Armitage's Gawains: from the "Alan Bennett mode" to the Poet Laureate mode

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In a 2023 interview for *The Guardian*, Armitage tells journalist Simon Hattenstone that he only started reading poetry for his English literature O-level,[1] and in many prose pieces, he reports that there weren't many poetry books around when he was growing up in working-class Huddersfield.[2] How old he was when he read *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* for the first time and how much Middle English he had when he started translating the romance is unclear, but he vividly remembers when he decided to translate the piece:

> I can't pinpoint the moment when I decided to translate Sir Gawain, or remember how and why the idea came to me. A series of coincidences, probably: like noticing my wife's dog-eared copy of the Tolkien and Gordon edition, the "green book", poking out of the bookshelf; then the book falling open at a particular page, and my eye falling on a particular word - wodwo - a word well known to readers of Ted Hughes; then the poem coming up in a drunken conversation with Glyn Maxwell in a taxi in Poland; then remembering that Hughes himself had translated several sections of the poem, and going back to read them.[3]

This "series of coincidences" is a typical of Armitage's style: a list of anecdotes that mix personal memories (the "wife's dog-eared copy"), the literary canon (Tolkien, Gordon and Hughes), and bloke culture (the "drunken conversation" with fellow poet and long-time friend Glyn

1 Simon Hattenstone, "Interview: 'I'm a CBE, I'm poet laureate so I'm clearly not a republican am I?': Simon Armitage on his radical roots and rock star dreams," *The Guardian*, 8 April 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/apr/08/simon-armitage-poet-laureate-radical-roots-rock-star-dreams

2 Simon Armitage, *Magnetic Field* (Faber, 2020), vii.

3 Simon Armitage, "The Knight's Tale," *The Guardian,* 17 December 2006, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/dec/16/poetry.simonarmitage

Maxwell), all of which are recounted as if he was leafing through an album, and with many alliterations. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was everywhere with him, not just as a canonical text but as a series of signs.

His interest in Arthuriana started at an early age, not on page but on stage. Indeed, in an autobiographical text entitled "King Arthur in the East Riding" and collected in his 1998 prose work *All Points North,* the poet describes travelling with his father to perform a pantomime based on Camelot's characters. A pantomime being a family stage production usually based on well-known tales and figures with songs, slapstick comedy, gender-crossing, and anachronisms, the genre tends to display (and sometimes overplay) the comic potentialities of the classics. In his memoir, Armitage describes the evening as a moment of fun based on disregarding the traditional opposition between high and low cultures: "Enjoy it. And we do. From when Arthur yanks the plywood sword from the papier mâché stone to an hour later when, in an unexpected twist to the legend of Camelot, Merlin plugs him with a Second World War revolver, turning to the audience and saying 'Well, he wasn't up to the job.'"[4] Long before it became a matter of scholarly interest for the translator,[5] the world of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was already a source of creativity and parody for Armitage.

This chapter will analyse Armitage's translatory project, from his 2007 version for Faber to his 2021 version for Norton, through some exophoric productions that shed light on the tension between what the poet labels the "Arnold Bennett mode, characterised by the outward demonstration of inadequacy and unworthiness when standing before the edifices of the establishment"[6] and the embodiment of that very establishment as a figure of poetic authority. This Alan Bennett mode is a defining feature of

4 Simon Armitage, "King Arthur in the East Riding," *All Points North* (Penguin, 2008).

5 He would go on and translate other medieval texts like *The Death of King Arthur* (2010, from the anonymous *Alliterative Morte Arthure*), *Pearl* (2016, by the Gawain Poet) and *The Owl and the Nightingale* (2021, anonymous), besides adaptations from Greek, Latin, and German.

6 Simon Armitage, "The Knight's Tale."

Englishness according to Kate Fox (the social anthropologist and not the fellow Northern poet and stand-up comedian) who calls it "social Dis-ease". For her, it is "the central 'core' of Englishness […], a shorthand term for all our chronic social inhibitions and handicaps." [7] She claims, "We are accustomed to not saying what we mean: irony, self-deprecation, understatement, obliqueness, ambiguity and polite pretence are all deeply ingrained, part of being English."[8]

More specifically, it will show that Armitage cast himself as a modern-day Gawain on his path to self-discovery, a modern-day Gawain who still has some difficulties reading the signs, a modern-day Gawain who keeps receiving lessons in humility. Yet, as he was working towards his nomination as Oxford Professor of Poetry in 2015 and as Poet Laureate in 2019, he was also bond to claim literary authority, just like the Gawain Poet does in the text. The contention here is that Armitage responds to these two sides of "Gawain" as constructed in literary history – the Gawain character and the Gawain poet.

