

“The Pearl Poet”

An adaptation of “*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*”  
written for the screen by  
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A CREATIVE THESIS

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## An Abstract of the Thesis of

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This adaptation of the 14<sup>th</sup> century poem, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, includes not only the action of the poem, but a month in the life of the poet and a modern reader experiencing the text for the first time. In each of these frames, the central characters go through processes of self-discovery that allow them to realize their own gayness and creative potential. The screenplay deals with how people in different time periods struggle with societal and personal expectations.

### Acknowledgements

I am hugely indebted to a number of people who supported me throughout the process of writing my thesis. I give thanks to my friend Barbara who had the same idea but didn't mind if I stole it, and who always liked my papers. I am also grateful to my Jacob who was always there to prevent me from tossing my computer out the window . Most of all, thanks to Professor Ed Versluis for introducing me to the text, and my advisor, Professor James Earl, who helped me to relax.

## Critical Preface to “The Pearl Poet”

### Why a Screenplay?

Although I have always wanted to be a writer, I never considered writing screenplays until I read *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. I could envision the action in the play so vividly that I began, in my mind, to cast the ideal actors for each role. A friend of mine pointed out that the movie had already been made several times, but I thought that I could contribute something different to that catalog of film adaptations.

I was a sophomore when I first read the poem, and I could not yet fully understand it. Indeed, my first interpretation of the epic was identical to my professor's; my conception of this great work came from somebody else's mind, which, although brilliant, lacked the familiar flavor of my own imagination. It took me three readings of the poem and two more professors to realize the humor inherent in the work. Now, as I peruse pages of alliterative verse, I find myself laughing out loud.

I can think of no better medium than film to communicate this sense of humor, as well as the social issues inherent in the poem that I have gleaned as my focus. This project has taught me the enormous power of film. Just like a good book, a movie can involve an audience in the lives of characters struggling with issues totally alien to the audience, but can still elicit sympathy and understanding. I chose to focus on themes of gayness in the poem partly because doing so would allow me to make controversial statements about gayness in Christianity; and I could encase these messages in the easy to swallow gel-coated capsule of film.

## “The Pearl Poet”: Techniques and Form

Here is my extremely brief pitch: A medieval poet and a modern college freshman are transformed by a text about a knight that leads them to discover their own gayness and creative potential. As the knight suffers from self-imposed shame, the poet and the student learn to release their fear, shame, and guilt and live as they had always dreamed.

Conventionally, the screenplay form calls for a structure of three acts; a beginning, middle, and end. The First Act introduces the characters and builds to a crisis point that will determine the action of the Second Act. This middle section is where most of the action occurs and leads to a climax, a resolution, and finally, the denouement of Act Three. “The Pearl Poet” was a structural challenge because I needed to write three separate frames into the three acts with coinciding plot points. The first frame is that of the poem itself, which takes place in Arthurian Britain. The second frame illustrates the life of the poet in the 14<sup>th</sup> century England. Lastly, the third frame takes place on a contemporary American university campus. I needed to introduce the principal characters of each of these frames in the first ten pages of the script, and I needed to guide them to a resolution at the same rate. This did not seem possible until I outlined the play, scene by scene, on three-by-five cards. This enabled me to juggle, add, and subtract scenes, as well as envision a holistic picture of the final product.

The script begins in the second frame as the poet, Roger, arrives at the village where he is to stay while he dictates a religious poem, *Pearl*, to the scribes at the local

monastery. On his first night in the village, Roger begins to compose *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The student, Phoebe, begins to fall in love with the text at this point in the third frame. As the action of the poem begins in the first frame, Gawain, a knight of the Round Table, finds himself participating in an exchange of blows, a contest proposed by the magical Green Knight in which Gawain hacks off the knight's head with an ax. However, the Green Knight miraculously lives to command that Gawain find him in a year's time to receive an equal chop. As the direness of this situation sinks in, Roger receives a letter proclaiming the devotion of an anonymous admirer. As Gawain embarks on his possibly ill-fated quest to find the Green Knight, Roger decides to find the author of the mysterious yet passionate letter, and Phoebe becomes acquainted with herself while she finds a nook in the social strata of the university.

