Going Dutch: David Lowery's 'Middeleeuws Nederlands' Debt; or, How Gawain Becomes the Knight of the Fox

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Conference on
Tradition and Innovation in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*
21-22 November 2024
Université de Lorraine,
Nancy, France

David Lowery's 2021 film *The Green* Knight is on track to being one of the most discussed and written about Arthurian films, easily overshadowing John Boorman's 1981 *Excalibur*,[1] though the 1975 comic romp *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* doubtless holds the record for being the most discussed Arthurian film. This year's conference in Nancy and last year's conference in Paris on Lowery's *The Green Knight* and its source, as well as the inclusion of the poem and the film on the French national examination, the *agrégation*, in 2024,[2] further attest to the interest that the film has generated in the academy.

[1] Lowery's film has attracted a great deal of both popular and scholarly attention. On *Rotten Tomatoes*, the film has garnered more than 330 reviews and more than a thousand verified ratings—readily outscoring John Boorman's 1981 film *Excalibur* which garnered a sharply divided critical reception. For a selected bibliography of scholarly critical discussions of the film, see the appendix to this essay.

[2] See the guide to the poem and the film published for examination takers: Sandra Gorgievski and Martine Yvernault, eds. *Agrégation anglais:* Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, *Anonyme (c. 1400);* The Green Knight, *Film de David Lowery (2021).* (Paris: Ellipses, 2023).

That the film lends itself to multiple continuing discussions is in large part due to the many ways in which Lowery and his colleagues have entered into a conversation with the fourteenth-century Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green* in particular and with the medieval in multiple forms in general.[3] In perhaps an unexpected example of critical understatement, Umberto Eco once opined 'that people seem to like the Middle Ages.'[4] Lowery and company are just such people.

We now know thanks to Dennis Tredy's excellent essay in *Arthuriana* that the initial screenplay for *The Green Knight* differs radically from that of the finished film.[5] Unlike the three previous attempts to film *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*—two almost ludicrous endeavors directed by Stephen Weeks released a decade apart in 1974 and in 1984 and a plodding made-for-TV 1991 version directed by John Michael Phillips, Lowery's film engages successfully with its source. The opening voice over echoes the alliterative verse form found in the poem, telling us that the film is not going to be about 'the boy who pulled sword from stone.' The camera

[3] I have previously discussed the conversation Lowery carries out with his source. See Kevin J. Harty, 'David Lowery's *The Green Knight*: A Film Director in Conversation with a Middle English Poem,' in Sandra Gorgievski and Martine Yvernault, eds. *Agrégation anglais*, pp. 161-73.

[4] Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*. trans. William Weaver. (San Diego: Harvest Books, 1986), p. 61.

[5] Dennis Tredy, '"The forme to the fynisment foldes ful selden" (l. 499): A Comparison of David Lowery's Screenplay and His 2021 Film Adaptation *The Green Knight*,' *Arthuriana* 34 (Spring 2024): 21-44.

then fades to a woman and a man exiting an enclosure whose tower is aflame; she mounts a horse, and the man leads her off the screen. The cast credits at the end of the film indicate that the woman, is Helen (as in Helen of Troy) and the man is Paris (as in the Prince of Troy). What are these two Homeric characters doing in Lowery's film? They are there because Lowery and company have done their homework by engaging with the poem. References to the Trojan War frame the narrative in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*:

> When the war and the siege of Troy were all over
> and the city flattened to smoking rubble,
> the man who'd betrayed in was brought to trial,
> most certainly guilty of terrible crimes. (ll. 1-4)
>
> . . . .
>
> Well, such was this adventure in the days of King Arthur,
> which book of the Britons gives evidence of.
> After Brutus, that brave man, came over first
> when the siege and the battle were over at Troy
> long ago. (ll. 2522-6)[6]

[6] Lowery contributed a forward to a reprint of Bernard O'Donoghue's 2006 translation of the Middle English poem, 'Forward to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,' in *The Green Knight*, ed. and trans. by Bernard O'Donoghue (2006; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 2021), p. vii—originally this translation was published under the title *Sir Gawain and the Knight*. I quote from, and refer to, the 2021 edition