On Saturday 16 December 2006, Simon Armitage published a piece for the *Guardian* which reads as a draft version of the introduction he wrote for his translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. One of the main differences between the two texts is the very first paragraphs – in the national newspaper, potentially read by a larger audience than the book, Armitage recounts a visit to the British Library to consult the manuscript. This anecdote has been omitted from his many introductions published by Faber and Norton since 2007. Yet, it is key to a better understanding of his translatory project, of the humour he wanted to bring out in his version, and of his translator's ethos as it subtly raises two important questions: to what extent is Gawain's challenge still relevant today for a much larger audience than medievalist scholars? Can a poet, born and bred in Yorkshire, who was

7 Kate Fox, *Watching the English* (Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2008), 508.
8 Kate Fox, *Watching the English*, 463.

trained to be a probation officer, who did not read Middle English when he accepted the commission, translate such a canonical œuvre? Issues of legitimacy and contemporaneity are clearly at stake here.

On surface level, the anecdote is about requesting to see the 14th century manuscript at the reception desk of the British Library and being turned down by an incredulous librarian who acts as the keeper of "one of our most priceless possessions". On a deeper level, it is about taking up a challenge without the credentials to complete the task and discovering it on the way rather than at the onset, thus failing to get access to the Holy Grail the manuscript represents in a rather humiliating way. On a yet deeper level, it is about making the readers laugh at the everyday violence of power structures and hierarchies imposed by the London establishment on the Northern provinces, the everyday violence of cultural gatekeepers against the Everyman.

How does that translate into the article? First, through a polarisation of people ("the lady on the desk", with or without a capital L, versus the poet, who subscribed a membership on that very same day and whose reputation is still to be built) and of places (the cosy reading room of the British Library where the scene takes place versus the wintry platform of a Yorkshire station where the poet comes from). The piece is delightfully understated – from Armitage's innocent discovery that his "new membership card laminated less than an hour ago" does not grant him privilege but hardships and the duty to prove himself worthy, to his failed attempt "to demonstrate some knowledge of the manuscript", the tone is one of satire and humorous self-deprecation. The scathing humour is plainly seen when the librarian says "There aren't amany pictures in it", suggesting that she does not believe such a layman may be able to read Middle English and could even want to check editorial moot points. The word "amany", with the prefix a- added to the word "many", does not seem to be attested as a dialectal or historical form, which means that it is part of a strategy of characterisation. Indeed, she is someone who

would talk down to people who don't seem to belong – she creates a word that may sound like his vernacular just in case he is not clever enough to understand Standard English. Of course, this pretentiousness alienates her for us readers. When levelled at the poet, the irony is based on a game of misidentification – indeed, the receptionist does not identify Armitage for who he is i.e. a renowned poet who by 2006 had published over ten collections besides numerous pamphlets, plays and radio plays, novels and memoirs, documentaries, as well as a creative translation of Homer's *Odyssey*. Though he can claim a large body of work, he dares not claim his name (note that it also takes Gawain some 100 lines and a few prompts to give his name after he arrives at Hautdésert). One could say that Armitage as a poet and translator fails to "perform", as another Lady would say, and actually fails in his own eyes as he is shown out of the British Library, dispossessed of the impression the actual manuscript might have left on his retina, and left with altogether different sort of impression, a reproduction of the manuscript in the form of a series of postcards, that is to say, simulacra of the real thing that anyone can buy from the Library bookshop, in other words, the symbol of a community of readers deemed illegitimate. This scene of humiliation is a lesson in humility, and the poet goes home, perhaps less transformed than transfixed by his adventure.

