

# **In with the Old and the New: Objects and Meaning in *The Green Knight***

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The present study is an overview of different objects from the movie, their significance in relation to each other and the characters they are associated with. Material objects in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are potent signs, involved in a relation to symbolic meaning which is typically medieval. The movie adaptation also features a network of symbols reminiscent of medieval semantics, but in a different light. The present pages offer an analysis of a few examples from *The Green Knight*, ranging from the iconic objects from the poem — the pentangle and the girdle — to new objects added by Lowery, namely the pair constituted by Essel's bell and the Lady's book. The aim is to explore how the pentangle and the girdle, although part of the original work, undergo semantic variations, while the additions, although specific to the contemporary movie, remain open to medieval frames of interpretation, the two categories thus accommodating both the "old" and the "new".

## **1. Iconic objects from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: variations in the pentangle and the girdle**

### **1.1 The pentangle, from the individual to the collective**

The pentangle is introduced in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as a powerful symbol and has prompted many interpretations by scholars. Its emblematic value makes it a potent vehicle for Gawain's five Christian virtues: friendship, fraternity, purity, politeness, and pity.<sup>1</sup> The interlace

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Armitage, trans., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (W.W. Norton and Company, 2008), ll. 652-54. ("fraunchyse", "felawschyp", "clannes", "cortaysye" and "pité").

pattern of this "endless knot"<sup>2</sup> has consistently been seen as furthering Gawain's portrayal as an incorruptible ideal<sup>3</sup>, a reading explicitly endorsed by the medieval text itself.<sup>4</sup> Setting up Gawain as the "perfect" knight, the pentangle represents the reputation he fails to live up to by accepting the girdle later in the poem. In the words of Brian Stone, it establishes for the reader the "composite quality of perfection against which Gawain's eventual fault, faithlessness (ME *untrawþe*, line 2509, of which the green girdle is the token) must be measured".<sup>5</sup> In his article "Structure and Symmetry in *Sir Gawain*," Donald Howard even presents a table paralleling the introductory scenes of the pentangle and the girdle, showing how each object acquires a deeper meaning when scrutinized together.<sup>6</sup> His main point, focusing on the narrative segments of the poem that follow the introduction of each symbol, is that:

The same kinds of events, in exactly the same order, occur in either part, and they center upon the three temptations in the first sequence and the three strokes of the ax in the second, with a confession following in each. These parallel contrasts are used artistically to distinguish Gawain's temptation and fall from his punishment and pardon.<sup>7</sup>

In the movie, this structural parallel is partially rendered in the scenes surrounding Gawain's departure, showing, one might say, "interlaced" shots

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 630. ("endeles knot").

<sup>3</sup> Richard Morris, ed., *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight*, Moncreiffe Classics, 2021, p. 133.

<sup>4</sup> "So it suits this soldier in his spotless armor, fully faithful in five ways five times over", Simon Armitage, trans., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (W.W Norton and Company, 2008), ll. 631-2. ("Forthy hit acordes to this knyght and to his cler armes/ For ay faythful in fyve and sere fyve sythes").

<sup>5</sup> Brian Stone, trans., *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* (Penguin Classics, 1974), p. 149.

<sup>6</sup> Donald R. Howard, "Structure and Symmetry in *Sir Gawain*", *Speculum*, University of Chicago Press, 39, no. 3 (July 1964), p. 430.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

of Morgan's ritual of weaving the girdle and the Queen's blessing of Gawain with her speech on the "five sets of five"<sup>8</sup>:

May the Blessed Virgin keep your five fingers strong, your five senses sharp, may her five joys inspire you, the five wounds of her son give you fervor, may the five virtues of a knight light your way. Keep your covenant, young Gawain.<sup>9</sup>

The speech is the closest thing in the movie to lines 640-661 in the poem, which expands on the pentangle as a symbol of the "five sets of five".

While the scene in the movie puts them in opposition with the pagan beliefs that Morgan channels in the making of the girdle, the pentangle itself makes but a brief appearance during the speech, in a single shot on Gawain's shield. The practical reason for the lack of visual attention drawn to it has to do with the shift in medium: lines and lines of description for it are unnecessary because the eye of the audience can comprehend what it looks like in a single shot, in a classical instance of switching from telling to showing. Even so, the "endless knot" could have been exploited as part of Lowery's motif of circularity. Yet the pentangle remains confined to the Court: it is introduced as part of the knights' costumes and etched on the ground in Camelot's hall. Although it is visible on Gawain's shield, the object is broken shortly after it is brought outside the realm of the Court, so that it is never fully realized as Gawain's individuality. Gawain himself only acknowledges the pentangle in association with a collective ideal he is not yet part of ("I see legends"<sup>10</sup> he muses while looking at the symbol on the knights' costumes).