Gawain spends many months searching for his adversary, until he stumbles across Castle de Hautdesert and meets Sir Bercilak, the castle's proprietor. The chemistry between the two men is evident immediately, much to the surprise of their creator, Roger, who is beginning to contend with issues of gayness in a Christian world. He begins to wonder if non-heterosexual sexuality has a place in the religious world-view of the middle ages. A pivotal point in the script occurs when Roger has a conversation with the monastery's abbot that inspires him to try to accept his own gayness. Phoebe also goes through a similar process; she notices gayness all around her just as she begins a relationship with a woman.

In the meantime, Bercilak has invited Gawain to stay at his castle until he must leave to meet the Green Knight. The two make a strange arrangement to spend their days

apart and exchange their earnings in the evenings. Bercilak's wife attempts to seduce Gawain, and while he maneuvers around most of her advances, he cannot begrudge her the occasional kiss. These kisses he in turn bestows upon Bercilak every evening when the two knights share their day's profit. During Lady Bercilak's final attempt at seduction, she convinces Gawain to take a girdle from her, an article of clothing that, when worn concealed, can prevent any mortal harm. Gawain cannot resist taking it and keeping it for himself rather than handing it to Bercilak. The garment, he believes, may save his life when he confronts the Green Knight.

After much holiday feasting and fellowship, Gawain finally departs Castle Hautdesert in order to find his enemy. The two meet at the Green Knight's home and commence their contest. The green man delivers two feints and one blow that barely nicks Gawain's neck. Gawain unsheathes his sword and dares the larger knight to attack again.

At this time, Roger finds out that his anonymous lover is actually one of his scribes, a monk named Gregory. He tries to convince Gregory that a relationship between them is possible and not a mortal sin, but to no avail. Gregory cannot overcome his own shame; he demands that Roger leave his hut and closes the door behind him.

After the exchange of blows, the Green Knight reveals that he is actually Sir Bercilak. He had been sent to Camelot by Arthur's half sister, Morgan le Fay, to test the mettle of the men at court. He found Gawain almost flawlessly honest in their exchange of goods, except for the minor fault that Gawain cared enough for his life to break their

agreement and keep the green girdle. Gawain saves the girdle as a memento of his failed chivalry, then returns to Camelot in shame.

At the end of the screenplay, Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table dismiss Gawain's small crime and commend him for his bravery, Phoebe comes out as a poet and a gay woman, and Roger decides to stay in the village to dictate a new poem to his scribes. That poem is titled *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Gayness is only one of the prevalent themes in the text. Social approval and self-acceptance also drive the action. The idea that chivalry was an invention of romantic poets, and that the Pearl Poet reveres the construct at the same time he criticizes it, is essential in the script. I tried to emphasize this point by comedically juxtaposing alliterative verse with less artful modern English and slang, thus allowing the characters to waver between the ceremonial speech of formal situations and the sarcastic, colloquial language of real feeling. Most important, however, is the idea that these themes cross boundaries of class and time. Therefore, the three frames set in very different time periods bleed into each other. I tried to blur the boundaries of time by casting the same actor as the professor in Frame Three, the abbot in Frame Two and the priest in Frame One. The action itself crosses over the frames' borders because similar events occur almost simultaneously in each time period. In addition, I used modern music in Frame One, medieval music in Frame Two, and 14<sup>th</sup> century music in Frame Three to help the audience think of each time and setting as inter-relational rather than independent.



## The Audience

Every text I have loved has required an intricate process of discovery. These reading and writing experiences are what I have valued most as an undergraduate. For my thesis I wanted to have a writing process of discovery during which my text would grow organically out of *Gawain* and my own mind. The finished product should take its audience on a similar journey. That is why I created the central character in the modern frame of the play. Phoebe is a student discovering *Gawain* for the first time; the text contributes to a realization of her own sexuality and poetic tendencies. Hopefully the screenplay's audience, whether the film is produced or remains a written script, will appreciate that issues brought up in a poem about the "Dark Ages," written by a poet from the Middle Ages are still prevalent today. I want the audience to observe from this presentation that while we have moved forward in our thinking, we are still victims of the hang-ups and self-accusations of the past. I also want to demonstrate that gayness is not by any means a new phenomenon, and that it was harmoniously present in cultures that existed thousands of years before our own.