In both poem and film, it is Christmas, and there is to be a Christmas game whose terms are dedicated by a huge verdant visitor, who shows up at the court. The film's court is presumably Camelot, though the King and Queen are not identified by name. However, another major Arthurian player in the film—Morgan is identified in the cast list and credits as simply Mother. It is she, the poem eventually reveals, who is clearly the *magistra ludi* of this Christmas game. Gawain, in both film and poem, must wait a year to complete his part of the game. In both poem and film, Gawain is symbolically armed with regalia deeply steeped in Christian belief—and eventually sports a green sash or girdle whose associations are decidedly more pagan. The interplay between pagan and Christian in the poem has long been the subject of scholarly comment. In both the film and poem, Gawain has a horrific passage through nature encountering different examples of the marvelous along the way.

Eventually, Gawain finds respite in the castle of a more than generous, though in the film also nameless, Lord and Lady, who play a second game of exchanges with their guest. After regaining his strength, but not necessarily salvaging his reputation, Gawain leaves his hosts, and is encouraged to abandon his promise to receive a blow from the Green Knight. Gawain's eventual encounter with the Green

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of O'Donoghue translation throughout this essay, since Lowery has given it his personal imprimatur. The DVD release of the film includes, as extras, interviews with the director and members of his creative team, all of which show in detail how they engaged with both the poem and the medieval in general.

Knight does not turn out well, and, in the poem, a chastened Gawain returns to Arthur's court presumably wiser than his knightly confrères about the ways of the world and the tenets of chivalry. In contrast, the film offers several endings, each differently coloring Lowery's final conversations with his source.

Lowery just as significantly departs from his source as he follows it. His King and Queen are not, like Arthur and Guinevere in the poem, in the flower of their youth. They are, instead, old and somewhat feeble, and eventually dead by the end of the film. Morgan is Gawain's mother, not his aunt. Gawain beheads the Green Knight not with the visitor's massive axe but with the King's sword. Gawain is not yet a knight—indeed, he is more than a bit of a slacker, content, it would seem, to whore and drink, rather than to earn fame and reputation by performing deeds of derring-do. In an oft-referenced interview in *Vanity Fair*, Lowery admits that his Gawain suffers from 'failure-to-launch syndrome.'[7]

Gawain's passage through nature involves his initial crossing paths with a fox, his surveying a battlefield littered with hundreds, if not thousands, of dead bodies—allegedly over 900 of whom were killed by the King himself—his being mugged by

[7] See Joanna Robinson, 'Director David Lowery on *The Green Knight*'s Eerie Influences,' *Vanity Fair* 16 July 2021 at https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2021/07/the-green-knight-david-lowery-preview-dev-patel-willow-influences?srsltid=AfmBOorlE8o8BZkER9eVEhc6ruox905smf66ffGtyCPC4xldRxAdz_a5. Accessed 11 November 2024.

a scavenger, his meeting St. Winifred, his consuming some hallucinogenic mushrooms, and his encountering a group of giants. The encounter with St. Winifred is significant narratively and thematically. Winifred is the only Christian saint to face martyrdom by beheading who survived her ordeal, who had her head restored to its rightful place on her shoulders, and who went on for decades to lead an exemplary life. That St. Winifred's intercession and protection are specifically invoked against unwanted sexual advances is spot on for further developments in the film.[8]

The castle where Gawain finally finds refuge is home to a Lord and Lady, both bigger than life, whose actions sometimes comfort, and other times discomfort, their guest. As in the poem, the Host hunts and offers his quarry to Gawain asking in return for whatever his guest has received while his host was away from home. Gawain doesn't quite live up to his part of the bargain with the Host—nor eventually with the Green Knight. Gawain and the Green Knight do indeed meet up, but, unlike the poem, Lowery offers two versions of that second encounter. It is tempting to suggest that the film's alternate endings nod not to a medieval source but to a nineteenth-century American literary one.