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<sup>8</sup> Simon Armitage, trans., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (W.W Norton and Company, 2008), 1.656. ("alle these fyve sythes").

<sup>9</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, from 33:35 to 34:58.

<sup>10</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, at 12:35.

The narrative reason behind this relegation is that the Gawain in the movie is not a knight yet, and he certainly is not the paragon of Christian virtues he is described as in the poem — his first appearance is in a brothel on Christmas morning — so there is no reason for the pentangle to be emblematic of his character, or to stay with him for the entirety of his journey. In fact, giving the pentangle the same significance to Gawain in the adaptation as in the medieval poem would go against the movie's point, which is first and foremost to show an imperfect and unaccomplished protagonist. Dissociated from Gawain, the pentangle here signifies knighthood as a status rather than the moral virtues of a specific character. It remains attached to a group and cannot endure very long outside of the place that group occupies within the narrative. Its five virtues are not introduced in the movie as Gawain's, but as those evidenced by the declining health of the King and Queen, as well as the low saturation in the Court scenes. One of the few shots on the pentangle shows blood (from the beheaded Green Knight) and moss (sprouting from his axe) spreading over the symbol on the ground of Camelot Hall.



Figure 1: *The Green Knight* (2021), at 22:49.

The shot echoes the Lady's monologue on the color green:

When it blooms beneath our skin, we **bleed** it out. (...) **Moss** shall **cover your tombstone**, and as the sun rises **green shall spread** over all, in all its shades and hues. This verdigris will overtake your swords, and your coins and your battlements, and, try as you might, all you hold dear will succumb to it. Your skin, your bones. Your **virtue**.<sup>11</sup>

After the Court's attempt at bleeding the Green Knight out, the moss that has spread from his weapon does remain, overtaking the pentangle engraved on the stone floor. The shot thus foreshadows the challenging of the virtues of a decaying society, virtues that the pentangle professes as eternal. Thus, the pentangle as a symbol of perfection is constantly undermined as belonging to a declining order. The girdle gets a lot more traction and takes up more space because, as a symbol of Gawain's faults and imperfection, it falls perfectly in line with the flawed protagonist Lowery gives us.

### **1.2 The girdle, a double origin and a double ending.**

The girdle's meaning is fleshed out in the movie by its early appearance as a gift from Gawain's mother. It is a magical artifact she makes to protect him on his quest. The movie stresses the importance of the girdle as a hand-crafted charm achieving a maternal desire for protection. Its making by Morgan and her sisters is shown at length, and when the Lady gives it back to Gawain later in the movie, she insists on having "made it".<sup>12</sup> The girdle's suggested double origin gives it complex meaning. Gawain receives it twice from two different women. On its first occurrence, the object is the symbol of the protection and love of a mother.

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<sup>11</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, at 1:25:47, my emphases.

<sup>12</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, at 1:32:15.



Figure 2: Gawain's mother gives him the girdle, *The Green Knight* (2021), at 35:39.

It is later somewhat defiled, tainted by temptation and cowardice when Gawain accepts it from the Lady in a very ambiguous scene.



Figure 3: The girdle re-introduced by the Lady, *The Green Knight* (2021), at 1:32:09.

Girdles in the Middle Ages could signify, among other things, chastity,<sup>13</sup> an association already challenged by the poem, in which Gawain interprets it as a token of his shame.<sup>14</sup> In the movie, the Lady taking it off makes for a suggestive and sensual gesture. "Do you want it?" she asks, and the audience cannot be sure what "it" refers to. The desire for the girdle Gawain verbalizes when he answers "yes" is metonymic of his desire for the Lady. As shown

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<sup>13</sup> Stephen E. Moore, *Church Words : Origins and Meanings* (Forward Movement Publications, 1996), p. 54.