A written screenplay's audience is limited, but once the script is produced, its message can reach millions. I would, of course, love for this script to be made into a blockbuster hit; however, I realize that it is not accessible to that wide an audience. The screenplay contains long speeches in archaic language that may be difficult for an audience to grasp. I attempted to solve this problem by including structural lessons that will inform the audience how to understand the text. The professor of Frame Three gives a critical and historical background for *Gawain*, thus simultaneously teaching the

character Phoebe and the film's audience something about the 14<sup>th</sup> century text. In addition, Roger dictates throughout most of the play in Middle English with modern English subtitles, gradually moving into a modern English translation. Late in the screenplay, the guests at the inn recite Middle English lines from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* that are relatively easy for a lay audience to understand. I intended these devices to create a feeling in the audience that they have become experts of the poetic language by the end of the film.

### Sources

In order for the project to succeed, I needed to borrow the thoughts of many philosophers and critics in order to justify my own ideas. Including the ideas of these writers in the text of the play helped justify my assertion that gayness has never been alien to Christian culture. I would like, once again, to thank my advisor who guided me to the works of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and John Boswell. Saint Bernard was a 12<sup>th</sup> century abbot who wrote sermons about "Song of Songs," a deeply erotic book in the Bible. His interpretation that the divine love described in the book between God and the soul is a metaphor for human love, and therefore human love is itself divine, is one of my principal arguments for the appropriateness of gayness in Christianity. Boswell's book, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, helped me define which Biblical passages actually prohibit gayness. The Holy Bible, King James version, has been an important reference throughout this project; I am grateful to my housemate, Aja, for lending me her copy for a year. Lastly, Andreas Capellanus' *The Art of Courtly Love*

gives specific guidelines of chivalrous behavior. This text helped me define chivalry and understand that it is a literary rather than a social construct.

My greatest literary influence is, of course, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. I used primarily the Marie Borroff 1967 modern English translation. Of all the translations I have read, I believe Borroff's is the most beautiful if not the most accurate. Casey Finch's *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet* provided Middle English passages of *Gawain and Pearl*, as well as modern translations of *Pearl*.

I had no concept of how to write a screenplay before I started this project. I read a number of screenplays by various writers, and looked at movies to learn their basic structure, however, Syd Field's *Screenplay: The Foundations of Writing* provided much of the instruction I needed to produce an artfully rendered script.

### Closing Thoughts

I have put all I have into this project, (at least, all I have left over after work and school). Although the thesis has been a source of stress, it has also been great fun. After enjoying such a large writing project, my ambition to pursue a career as a writer is happily renewed and refreshed. However, after graduation I will chase after a career in child literacy and become a starving non-profit worker rather than a starving artist.

While I would love to see "The Pearl Poet" produced, I am not planning to move to Hollywood in order to market it. I hope the script will not turn into a fossil in a box in my closet. Rather I plan to continue revising it and showing it to the industry people I do know. Who knows? Maybe someday a production company will fall in love with the

script and will refuse to change a morpheme. They will use my fantasy cast and crew list, give me a director's chair and a bullhorn, and reserve small parts for all my friends.

**“The Pearl Poet”**

2.1

FADE IN:

EXT. INN YARD IN NORTHERN WALES, AUTUMN—MORNING

ANGLE ON INN SIGN—“The Green Girdle”

A late 14<sup>th</sup> century village, monastery and chapel off in distance. Typical morning activity: travelers moving in/out, workers heading for the fields.

POET, a middle-aged, middle-class scholar dressed simply, with a meditative quality about him, steps out of carriage, looks around, focuses briefly on the sign, raising his eyebrows as if in a gesture of mild inspiration. A surly MONK runs out to greet him.

MONK

Welcome! I trust your journey was filled with plentiful romanticisms for you to muse upon. Rolling fields, ghostly crags, peasants lolling about vast fiefdoms. I am sure the consequential verse resembles the loftiest ambitions of the French poets. Shall I supply you with a shepherd’s daughter’s dowry worth of parchment?

Poet looks at him distractedly, as if simultaneously confused and put off by this sarcasm.

POET

Thank you.

MONK

Follow me, if you please.

INT. GREEN GIRDLE INN

The two enter the INN. The bottom floor is vast with long tables on two levels. The sunlight coming in through the sparse windows casts long bars of light across the room. As the two enter, a female INNKEEPER crosses in front of them with a tray of bread and ale. She gruffly nods her greeting. They head up a set of stairs to Poet’s home for the rest of the film. The entrance is located on a balcony that looks down to the main room. The room itself is dark and simple. It has only a bed, a writing desk, a single window, and a chair. On the desk there are several quills in a jar, an inkpot, and a large stack of parchment. As the two travel up to the room, the Monk SPEAKS, the DRIVER follows with a small trunk, and the Poet looks around with mild interest.