[8] On the narrative and thematic importance of Lowery's inserting St. Winifred into his film when there is no mention of her in the Middle English poem, see Kevin J. Harty, 'Spoiling the Sport, Upping the Ante, and Calling His Bluff: Why St. Winifred Appears in David Lowery's 2021 Film *The Green Knight*.' *Studies in Medievalism* 32 (2023): 11-19.

In Ambrose Bierce's 1890 short story 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,' wealthy plantation and slave owner Peyton Farquhar is to be hanged during the American Civil War by Yankee soldiers for his coming to the aid of the Confederacy. As Farquhar seemingly drops from the bridge to his death, the rope around his neck breaks, and he suddenly awakens and makes his way back to his home and family. It is eventually revealed that Farquhar never really escaped. Instead, he only imagined he did so in the moment between falling from the bridge and his neck being snapped by the hangman's noose. Lowery's Gawain too imagines an escape from seeming death only, at the end of the film, to find himself still beneath the blade of the Green Knight's great axe. Tredy in his essay on the final film's differences from the original screenplay suggests that the final version of the film nods to multiple other non-medieval sources and inspirations as well.[9]

The Foxes

Unlike its medieval source, Lowery's film gives us several foxes. A dead fox does indeed appear in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the spoils of Sir Bertilak's

[9] See note 5 above. For the text of the Bierce short story in print, see J.T. Joshi, ed., *Ambrose Bierce: The Devil's Dictionary, Tales, & Memoirs*. Ypsilanti, MI: Library of America, 2011. The complete text of the short story is also available for free on line at: https://loa-shared.s3.amazonaws.com/static/pdf/Bierce_Owl_Creek_Bridge.pdf. The short story was in 1961 made into a short film by Robert Enrico, *La Rivière du hibou* which was subsequently in 1964 shown on American television as an episode of *The Twilight Zone* as episode 22 of season 5.

third day of hunting. But the film's fox is not dead; he even talks! The fox appears throughout the rest of the film as Gawain's companion, notably as Gawain journeys through the film's almost post-Apocalyptic, hellish wasteland.[10] The fox is indeed captured by the Lord of the Castle, but not killed, and eventually tries to dissuade Gawain from journeying to the Green Chapel, usurping the role played in the poem by one of Sir Bertilak's servants. But we encounter other foxes in the film, before and after the extended appearance of Gawain's vulpine sidekick.

Fox # 1

When the Green Knight appears at court, he wields a huge green axe. As I have noted, unlike in the poem, Gawain does not use that axe to behead the verdant visitor. Instead, he uses a sword, one he borrows from, and will eventually return with bloodied blade to, the King. Gawain specifically states that 'I need a sword.' The camera then pans the faces of the supposedly unmatched heroes of the court, all of whom fail to offer their swords, many of whom turn their heads away from Gawain. If the King is indeed Arthur, then the sword may well be Excalibur. But again, Lowery is fond of playing fast and loose with bits and pieces of Arthuriana—and the medieval—in his film, as in the anachronistic architecture of the Lod and the Lady's dining hall in 'An Exchange of Winnings', or the Guignol(esque) puppets at the beginning of 'A Too Quick Year'.

[10] Tredy refers to the fox as Gawain's 'four-legged Virgil,' p. 17.

The Green Knight survives decapitation, stands up, retrieves his head, and begins to talk—a seemingly miraculous deed found in the lives of any number of decapitated saints who walk with their heads in hand to their chosen places of burial—France's St. Denis being one of the most famous of the more than one hundred martyrs who are designated cephalophore saints.[11] St. Winifred is the sole exception. After she is decapitated, her head is miraculously replaced by her uncle, St. Beuno, atop her neck and shoulders, and she goes on for decades to lead a holy life. When the Green Knight rides out from court laughing and holding his head aloft not unlike Washington Irving's Headless Horseman of Tim Burton's film *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), he leaves the great green axe behind. The axe is then wrapped in a green cloth and stored in a wooden chest. But, before it is put away until it is needed by Gawain for his visit a year later to the Green Chapel, we are given a quick shot of the massive weapon. Halfway down the hilt, there is the carved head of the Green Knight himself. And, more interestingly, three figures forming a circle are etched into the axe's massive blade. Those figures are a stag, a boar, and a fox—the three quarries of Sir Bertilak's hunt in the poem, the first two of which the Host also kills in the film. We thus meet our first fox even before Gawain sets out on his journey in an etching that foreshadows events to come in the film. The three etched