<sup>14</sup> "the symbol of sin, for which my neck bears the scar," Simon Armitage, trans., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (W.W Norton and Company, 2008), l. 2506. ("This is the bende of this blame I bere on my nek").

by the close-up on his semen, sexual desire and life instinct are here conflated in a scene that is therefore doubly erotic. The process of accepting the girdle follows the three steps to sin according to St. Augustine: suggestion, delectation and consent.<sup>15</sup> But Gawain is tempted by the girdle because he recognizes it as the gift his mother gave him ("Where did you get that?"<sup>16</sup> he says, the deictic *that* betraying his familiarity with the object), and the scene unfolds under the protective gaze of the disguised Morgan. Lowery's adaptation thus lays out the triangular relationship unfolding around the girdle, an object which means different things to different characters. To Morgan, it is her love for her son, to the Lady it symbolizes temptation and cowardice ("you are no knight" she says to Gawain's acceptance of it), and to Gawain it represents hope for survival.

The girdle also benefits from the alternate ending put forth by Lowery: the object is thus given a double resolution in addition to its double origin. The fact that it merges with him in one of the endings is indicative that his identity and everything he does and grows up to be from then on will be built upon the choice to rely on magic and lies to survive, so that the cowardice it denotes will become an integral part of his character. Friedman and Osberg mention the girdle as an instrument of "binding magic."<sup>17</sup> In this regard, choosing to keep it on is akin to a pact with the devil, an irreversible compromise of Gawain's character.

In the scenario when Gawain takes it off in front of the Green Knight, however, it completes the movie's coming-of-age story, because for the first

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<sup>15</sup> Brian Stone, trans., *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* (Penguin Classics, 1974), p.132, already mentions this in relation to the girdle as symbol of temptation in the poem.

<sup>16</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, at 1:32:15.

<sup>17</sup> Albert B. Friedman and Richard H. Osberg, "Gawain's Girdle as Traditional Symbol", *The Journal of American Folklore*, American Folklore Society, 90, no. 357 (September 1977), p. 309.

time he faces the world without motherly protection, and without committing to either of the (courtly and magical) orders that have been competing for his faith throughout the movie. Gawain's girdle, like the "spell about [his] waist" in the poem,<sup>18</sup> is closely associated with magic and temptation, but because of the change in meaning in the pentangle, as well as its double introduction and resolution, its focus is not on exposing the faults in his paragon of virtue. Like Gawain himself, the girdle is at the crossroads of ontological possibilities. Its function is to put him face to face with his own agency in order to coax him out of his childish fear of self-determination.

## **2. A new pair of objects: a medieval reading of the bell and the book**

### **2.1 The bell: Essel, time and marginality**

The bell and the book given to Gawain in the movie are Lowery's original additions to the story. The bell is closely linked to Essel (herself one of Lowery's inventions) and visualizes her presence throughout the movie. It is introduced as a gift from Essel to Gawain, and its value as a token is brought up several times.



Figure 4: Essel gives a token to Gawain, *The Green Knight* (2021), at 38:02.

It disappears from the narrative space for good when the Lady takes it from Gawain shortly after giving him her own gift, a book. The bell and the book

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<sup>18</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, at 1:38:33.



work together as opposing gifts from two characters that mirror each other (both the Lady and Essel are played by Alicia Vikander). Although it is an object which is specific to the movie, its relevance still relies heavily on medieval frames of interpretation. The sound it produces influences narrative time: when a nostalgic Gawain makes it ring close to his ear, it prompts a brief analepsis, visually taking the audience back to Essel doing the same.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 5: Gawain listens to the bell tinkle, *The Green Knight* (2021), at 38:00.

What is interesting here is the slight mismatch between the moment Gawain rings the bell and the mostly silent shot on Essel that follows. This conflates the sound produced by Gawain with the sound produced by Essel, in a scene that is therefore slightly off-kilter in the memory contained in the bell tinkle. The play on what is seen and what is heard makes the scene more dynamic and poses the question of time, which must be linear for such a sense of nostalgia to be instilled, but which can be rewound at any time thanks to the bell in a cyclical manner.

The association with time is relevant from a thematic point of view. Gawain gets the bell from Essel who asks him to make her his lady,<sup>20</sup> loses the bell only to find it again, before a Lady resembling Essel takes it from

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<sup>19</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, at 38:02.