The rhetoric he uses in this piece is reminiscent of Gawain's self-deprecating mode of speech throughout the poem. In her 2017 *English Politeness and Class*, Sara Mills claims: "self-deprecation runs through ideological accounts of English politeness, where individuals belittle themselves in order to appear polite."[9] This speech mode describes a large array of verbal practices from affected modesty to actual contempt for oneself. It is considered by psychologists as a "communication practice"[10],

9 Sara Mills, *Politeness and Class* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 66.

10 S.A. Speer, "Reconsidering self-deprecation as a communication practice," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 58, no 4 (Oct. 2019): 806, https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12329.

which results in either effacing or highlighting the speaker. Gawain is recognized as a master of rhetoric by the knights at Hautdesert,[11] which is a paradox – he is in the process of proving himself a worthy knight, and yet he is already called one, meaning that his reputation has preceded him in more than just one way. His command of rhetorical skills shows in the belittling strategies he uses to navigate the courtly code of honour, especially when he manages to convince Arthur to let him take the blow without offending him[12] – he uses a hypothetical structure ("should you") to eschew assertiveness; he insists on the protocol ("unfitting") shared by all the knights; he presents the chivalric ethos as a communal experience ("my fellow knights"); he resorts to a concessive clause to indicate his submissiveness to the king ("tempted as you are"); he pits himself against the other knights through a series of superlatives to show he pales in comparison ("I am weakest of your warriors and feeblest of wit"); he addresses the king directly and intimately to establish complicity ("Were I not your nephew"); and finally, he takes full responsibility for any misinterpretation of the situation ("And if my proposal is improper, let no other person stand blame.") Therefore, after the Green Knight has introduced disruption at Camelot, boasting around while insulting everyone, Gawain puts forward his Bennetian "inadequacy and unworthiness" as a strategy to praise Arthur and uphold the courtly ethos, while proving himself worthy of the challenge. To use Ad Putter's words, he "manages to be proudly modest and modestly proud"[13]. By this verbal speech act, Gawain restores order at Camelot.

In later episodes, both the Lady[14] and the Green Knight[15] use deprecation against Gawain – they pit his alleged reputation against his

11 Anonymous, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, trans. Simon Armitage (Norton, 2021), l. 916-927.

12 Anonymous, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* l. 339-361.

13 Ad Putter, "'Walewein ende Keye' and the Strategies of Honor," *Arthuriana* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 68, 10.1353/art.2007.0040.

14 Anonymous, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* l. 1297-1301.

15 Anonymous, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* l. 2270.

actual behaviour. In the bedroom scene, the Lady claims he does not live up to his courtly reputation as he refuses to give in to her. In the mock beheading scene, the Green Knight claims he does not live up to his chivalric reputation as he flinches. Gawain is not the knight people think he is. Yet, Gawain counter-attacks the Lady's insinuations by setting the courtly code right and by reverting to conventional gender roles,[16] and he counter-attacks the Green Knight's slurs by abusing him too and by engaging in a verbal joust.[17] He may not be the knight in deeds everyone expects him to be, but he is a knight indeed when it comes to upholding the chivalric code. In the end, because he cannot put together his self-image and the image others have of him, he reverts to self-deprecation. But while the first speech to the king may well have been a way of promoting his worthiness through false modesty, the second one is a heart-wrenching admission of his failure.[18] His doubts as to his worthiness could be dismissed by Arthur and the court who wear the girdle and laugh, but they are not. In the end, Gawain is a Christian knight, who has to live with the conscience of the fallible nature of humankind. The self-deprecating modalities are a sign of the evolution of humility on Gawain's part, from "trawthe" to Truth. To use Armitage's words, Gawain discovers the Arnold Bennett in him.

Yet, there is more to the British Library anecdote. Of course, this excruciating scene has to happen in front of a whole crowd, "a couple of dozen readers", who know better as they are "poring over ancient maps and documents", and whose caricature is complete with the image of their eyes raising "just over the rim of their spectacles", suggesting they are quite ancient themselves. In a later version of that text, the description of the readers is inflated to even more comic proportions:

> Although my back is turned to them, I'm pretty certain that the learned scholars behind me have now given up any pretence of work and are

16 Anonymous, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* l. 1302-4.
17 Anonymous, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* l. 2284-7.
18 Anonymous, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* l. 2510-2.