MONK

(after Innkeeper nods, while they are moving)  
 As you can tell, our village's sole inn is as congenial as it is luxurious. The food, of course, is a gastronomical delight, but I know that, like myself you have spent enough time in monasteries that you will not become overly exuberant over culinary genius.

Poet nods and notices a small table sporting shards of wood, vials of bone and hair, and religious icons.

MONK

Ah, I see you have discovered the wench's fine collection of authentic relics, personally guaranteed by countless peddling pardoners. And at last, here we are, your humble abode.

Opens door, Poet enters. Driver drags in the trunk and drops it in a corner. Poet glances about, and then moves to the writing desk.

MONK

And there is your bride's price. I hope it will be worthy of the impending opus. Your noble patron has asked that you begin dictating immediately. I will wait for you out in the gutter while you get settled in your palatial suite. I trust everything is satisfactory?

Poet looks up, nods, sees Driver waiting to be tipped, looks to Monk, who glares and shakes his head. Poet pulls a coin out of a small purse hanging by his side and hands it to Driver. Driver rewards him with a huge, rotten-mouthed grin, and then jostles past Monk out the door, who follows him trying to maintain some semblance of dignity. Poet turns back to his room with a small smile. He opens his trunk and removes a manuscript. On the cover it says clearly but in Middle English, "*Pearl*."

2.2

EXT. INN YARD

Poet with his manuscript under his arm and looking freshened-up emerges from the inn and surprises Monk, who takes a swig from a flask. He places the bottle inside his robes and rubs his nose, then they set-off towards the monastery.

2.3

**EXT. PATHWAY LEADING UP TO MONASTERY**

Poet leans his head back to take in the full scope of the large but functionally simply building. Monk goes through the door and holds it open as Poet enters.

**INT. ENTERANCE WAY OF MONASTERY**

There is a lot of traffic through this part of the building. Monks walk past with their noses in books; others conduct whispered conversation. Monk stops a small group walking and conversing.

**MONK**

The artist is here.

Monk turns around and sees Poet watching two monks who are speaking in a corner. One leans with his back to the wall while the other faces him with his hand pressed to the wall.

**MONK**

Some of our residents are very close.

**POET**

Friendships are inevitable in these close quarters.

Monk continues to lead Poet to the **SCRIPTORIUM**.

**INT. SCRIPTORIUM, A CLASSROOM-LIKE CHAMBER IN MONASTERY  
SITTING IN THE MOTTLED GLOW OF A STAINED-GLASS WINDOW.**

Several scribes rise as Poet and Monk enter. They are all monks, each with ink-covered hands. One, from now on to be called **FAN**, appears nervous, straightens his robes, and looks at Poet admiringly.

**MONK**

Well, here are your servants. I'll leave you to it, then.

Monk exits. Poet starts toward a stool and podium at the head of the room, looking around on the way. He avoids eye contact with the scribes. He settles himself in the stool, sets the manuscript on the podium carefully and unties the ribbon around it. Once he is finally settled, he looks up at the scribes. He takes the time to make eye contact with each of them, lingering on Fan.

## POET

I most certainly do not consider you servants. I could easily be sitting where you are, my face pointed toward some arrogant soul who scribbles ink on parchment, but my life has simply gone in another direction. I hope you can forgive me for being who I am. As for you, you are my tools. And I do not mean that in any feudalistic way. You are like the quill that stains my fingers. You are the medium through which my ideas take wing in the minds of others. I am, in fact, your servant. I am at your mercy, just as I am at the mercy of my ink, my imagination. I beg you, masters, treat me well. As a poet I can be...fragile. On second thought, do with me as you will, but treat my words as tenderly as possible.

## POET

(Reading from Manuscript)

“Pearl, O pleasure for a prince  
 Enclosed in gold, so clean and clear,  
 I own that all the orient’s  
 Fine Pearls, though pure, provide no peer,”

Poet goes on in Middle English as camera travels over the intensely concentrating scribes and rests on Fan, who watches Poet in painful adoration.

## POET

“So rounde, so reken in vche araye,  
 “So small, so smothe her sydez were;  
 Quersoeuer I jugged gemmez gaye  
 I sette hyr sengeley in synglure.”

ANGLE ON Fan as Poet finishes the stanza in modern English.