<sup>20</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, at 38:37.

him a second time. In the medieval period, bells were used to ring the hour, thus playing a defining role in measuring time. The sound of the bell signifies the passage from one time another, evoking the passage of time towards death. When Gawain, on his way to certain death, rings the bell, he seeks comfort in the memory of a character full of life. In this regard the movie matches what medieval bells stand for, according to Fabienne Pomel: "[une] représentation du temps [...] comme intériorisé par un homme qui cherche à s'en assurer la maîtrise pour conjurer l'angoisse plus forte de la mort".<sup>21</sup>

This leads to the apotropaic function of bells in the medieval period,<sup>22</sup> which is evidenced in the movie when Gawain clutches the bell in moments of despair. Essel's bell is a token indeed, as he later says to the Lady, but maybe not as much a token of love as a talisman for comfort. When she asks: "For what, for good luck? For love?", his answer is: "No".<sup>23</sup> While he could be lying to please her, the possibility that he is saying the truth is interesting. Like every other circulating object in this movie, the bell encompasses much more than it seems. As a gift from Essel, it symbolizes her presence in Gawain's mind, the comfort of home and life, warding off uncertainties and fears along Gawain's journey to his death. The keepsake is lost once as he trips and falls, and a second time when the Lady takes it away, shortly after giving him a gift of her own. The loss of the bell at Hautdesert signals Gawain's point of no return.

Bells in medieval iconography are also a symbol of marginalized people, madness and spirituality, which makes perfect sense considering the bell's

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<sup>21</sup> Fabienne Pomel, ed., *Cloches et horloges dans les textes médiévaux* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012), p. 31.

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Marie Fritz, "Clochettes des parures et des montures : de la redondance à la *senefiance*", in Fabienne Pomel, ed., *Cloches et horloges dans les textes médiévaux* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012), p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, at 1:22:27.

original owner. Essel is a prostitute, and therefore a marginal. She has no interactions with any other character except for Gawain, whom she only meets in marginal places (the brothel, the forest...). She is almost a hermit, isolated from the other characters not only in terms of social rank and narrative involvement, but also by her takes on life, pleasure and goodness, which are at odds with the other forces of the Court and Morgan. The immaterial sound of the jingle bell she gives Gawain evokes, as mentioned earlier, time and comfort in the face of death, as well as what Karin Ueltschi calls "dérision".<sup>24</sup> Essel mocks the moral and social codes that Gawain feels beholden to, which she finds ridiculous and shallow, as she makes clear in the scene where she gives him the bell. Essel's bell is thus an efficient tool for characterization, and, in accordance with its medieval connotations, allows the questions of time, spirituality and marginality to coalesce within a single object.

## **2.2 The book: the Lady, love and knowledge**

The book is another addition by Lowery, somewhat paralleling the bell as it is a gift from the Lady to Gawain. The book operates on a double replacement logic. Within the movie's narrative and system of object circulation, the book replaces the bell previously given to Gawain by Essel, who, as mentioned earlier, functions as a mirror image of the Lady as well. The Lady snatches the bell from Gawain's neck right after giving him the book, the exchange enacting her character's supplanting Essel as the main focus of Gawain's attention.

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<sup>24</sup> Karin Ueltschi, "Clochettes, sonnettes et campanelles : la parure du carnaval", in Fabienne Pomel, ed., *Cloches et horloges dans les textes médiévaux* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012), p. 140.

In terms of adaptation, the book is used as substitution for the ring as the Lady's first gift. The ring is a more explicit and traditional love token, which Gawain refuses. The book is introduced by the Lady as a Christmas gift ("It is nearly Christmas"<sup>25</sup>) which, as opposed to its medieval counterpart, Gawain accepts. Despite the explicit context of Christmas, the book retains the ring's status in the poem, as a love token. The "Christmas gift" here is a mere cover-up for an illicit "love gift". In fact, one can argue that the book is an even better exemplification of a "courtly" love token than the bell, which as previously mentioned, does not actually function as such. In a chapter from *The Medieval Art of Love*, Michael Camille lists typical love gifts, including both books and rings, but not bells.<sup>26</sup>

The interactions between Gawain and the Lady in the library scene are also typical of the transactional nature of love gifts exchanged in a courtly setting. In fact, every aspect of the scene seems almost ritualistic in the deliberateness of the gift giving, in a complete subversion of the scene featuring Essel's spontaneous gift. The Lady gives the book to Gawain and demands a kiss in return ("Should not a knight offer a lady a kiss in thanks?"<sup>27</sup>), in accordance with the courtly usage displayed in the poem. Gawain complies, kissing her on the cheek. On the other hand, Essel's gift is a desperate gesture rather than a conventional one: she impulsively tears the bell from her costume and places it in Gawain's hand.