> watching this little cameo scene with great amusement. They have pushed aside the Magna Carta, or the Mappa Mundi, or the original copy of the Holy Bible written by God himself and they are sniggering.[19]

The readers are witnesses to the poet's "outrageous request"[20], an adjective which, incidentally, is used on line 93 to describe Arthur's yearning for a marvellous tale before eating, and which translated the word "uncouthe" in Middle English. "Uncouth" means "new, novel" according to Putter and Stokes[21], but sounds like uncouth, that is to say coarse, rude, and Armitage must have looked very rude in the eyes of his audience in the Library. In fact, his clothes, "the heavy-duty parka" and the "pair of big boots", which act as a Barthesian punctum in this picture of the poet, betray him as outlandish, straight out from the frozen North, placed in the civilized world to bring mayhem. What Armitage is perhaps suggesting here is that he is both a modern-day Gawain and a modern-day Green Knight, an agent of both order and disorder when it comes to institutions. In the end, as readers in the know, we can't help but distance ourselves with the haughty Library crowd and laugh at this depiction of the absurdity of misplaced gate-keeping.

This anecdote is not in the introduction of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, but it was published in *Gig: The Life and Wild Times of a Rock-Star Fantasist* (2008), a memoir of Armitage's relationship with music interspersed with musings on his work as a poet. At some point, he mentions the BBC documentary that was being filmed at the time. The point is to document his work as a translator of a medieval text who is bent on seeing the connexions with the modern world. First, he focusses on his visit to a farmer to witness the gutting of a deer to better understand the "gralloching" scene and then he recounts the episode at the Library, but only after ironizing on his role in the documentary. This time, his sense of inadequacy is due to

19 *Gig: The Life and Wild Times of a Rock-Star Fantasist* (2008).
20 *The Guardian*.
21 Putter and Stokes 968.

his very activity as a translator, which is not blockbuster material: "I don't find it very easy being followed around by a cameraman, and I don't suppose Keith finds it easy making a film of a poet translating a poem written in 1400. Me sitting on my backside crunching through dictionaries of Middle English is hardly a feast of visual entertainment." Once again, the understatement (or more precisely the litotes as it is expressed through a series of negations) highlights both what he believes the viewers' expectations are and how he cannot live up to these expectations, a plight which Gawain also experiences, and which is the source of what Armitage names "the comedy of the poem" in "In Our Time", a 2018 BBC programme. It is indeed exactly what Gawain experiences in Hautdesert when, upon his arrival, all the knights are enthusiastic about what he may teach them in terms of "luf-talkyng".[22] What the Lady attempts in the bedroom scenes is an extension of that. To put it bluntly, but not as bluntly as Lowery did in his film adaptation *The Green Knight*, she wants to give him a hand to disclose the knight in him by reminding him of his reputation. In spite of her insistence, he does not give in, but nevertheless accepts another present, that is to say the girdle. While this can be read as Gawain's failure to conform to his chivalric ethos for fear of dying, Armitage ventures another interpretation:

> He has to use all his skills as a knight to deflect and parry her advances and eventually she presses upon him this apparently, allegedly magical belt. She's got the belt in her hand actually, he's already refused a ring and my feeling is that it's almost out of embarrassment as much as wanting to save his skin that he takes the belt.

This interpretation is reminiscent of the "No sex please, we're British" motto: Gawain is embarrassed, out of his depth, because of the Lady's directness. According to Armitage, he is scared he may not be able to "perform", another word the poet cheekily uses in this scene that oscillates between romance

22 Anonymous, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* l. 927.

and fabliau. Armitage goes even further in his explication of the text's innuendoes by describing Gawain as a funny character:

> I think the poem is very funny and a lot of that humour gets taken away in the scrutiny. [Gawain] is kind of prissy, precocious, pretentious […], he is those things and I think he's been set up for a failure with the armour and the dressing as well. After a while, I think "Come on!"

In other words, Gawain is too self-righteous and blind to the signs on his path for the reader to take his plight seriously.