[11] The word *cephalophore* comes from the Greek for 'head-carrier'. For a catalogue of cephalophore saints, see Émile Noury, 'Les saints céphalophores : Étude de folklore hagiographique,' *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 99 (1929):158-231.

animals are indeed those from the poem. According to multiple medieval bestiaries, the stag represents nobility; the boar, ferocity; and the fox, deceit and mendacity. But Lowery's fox, or foxes, are not so easily characterized.

Fox # 3—I'll discuss Fox # 2 later in this essay.

On his way to visit the Lady of the Castle in what turns out to be her private library, Gawain does a double take as he passes a painting hanging on the wall. Viewers too might do a double take. At first glance, the painting seems to be none other than *The Hunt in the Forest* by the Italian Renaissance master Paolo di Dona, dubbed Uccello, "bird" in Italian (1395-1475), because his most notable works depict scenes in nature. *The Hunt* is painted on wood, probably dates from the 1460s, and now hangs in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Its colors are purposely bright, and the wooden panel contains flecks of gold. Specifically, it is a *spalliera* painting, one meant to be viewed at shoulder height. There is a hunt at night with brightly garbed nobles on horseback, beaters, and dogs running every which way in mad pursuit of several clearly panicked harts. Such confusion and mayhem run counter to the advice proffered in medieval and Renaissance hunting manuals. The scene itself is fanciful—symbolic, if not allegorical.

Closer inspection reveals that the gold flecks in the trees and bright colors of the costumes of the figures in the painting are complemented by the dark forest, and the painting would as a result have been even more beautiful when viewed by

candlelight at shoulder height. The trappings of the horses bear a crescent moon, the symbol of Diana, the goddess of the hunt and of chastity—hunts and chastity (or its lack) also being central to both the poem and the film. The moon faintly appears as well top center in the painting, further underscoring a second possible connection of the scene to Diana, and any attendant symbolism or allegory. Both Petrarch and Boccaccio suggested that such a hunt was a metaphor for the male experience of love. Therefore, when we watch Gawain walking by what appears to be Uccello's *The Hunt* on his way to the Lady's Library, we might logically be tempted to see Gawain as playing a role in an allegory about love and chastity—two themes certainly not foreign either to the film or its Middle English source.[12]

But the painting hanging on the wall in *The Green Knight* only appears to be Uccello's *The Hunt*. The viewer, like Gawain, is meant to do a double take. The object of the hunt in the picture hanging on the wall in the film is *not* a hart, but a fox. And the associations of each animal for audiences, medieval and modern, are markedly different. We have seen that fox before,[13] and will do so again, later in the film in 'A Beheading at the Green Chapel'. The fox is no symbol of chastity, or love;

[12] For a discussion of the *The Hunt*, see Catherine Whistler, *Paolo Uccello's 'The Hunt in the Forest'* (Oxford: The Ashmolean Museum, 2010). On the link to Diana in the painting and in Roman poetry, see Christopher Lloyd, *A Catalogue of the Earlier Italian Paintings in the Ashmolean Museum* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 172-5.

[13] The fox first appears in the woods in 'A Kindness,' at the end of 'A Meeting with St. Winifred,' then in 'An Interlude'.