## POET

“In a garden green with grass, my cheer  
 Was lost! It lunged to land. O lot!  
 A lovelorn, longing look I bear  
 For that precious pearl without a spot.”



INT. SCRIPTORIUM IN MONASTERY, A CHANGE IN THE LIGHT SHOWS THAT IT IS THE SAME DAY IN THE LATE AFTERNOON.

Poet is walking from scribe to scribe, examining their illustrations of the moment in "Pearl," when the narrator wakes up and sees the girl across the divine river. He comes to Fan's depiction, which is the incredibly bad illustration that has survived in the MS Cotton manuscript. Fan stirs uncomfortably and cannot work as Poet looks at the illustration with dissatisfaction, and a slight expression of disgust, then moves on.

2.5

INT. INN, EARLY EVENING.

Poet shoves his way into the Green Girdle amidst a large group of pilgrims who have just arrived. They jostle and catcall each other as they move a wide array of luggage (from fancy trunks to worn saddle bags) into their rooms. The noise is enough to drive any serious poet to distraction. A WOMAN PILGRIM attempting to hoist her large trunk up the stairs blocks Poet's way.

WOMAN PILGRIM

(Addressing a pilgrim in the robes of the clergy)  
Ho, preacher. Help a wee damsel to her room  
and she'll reward you with a fresh bed of straw.

PREACHER

(Sarcastically)

My child, I protest! Your words do nothing but  
soil the purity of our religious journey. When  
we arrive in Jerusalem we shall have to sweep  
the desert of its sand for penance.

Those around them laugh.

WOMAN PILGRIM

Well then, I shall break my back carrying this  
trunk to my room so I can find the hair shirt  
within in it and pray for the next 7 fortnights  
with only crust of bread to sustain me. You  
there. (addressing poet.) Have you the mercy  
to spare a tainted woman serious injury?

POET

Of course, madam. And no reward is necessary.

As the Poet approaches her on the stairs, Preacher shoves past him

## PREACHER

Desist, man, desist! I received the initial offer,  
 which is of course the most heartfelt. Do not  
 presume to take from me the innocent joy of this  
 lady's company.

Preacher takes up the other handle on the trunk and helps Woman Pilgrim, laughing, to her room.

A continuous shot follows Poet as he meekly pushes his way up to the room, stumbles through the door and quickly shuts it behind him. With a roll of his eyes, he removes his outer clothing and sits at his writing desk as if the thought of doing so has occupied his mind all day. He opens the inkpot, puts a single sheet of parchment before him, and readies a quill. He thinks for a minute, and begins to write. In Middle English he writes "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." As he continues writing, we HEAR PROFESSOR'S voice reciting the poem in modern English.

## 3.6

## INT. UNIVERSITY AUDITORIUM FILLED WITH FRESHMAN STUDENTS—DAY

The large auditorium looks down to a wall of chalkboards and Professor standing at a podium reading animatedly from a text. The actor that plays Professor also plays the abbots in the two other frames. The students are in various positions, whispering to each other and reading along. During Professor's recitation, a TRAVELING SHOT moves from his face past different students paying variable levels of attention, to READER, who sits transfixed, with her fingers marking her place on the text. The heading in the book on one page says clearly "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," on the other it says "Anonymous." She seems to be sitting as isolated as possible, she has a worn army backpack, and there's a bright orange "used" sticker gracing the side of her textbook. She is somewhat pretty, quirkily dressed, and very eager.

## PROFESSOR

"Since the siege and the assault was ceased at  
 Troy,  
 The walls breached and burnt down to brands  
 And ashes,  
 The knight that had knotted the nets of deceit  
 Was impeached for his perfidy, proven most  
 True,  
 It was high born Aeneas and his haughty race  
 That since prevailed over provinces, and  
 Proudly reigned  
 Over well-nigh all the wealth of the West  
 Isles."

(MORE)

PROFESSOR (cont'd)

You will all find, as English majors, that for the British poets, a sense of the history behind their work was essential, no matter how inaccurate their sources. We know very little about the Gawain-poet, but we can glean from his work his reverence as well as his criticism of his own society. First of all, the poem is in the alliterative style of works of the Anglo Saxon period. This connects the work to the wonderful beginnings of English literary history, the so-called Dark Ages. In addition, these first lines of the poem orient the audience in 14<sup>th</sup> century popular British history. Popular I say because the claim that the Brits were descended from the great warriors of Troy has never been substantiated, but it is a pretty neat idea. The Gawain poet seemed to be fairly well acquainted with the court system, he may have had a noble patron to flatter, so his work illustrates the chivalric heritage of the English court in a relatively flattering manner. But is it simple propaganda? Well?