Armitage's ironic treatment of Gawain particularly shows in the lines when the knight is brooding in the dark at Hautdésert:

> Yes he dozes in a daze, dreams and mutters
> like a mournful man with his mind on dark matters
> How destiny might deal him a death blow on the day
> when he grapples with the giant in the Green Chapel;
> how the strike of the axe must be suffered without struggle.[23]

In the translation, Gawain is described as experiencing something akin to teenage angst, as opposed to the ruminations over mortality expressed in the medieval text. For instance, the intensifier "yes", which is not in the original text, introduces an emphatic description. Besides, the alliterative meter is enhanced by the pararhymes (doze / daze, mutters / matters) and the near internal rime (grapple / Chapel). As for the word "destiny", it sounds slightly sarcastic in the 21st century. The contrived diction tends to undermine Gawain's melancholy state, probably even more for contemporary readers who are well aware that the knight won't actually die in the end.

Armitage references Gawain again in *Walking Home: Travels with a Troubadour on the Pennine Way* (2012), another memoir in which he focusses on a challenge he set for himself, walking the Pennine Way from North to South and paying for food and lodging with nightly poetry recitation. The memoir is a wonderful piece about hiking, about the place of poetry

23 Anonymous, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* l. 1750-1754.

today and about deflating any kind of pretension. Indeed, to distinguish himself from previous travellers, the self-proclaimed troubadour insists on his shortcomings by creating a comic persona through a rhetoric of belittlement. He compares himself to other walkers who have been successful: he is afraid he can't measure up to his mother and his wife, first and foremost, which means that the walk is also a test of virility; he definitely can't live up to epic heroes like Ulysses either, maybe because the age of heroism has long vanished in the 21st century. More importantly, he compares his gear to Gawain's: his own pentangle is a meaningless war medal inherited from an uncle[24] and his sash is a badge of the Pennine Way[25], which both act as signs of his prospective failure. He also dwells on putting his gear on:

> In the medieval poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the hero of the story manages to clothe, equip and armour himself in not more than three verses, and he's setting off on an epic journey across the unmapped regions of Dark Ages Britain to do battle with a foe of supernatural colour and superhuman strength. It takes me the best part of an hour to slap on emollients, tighten straps and replenish supplies, and I'm only walking to Greenhead, less than seven miles to the West.[26]

Set against the purple patch that describes Gawain's dressing scene,[27] the poet's own experience reads as a rhetoric of belittlement – he is no knight, no knight in shining armour, more like in a process of mummification. Of course, the story is very partial here, because the medieval poem probably leads us to understand that Gawain is a knight in shining armour, but probably no knight without his shining armour. Yet, it nevertheless underscores the poet's mock heroic tone.

24 Simon Armitage, *Walking Home: Travels with a Troubadour on the Pennine Way* (Faber, 2012), 78-79.
25 Simon Armitage, *Walking Home,* 225-7.
26 Simon Armitage, *Walking Home,* 76.
27 Anonymous, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* l. 566-618.

The armour, the external, material sign of knighthood, also holds pride of place in the 2009 BBC documentary on the poem, when Armitage meets two actors – aptly named Gandalf and Gary – who reenact a fighting scene. During the demonstration, before he dons the armour himself, the poet comments:

> The Gawain poet devotes long sections of the poem to Gawain's armour and apparel and on the one hand he stands there, as heroic and a shining example of knighthood; on the other hand, there's something quite funny about that passage, it's over-elaborated, almost to the point where I think you can afford a little chuckle as Gawain is stood there in his metal suit.

In the dressing scene, Gawain as a man with a body disappears and is replaced by an icon of chivalry. His equipment negates his human corporeality and highlights his embodiment of knightly values. Yet, in the documentary, Armitage does not really chuckle when he is given the armour to wear, feels its weight, but also the punch in the stomach as a test of his strength. On the contrary, his face expresses his attempt to not show the pain.[28] In an article for *The Sunday Times*, the poet explains his funny face:

> Gary: "How was that?"
> Poet (swallowing blood): "Well… I felt it."

Once again, Armitage uses an understatement: even with the armour on, he can't really pass for a full-fledged knight, especially compared to men who have more credentials in that field. Not only does he live some of Gawain's formative experience on his way to self-knowledge, but he also showcases the fact that he cannot conform to his model. This is very Arnold Bennett.