he is clearly a symbol of deceit and betrayal—themes, along with confusion and mayhem, always running just below the surface in *The Green Knight*, especially in the scenes in the Lady's library and in Gawain's bedchamber that follow in the film. By showing us what we might wrongly believe to be Uccello's *The Hunt* and then switching the object of that hunt from a hart to a fox, Lowery has in this scene further linked Gawain to his vulpine sidekick. Then, to add further to the mix here, Gawain later in the evening walks by the painting again on his way to his bedchamber. Once again, Gawain does a doubletake—as does the viewer—when he finds his own image inserted into the painting madly pursued by a hunter on horseback. The hart has become the fox, and the fox has literally become Gawain. Hugh Hudson points out a key feature in Uccello's use of perspective in *The Hunt*: 'most of the riders' heads are aligned with the horizon, while the heads of those on foot are all lower. This implies that the viewer is on the same level as the riders, and given the flat terrain, might be on a horse, and so virtually a part of the hunt.'[14] Thanks to Lowery's alterations to Uccello's *The Hunt*, the film's Gawain, just like viewers of Uccello's painting, has become part of the hunt, interestingly as prey or 'game', after declaring himself 'game' to the Green Knight's challenge in 'The Christmas Game'.

Fox # 4

[14] See also Hugh Hudson, *Paolo Uccello, Artist of the Florentine Renaissance Republic* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2008), p. 187.

A second doctored medieval image involving a fox, in this case an image borrowed from a medieval Dutch source, also appears in the film's first ending. After a disastrous war in which his own illegitimate son is killed, Gawain, now king, returns in defeat to his castle. Behind his throne hangs the 'queer' portrait that the Lady of the Castle produced of him in her Camera Obscura, and, on the wall of his bedchamber, hangs a rendering of a manticore reproduced, with one significant change, from a Middle Dutch illuminated manuscript[15]. The mythical manticore has the face of a man, the body of a lion, and the tail of a scorpion. But the film's reproduction of the medieval fantastic beast substitutes the tail of a fox for that of the scorpion, and thereby cements Gawain's perfidy with the legendary perfidy of the fox, as does the green sash that he still wears. Further underscoring Gawain's perfidy here are the associations surrounding the manticore—once again, Lowery and company have searched far and wide to appropriate the medieval. The manticore was, of course, deadly—it preyed on and killed men and other beasts—but it used deception to lure its victims, so much so that the manticore became a symbol of

[15] Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KB, KA 16, fol. 64r. For the specific illustration of the manticore in the Middle Dutch manuscript, see the entry on the manticore in *The Online Medieval Bestiary*, Gallery 11, at http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast177.htm (accessed 1 October 2021). The bestiaries differ in incidental details but essentially agree in establishing the symbolism that attaches to each animal—whether it be real or mythical.

fraud.[16] That the altered picture of the manticore—now a symbol doubly deceitful with its vulpine rather than scorpionic tail—cracks down the middle, just like the walls of his castle will crack and crumble, only further condemns Gawain. When at the conclusion to the film's first ending, Gawain, while sitting in an empty throne room, finally pulls off the green sash from around his waist, his head falls from his shoulders.

Now about Fox #2

The medieval bestiary and the tradition of Reynard the Fox are quite clear about what the fox stands for: nothing good.[17] But a thirteenth-century Middle Dutch romance, the *Roman van Walewein*, pairs the title character with a talking fox who is more than a worthy companion.[18] The Dutch fox is a cursed Prince Roges. The Prince is falsely accused of trying to importune his hostess, whom he rejected when she tried to seduce him. As punishment, he is subjected to a vulpine metamorphosis. Lowery's Gawain will face a similarly duplicitous and aggressive hostess soon enough in the film.

[16] On how the manticore came to be associated with fraud, see John F. Moffitt, 'An Exemplary Humanist Hybrid: Vasari's "Fraude" with Reference to Bronzino's "Sphinx",' *Renaissance Quarterly* 49.2 (1996): 303–3.
[17] So negative were vulpine associations that Reynard the Fox became a figure useful for writers of medieval political satire. See *The New Reynard, Three Satires*, trans. Nigel Bryant (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2023).
[18] *Roman van Walewein*, ed. and trans. David F. Johnson and Geert H.M. Classens, Arthurian Archives VI, Dutch Romances I (Cambridge, Eng.: D.S. Brewer, 2000).

