Lowery makes Guinevere a complex heroine. At first, she might seem a traditional female, who is defined only with respect to her husband. For instance, the episode in the grand hall, when the King calls Gawain to sit next to him is of particular interest. While the knight is approaching, the frame is focused on the royal throne and the woman remains unnoticed until her husband mentions her presence. Only at this moment, the woman appears to the viewer.

Still, the role of the Queen is expanded when she becomes responsible for delivering the message of the Green Knight to the whole Camelot’s audience. The power of her words can be interpreted as a catalyst for Gawain’s readiness to accept the challenge. Nevertheless, an important remark regarding this part is to be made. Guinevere does not sound like herself, instead she acquires a decidedly male timber, which in fact belongs to the Green Knight. This complicates the portrayal of the heroine, who, on the one hand, is not as marginalised as in the poem, but on the other hand, still perceived as insignificant and controlled by men.

The wife of Lord Bertilak is also worth discussing. The woman’s physical appearance is described as exceedingly charming and elegant, which cannot be unnoticed by the knight. Consequently, the lady skilfully uses her allure to manipulate Gawain and her behavior contradicts the medieval idea of women being unable to act on their own. The further analysis, however, reveals that lady Bertilak is not disobedient and independent; on the contrary, she is merely used by her husband, who dictates her actions in order to test the knight’s honesty and integrity. Therefore, the woman’s role is strictly limited to that of an object in “a grander, master design overseen by a male supervisor” [Heng 1991: 508].

In the film adaptation, Lady Bertilak’s nature is ambivalent. The heroine captures the attention of Gawain from the first appearance in Lowery’s work with her stunning exterior, achieved by means of various visual elements. Later, Lady Bertilak, although guided by her husband, is endowed with agency that becomes evident with Gawain’s inability to resist her advances. It proves the idea that the woman may influence the main character’s fundamental notions of chivalry.

Another major female character in The Green Knight is Morgan le Fay. Unfortunately, in the modern world, Morgan le Fay and Morgause are often presented as one character and their names are used interchangeably, which is a misjudgment. Morgan le Fay is Gawain’s aunt, and in many medieval sources the woman is known as a dangerous sorceress and King Arthur’s main opponent. Morgan le Fay is one of the major characters that covertly contributes to the plot development of the story. The reader is introduced to an elderly noble lady, who is shown hideously ugly, and serves as a tool to emphasize Lady Bertilak’s beauty. At the same time, the heroine in this episode helps the young knight to reveal chivalrous qualities such as virtue and politeness towards women.

In the film adaptation *The Green Knight*, cunning Morgan le Fay is in the guise of an ugly maid in Bertilak’s castle who is also used as an instrument underlying the elegance of Bertilak’s wife. On the one hand, the jealous sister acts as the main villain of the story as the female created a green monster to scare her brother's wife Guinevere to death. On the other hand, the heroine can be viewed as the mother figure, who helps Gawain to integrate into the society of that time. Thus, the role of Morgan le Fay highlights the ambivalence inherent in women of that period, as females could be perceived as caring figures or as sources of danger [Hark 1974].

To conclude, it can be seen that the portrayal of female heroines in *The Green Knight*, the 2021 film adaptation of the popular Arthurian legend, has not undergone significant transformations. Having been shot in the world with drastically different attitudes to women compared to those of medieval society, the film still reflects stereotypes regarding females’ roles and agency.

**References**

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