The belittling strategy is not only found in the translator's ethos and in the treatment of Gawain but also in the narrative voice, which is particularly clear in his ars poetica:

> So listen a little while to my tale if you will
> and I'll tell it as it's told in the town where it trips from

28 Simon Armitage, host, "In the Footsteps of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," BBC Worldwide Ltd, New York, N.Y., Films Media Group, 20092009, 10'37, https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6pzj1u.

the tongue;
and as it has been inked
in stories bold and strong,
where loyal letters linked,
have lasted loud and long.

Here, the Gawain poet cites his two main sources – the chronicles that have been passed down to him and the stories he has heard in court. Throughout his narrative, he keeps on repeating phrases like "as I herde", which is a way of masking his own agency while emphasizing the oral nature of the text. He is a compiler and a transmitter not a creator, and his authority comes from previous texts. Obviously, this is also a posture of modesty as this specific adventure does not seem to be referenced in any other romance or historical source. Besides, it gives the audience interpretative authority as they have to recognize other texts to fully understand the poem. Gawain's story is part of the world heritage now, whereas the texts that gave the Gawain poet authority are no longer known by all. The romance itself is no longer meant to be shared in a public reading but appreciated in silence (even though there are recordings of the text, one by Ian McKellen). Hence the fact that the "I" (especially in sentences like "as I heard") is much less present in the translation. Paradoxically, these two self-effacing strategies (hiding behind past authoritative texts or erasing the narrative I) may be means of highlighting the poets' creative power.

Armitage concludes "Damned if he does and Damned if he does not", one of his Oxford Professor of Poetry lectures, by saying: "Gawain learns the hard way that to err is human, to be born is to be a hypocrite, to recognize and admit one's inadequacies is to come as close to triumph as is humanly possible." This article has tried to show that Armitage's ethos as a translator, his narrative voice and his conception of a funny Gawain prove the lesson has been learnt. There have been several versions of the text and even the two published by Faber in 2007 and 2021 bear strong differences. These differences may be explained by the switch from the Arnold Bennett mode

to the Poet Laureate mode. Indeed, in May 2019, Armitage was dubbed Poet Laureate by Elizabeth II. The process of institutionalisation, which had started earlier in the 2010s through different appointments and recognitions, came to an end here. When he became Poet Laureate, Armitage became the institution. This corresponds roughly to his main reworking of the translation, which he did under the aegis of Alfred David, an American scholar of medieval literature who had also played a "role as advisor to Seamus Heaney, the Nobel laureate, in the production of his prize-winning translation of Beowulf".[29] His revision process is acknowledged in the introduction:

> My translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was first published in 2007. A few years later, encouraged by Professor James Simpson at Harvard University, who had been a great supporter and my main adviser in the first instance, I entered a long and involved transatlantic correspondence with Alfred David, at that time Professor Emeritus, University of Indiana, who sadly passed away in 2014. Over several months—Fitt by Fitt (a literary term meaning "section" or "part"), stanza by stanza, line by line, and sometimes more painstakingly, word by word—I reconsidered some of my original decisions and missteps, and eventually produced this revised edition.[30]

The changes actually mainly concern the dialect words (words mainly used in Yorkshire and that are more rare in Standard British English, but also Standard British English words that are more rare in General American), which are almost all standardized and Americanized in the 2021 Norton version. One example of that is the word "bide" which was used several times in the 2007 edition and almost disappeared from the 2021 version. They also concern a few approximations. For instance, line 453 had "January" for "Nw Yeres" in 2007 but "New Year" in 2021. In other words, while the initial project was to "coax Gawain and his poem back into the Pennines", the place he knows through personal experience, the latest translation brings it closer to a slightly Americanized Middle Ages literary culture. In typical

29 "Indiana University: Alfred David", accessed 20 December 2024, https://honorsandawards.iu.edu/awards/honoree/1456.html

30 Armitage, Simon. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Norton, 2021, pp. 21-2.

Armitage fashion, he adds: "There are no radical changes, particularly in the tone and attitude of the translation and its emphasis on alliteration; more a case of a nip here and a tuck there, amounting to perhaps a couple of hundred minor amendments."[31] Saying that two hundred modifications, that is to say some 10% of the text, is no radical change, is nevertheless a bit of an understatement. The Alan Bennett is still there behind the Poet Laureate.

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31 Ibid.