Lowery has given no indication that he even knew of the existence of the Middle Dutch *Walewein*. Rather, in the extras found on the DVD release of his film, Lowery talks about his decision to include Gawain's vulpine companion as homage to two non-medieval films that he greatly admired which had foxes as characters—Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* and Wes Anderson's *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, both released in 2009.[19] But the connections between *Walewein* and *The Green Knight* are clearly two-fold—the talking fox and the attempted seduction of a guest knight by his hostess. As is abundantly clear in one scene and incident after another in the film, Lowery and company delight in playing with the medieval, and they specifically do so twice with an image of a fox—in the double tweaking of the Uccello painting where hart becomes fox becomes Gawain and in the alteration of the illustration of the manticore from the manuscript of a medieval Dutch bestiary whose tail goes from scorpionic to vulpine. That the film also then nods to the Middle Dutch *Roman van Walewein* should not be that surprising, especially given the complex—if not contradictory—medieval characterizations of vulpine companions and even of Gawain himself.

With possible origins in Celtic lore, Gawain's characterization in medieval literature often varies by geography. Gawain is always a central figure in Arthur's

[19] See 'Boldest of Blood & Wildest of Heart: Making *The Green Knight*' on the DVD release of the film.

court. He is Arthur's sister's son, and the uncle-nephew bond is seen as especially strong. In addition, Gawain is more often than not the paragon of courtly virtue in Middle English romances, and someone decidedly less so in Old French literature. Gawain's decline in the Old French literary tradition is gradual, but clearly marked. Chrétien de Troyes tends to see him as somewhat humorous, but, in the *Tristan en prose* written about 1230, less than a century after when Chrétien flourished, Gawain is depicted as a brutal, vengeful, and blood-thirsty scoundrel.[20] The Gawain in the medieval German tradition is a more complicated figure—at times his characterization follows that found in Old French romances; at other times, he is a proper hero in a tradition that the Low Countries seems to have inherited from their German neighbors—hence the positive characterization of the eponymous hero in *Roman van Walewein*.[21]

Lowery's Gawain is obviously at best a hero in waiting—to quote the director again, the film's Gawain suffers from 'a failure to launch.'[22] Even the film's Queen

[20] On the decline of Gawain's reputation in the medieval French tradition, see Keith Busby, *Gauvain in Old French Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1980).
[21] Wolfram von Eschenbach is less harsh in his characterization of Gawain in his *Parzival* than Chrétien is, and, in Heinrich von dem Türlin's *Die Crône*, Gawain is the hero of a Grail romance.
[22] See again Joanna Robinson, 'Director David Lowery on *The Green Knight*'s Eerie Influences,' *Vanity Fair* 16 July 2021 at https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2021/07/the-green-knight-david-lowery-preview-dev-patel-willow-influences?srsltid=AfmBOorlE8o8BZkER9eVEhc6ruox905smf66ffGtyCPC4xldRxAdz_a5. Accessed 11 November 2024.

acknowledges that he has 'yet' to have any heroic tales to tell of himself. In contrast, Walewein is clearly heroic, and his difference from Lowery's Gawain is in large part due to the associations, medieval and modern, that a fox more often than not has. It has been long established that the *Roman van Walewein* has as an analogue in a folktale catalogued as Aarne -Thompson Tale Type 550, perhaps best known to modern readers as Grimm's *The Golden Bird*. In the folktale, an at-best hapless hero can only complete his quest with the help of a vulpine companion, who is everything that he is not. The fox is clearly the major player in the folktale. He can talk, he possesses supernatural powers, he is a clever trickster, but he puts his cleverness and trickery to good use to aid his human sidekick, who again clearly cannot succeed without the assistance of his vulpine companion. Folktales and romances differ, however, in how they view such human-animal bromances—to borrow a term from contemporary cinema. In folktales, the animal is allowed to upstage his human companion; in medieval romances, their dynamic is reversed. Animals must, in romances, play second fiddle. They can occasionally intervene, they can assist, but they can never upstage their human companions, even, as in the case of Roges, when they are an animal companion who is really a human magically transformed into a fox.