The book is heart-shaped, which adds to its relevance as a love token. It is briefly read aloud by Gawain, and its contents deal with profane love poetry.

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<sup>25</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, at 1:19:52.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Camille, "Love's Gifts", in *The Medieval Art of Love : Objects and Subjects of Desire*, (Harry N. Abrams, 1998), pp. 51-71.

<sup>27</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, at 1:20:14.

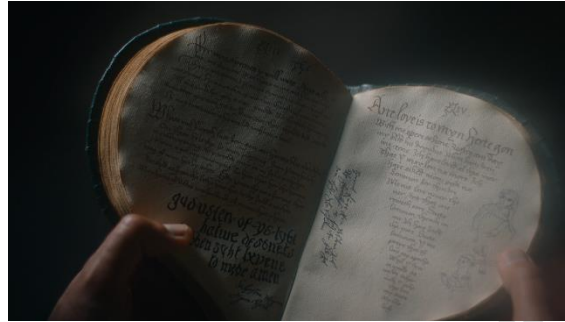


Figure 6: *The Green Knight* (2021), at 1:21:13.

Heart-shaped books became gradually more common from the end of the Middle Ages (The *Chansonniere cordiforme* was made about a century after *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was written).<sup>28</sup> The line read by Gawain, "Ant love is to myn herte gon wiþ one spere so kene,"<sup>29</sup> is an excerpt from the first stanza of a Middle English love poem entitled "When the Nightingale Sings," to be found in the Harley 2253 manuscript:

When þe nyhtegale singes þe wodes waxen grene.  
Lef ant gras ant blosme springes in aueryl y wene,  
Ant love is to myn herte gon wiþ one spere so kene  
Nyht ant day my blod hit drynkes myn herte deþ me tene.

When the nightingale sings, the trees grow green,  
Leaf and grass and blossom springs, in April, I suppose;  
And love has to my heart gone with a spear so keen,  
Night and day my blood it drains my heart to death it aches.<sup>30</sup>

Gawain reads the Middle English version aloud, more specifically the line about the lover's heart being pierced by the arrow of love (a *topos* of

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<sup>28</sup> "Reading the Book of the Heart from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century: A Valentine's Day Feature," accessed September 15, 2024. <https://press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/391167.html>.

<sup>29</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, at 1:21:13.

<sup>30</sup> Anniina Jokinen, trans., "When the Nyhtegale Singes," *Luminarium: Anthology of English Literature*, accessed October 22, 2024. <https://www.luminarium.org/medlit/medlyric/nyhtegale.php>.

romance), which reinforces the book's status as a medieval love token. The exact term appears in the latter part of the poem, but it is not read aloud by Gawain: "Sweet beloved, I pray thee / For a love token" ("Suede lemmon, Y preye thee/ Of a love-bene").<sup>31</sup> This is another evidence that the choice of the poem is not insignificant in regard to the narrative framing of the book itself. The natural motif pervading the poem also resonates thematically in Lowery's movie, linking the Lady to the magic embodied by the Green Knight, perhaps a nod to her effectively being the Green Knight's wife in the poem.

The book, like the bell, indeed works as an interesting characterization device for the character it originally belongs to. One could wonder about the fact that, as a medieval woman, she has access to so many books. After all, even Gawain says that he never knew so many even existed.<sup>32</sup> But this is not that strange. Libraries were established from the 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>33</sup> and, as Hoogvliet explains in her article on female literacy at the time, many noblewomen could read, sometimes write, and even often came to own a couple of books.<sup>34</sup> However, though some intellectuals enjoyed a small private library,<sup>35</sup> in the film the Lady's library is noticeably furnished, which implies the amount of time and money she must have dedicated to it, given the high cost of medieval manuscripts.

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<sup>31</sup> Anniina Jokinen, trans., "When the Nyhtegale Singes," *Luminarium: Anthology of English Literature*, accessed October 22, 2024. <https://www.luminarium.org/medlit/medlyric/nyhtegale.php>.

<sup>32</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, at 1:19:07.

<sup>33</sup> Sophie Cassagnes-Brouquet, *La Passion Du Livre Au Moyen-Age* (Editions Ouest-France, 2023), p. 21.

<sup>34</sup> Margriet Hoogvliet, "'Une petite Instruction pour femme séculière': lectures religieuses des femmes et bibliothèques à la fin du Moyen Age et au 16eme siècle", *La Revue de La BNU* 14 (2016): 36–43.