Lowery's Gawain's vulpine relationship finds a middle ground between such relationships in folktales and in medieval romances. That middle ground has little bearing on the characterization of the fox, but tells us a great deal about Gawain. The film takes all the negative associations medieval and modern that the fox has and then shows how Gawain apes those associations in scene after scene, most notably in his non-stop mendacity. Gawain lies to Essel, to his mother, to Arthur, to the scavenger, to the Lord of the Castle, to the Lady of the Castle, to St. Winifred when he tells her that he is heading home, and to the Green Knight. As the Lady of the Castle rightly chastises him, Gawain is 'no knight.' Once again, Lowery has only halfway nodded to the medieval. We get an analogue to the *Roman van Walewein*, but one which tweaks the human-animal bromance found in the Middle Dutch poem. We get a foxy Gawain, not a Walewein who happens to have a fox for a companion. A foxy Gawain is a decidedly problematic Gawain. Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century Old French romance *Le Chevalier au lion* dubbed the main character, Yvain, the Knight of the Lion, given his rise from personal disgrace to reclaim his knightly status. Such a leonine moniker is then indeed positive, but Gawain's characterization as the Knight of the Fox is not.[23]

[23] My discussion of the *Roman van* Walewein is indebted to that of Jane H.M. Taylor who contrasts the difference between being a Knight of the Lion and a Knight of the Fox in "The *Roman van Walewein*: Man into Fox, Fox into Man," *Arthurian Literature XVII: Originality and Tradition in the Middle Dutch Roman von*

That Lowery's fox is no Roges is nowhere clearer than in the fox's final onscreen appearance. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain leaves Bertilak's castle for the Green Chapel with one of his host's servants as guide and companion. The servant suggests to Gawain that he should turn back from what is clearly a foolish and deadly rematch with the Green Knight, and Sir Bertilak's servant reassures Gawain that, if he does turn back, he will not tell anyone about Gawain's cowardice. In 'A Beheading at the Green Chapel', the talking fox assumes the role of the servant in the poem. Lowery has stated that the change from human to vulpine tempter was motivated by financial considerations and by narrative economic.[24] The director did not want to introduce a new character at this point in the film, nor did he want to have to pay an actor to play the part. Lowery's decision only further cements the bond between Gawain and the fox. That decision, then, by the film's end clearly leaves us with a less than admirable foxy Gawain. And such a negative characterization of the poem's more heroic Gawain is reinforced by the multiple foxes in the film, especially the two that Lowery has, on his own terms, borrowed from a medieval Dutch manuscript illumination and a medieval Dutch romance.

Walewein, ed. Bart Besamusca and Erik Copper (Cambridge, Eng.: D.S. Brewer, 1999), pp. 131-145.

[24] See again 'Boldest of Blood & Wildest of Heart: Making *The Green Knight*' on the DVD release of the film.

APPENDIX

Recent Scholarly Criticism on David Lowery's *The Green Knight*

Crofton, Melissa. "Medieval Poem versus 21st Century Film: Why Choose One When You Can Have Both?" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88.2-3 (2023): 1-5.

_____. "'You Are No Knight': David Lowery Rivals a Medieval Poem in *The Green Knight*." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88.2-3 (2023): 41-60.

Forni, Kathleen. "Lowery's *The Green* Knight: Honor Reconsidered." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88.2-3 (2023): 61-77.

Fruoco, Jonathan. *Unveiling the Green Knight.* Paris: Université Paris Nanterre, 2024.

Gorgievski, Sandra and Yvernault, Martine, eds. *Agrégation anglais:* Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, *Anonyme (c. 1400);* The Green Knight, *Film de David Lowery (2021)*. Paris: Ellipses, 2023.

Harty, Kevin J. "David Lowery's *The Green Knight* (2021): Authenticity and Accuracy, Historicons and Easter Eggs." In *Cinema Medievalia: New Essays on the Reel Middle Ages*, ed. Kevin J. Harty and Scott Manning. Jefferson, NC: McFarland. 2024.

_____. "Notes Towards a Close Reading of David Lowery's 2021 Film *The Green Knight*." *Journal of the International Arthurian Society* 10.1 (2022): 29-51

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