<sup>35</sup> Sophie Cassagnes-Brouquet, *La Passion Du Livre Au Moyen-Age* (Editions Ouest-France, 2023), p. 33.

But as previously mentioned, the Lady is closely associated with magic. She is shown drawing tarot cards,<sup>36</sup> and she supposedly made a magical girdle identical to the one Morgan gave to her son. The skills involved in the photography scene and the number of books she has not only read, but also written, or copied and bound, clearly appear as anachronistic and unrealistic. As part of an incredible collection, and because of its content and aspect that are reminiscent of the Green Knight (with green foliage patterns), the book further identifies the Lady as a character that is closely associated with magic.

Books also denote scholarly knowledge, suggesting that the Lady knows something that Gawain does not, which puts her in a dominant position. In the article "Writing as a Religious Lieu de Savoir", Hoogvliet and Corbellini quote Foucault's *Surveiller et Punir. Naissance de la Prison* to illustrate the relations between knowledge and power in the Middle Ages.<sup>37</sup> According to the latter, writing and reading are two integral aspects to knowledge: "The practice of the self includes reading and the compilation of personal notebooks, and should be considered as a process of accumulation of knowledge [...]"<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the Lady can indubitably be read as the most knowledgeable character, one who is prone to critical thinking, a fact evidenced by her monologue questioning the meaning of the color green and the entity of the Green Knight. She is in complete control of the scenes she shares with Gawain, because "there is no power relation without the correlative

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<sup>36</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, at 1:29:36.

<sup>37</sup> Margriet Hoogvliet and Sabrina Corbellini, "Writing as a Religious Lieu de Savoir", *Le Foucaldien* 7, no. 1 (2021).

<sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir. Naissance de la Prison* (Gallimard, 1975), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Vintage Books, 1995), as cited in Margriet Hoogvliet and Sabrina Corbellini, "Writing as a Religious Lieu de Savoir", *Le Foucaldien* 7, no. 1 (2021), p. 3.

constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations."<sup>39</sup>

Part of the Lady's power lies within her awareness of being a constituent in the narrative. The library scene is the very place where she delivers her line: "I write them down and – don't tell anyone this – when I see room for improvements, I make them".<sup>40</sup> The Lady's statement on her books is deliberately meta-referential, to the point where it was almost not included in the final script.<sup>41</sup> Thus, for the audience, the Lady is the closest vehicle to the narrator's voice. She is both part of the narrative and able to reflect on it. She is the only character to look directly into the camera, a break in the fourth wall that immediately follows her monologue, as if to appeal directly to the audience.

"Surely a knight knows something of love?" the Lady asks,<sup>42</sup> and interestingly as she gives him the book and takes the bell, she interrogates Gawain on love and knowledge in a way that encompasses both aspects of the object. The book as a love token synthesizes Gawain's triangular relationship with Essel and the Lady. It works as an adaptational stand-in for the ring and a narrative stand-in for the bell. As a symbol of knowledge, it also becomes a tool for the Lady's characterization as a figure well-versed in literature, love and magic, who is able to comment on her own fictional status.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to examine how each selected object from *The Green Knight* entertains a dual relationship to medieval and modern

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, at 1:19:25.

<sup>41</sup> David Lowery, "Foreword to *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight*," in *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight*, translated by Bernard O'Donoghue (Penguin Books, 2021), p. vii.

<sup>42</sup> *The Green Knight*, 2021, at 1:22:30.



semantics, which is typical of medievalist productions. The pentangle and the girdle thus appear as objects newly defined from the source text, while the bell and the book are newly introduced objects which reveal their full potential thanks to a medieval reading. All these objects become part of an organic system of signs to be read in light of one another.

Overall, this strengthens the idea that the movie, as an adaptation, not only injects modernity into the original work, but also builds upon medieval frames of reference to support its own contribution. The objects adapted from the poem into the movie are manipulated by Lowery, but his additions do not come *ex-nihilo*. The movie's engagement with its own source material is tinged with reciprocity.

These remarks aim at offering some exploratory insight into the movie's inner dynamics, allowing a deeper understanding of objects as a network operating *within* the movie, as well as across time and medium. For the sake of conciseness, I have only studied here a selection of particularly relevant objects, to be completed by other elements, namely Gawain's cloak, the Green Knight's axe and Morgan's use of handwritten text.