Reader shifts in her seat and looks around her as the auditorium grumbles in reply.

PROFESSOR

Listen carefully. On the surface, this piece appears to glorify British courts and courtiers, especially Camelot, but actually it is a hilarious critique of the entire chivalric system. We're talking, here, about chivalry, a concept that was imagined by writers who wrote about Camelot after the fact. (If it ever was a fact.) The ideal of courtly love, which was totally made-up by romantic poets, became the model of perfect behavior. Modesty at all times, impeccable manners, humbleness, seeking out daring and life-threatening adventures, platonic love, and, of course, rejecting the sexual advances of English supermodel-slash-princesses, these were the values that all courtiers had to emulate. Did they? Would you? The poem begins in Camelot at Christmastide, a great feast. The

(MORE)

PROFESSOR (cont'd)

many knights have grown fat after a long period of peace; their heroic boasts have grown old. The king is bored; he demands a spectacle.

1.7

INT. CAMELOT CASTLE—A STORMY WINTER EVENING

The feast of Christmastide is about to begin. In a large hall hundreds of guests and knights are seated at the round table. The great table is so massive that this room had to be built especially to accommodate it. Although the shape of the table, legendarily, was meant to communicate the equality of the King and all his champions, KING ARTHUR'S chair is elevated to indicate his stature in the hierarchy. GUENEVERE'S seat is also elevated, though its height does not match that of the king's. A BISHOP sitting on the other side of Arthur enjoys the same status as the queen. The queen sits in-between GAWAIN and AGRAVAIN À LA DURE (a Lancelot clone who is also a nephew of the king and shares a plate with Guenevere.) These two are seated at the same level as everyone else. Because of this set-up, the table is at comfortable level in front of Arthur, Guenevere, and the Bishop, but it rests at chest-level in front of the Knights and guests, dwarfing them ridiculously. The table is crowded with beer and dishes of holiday delicacies. The guests share plates with one another, except for the Bishop who has food piled before him. Arthur's plate is empty. The others have not yet begun eating, though they eye their food hungrily. The hall is U-shaped: A wide entrance opens into it, and the table fills the back of the room so that it is almost impossible for the servants to move around behind the chairs of the guests. There are musicians playing a medievalized version of "Rocking Around The Christmas Tree." The hall is decorated with a mixture of pagan and Christian symbols. Holly (pagan symbol of the coming Spring) is strung up with crosses and pentangles in between. The Courtiers are all dressed in their finest.

ARTHUR

Welcome, my friends, and many tidings of this glorious day. You have all finally been served.

AGRAVAIN À LA DURE

Excepting yourself, my liege. Will the king of the Britons not join us in thanksgiving to the king of kings?

We HEAR chuckling and mumbling around the round table.

ARTHUR

My dear queen, you must keep your champion in check or he will upstage your lord.

Blushing, Guenevere and Agravain turn back to their plate as the table chuckles.

ARTHUR

But, indeed, my noble companions, Agravain's fears may come to pass, for how can I partake of this feast 'ere I see some sort of marvel worthy of this humble court? In these blessed and lengthy times of peace, great acts of bravery are long in coming, and the space between them is vast. Our memories grow weak as our minds grow older. Suddenly instead of killing 15 Saxons in that last triumphant battle, Yvain over here tells of slaughtering 100. Quite a deed, Sir Knight. You must have sent some of our enemy home with the plague. You all know of my decree: Perhaps it is because of my pride, or my busy young blood, my wild, restless mind; I will never eat on so high a holiday, till I have heard first of some fair feat or fray, some far-borne tale of some marvel of might that I might trust, by champions of chivalry achieved in arms. Oh, I long for a spectacle. Will not some suppliant come seeking some single knight to join with him in jousting, in jeopardy each to lay life for life, and leave it to fortune? Such is the king's custom, when his court he holds at each far-famed feast amid his fair host so dear. This stout king stands in state till a wonder shall appear; thus I lead, with heart elate, high mirth in the New Year.

Silence follows this speech as courtiers glance at each other uncomfortably, hoping somebody has an unfamiliar story to tell so they can eat already.

2.8

INT. POET'S CHAMBER—AFTERNOON.

A light snow outside shows that time has passed. Poet is sitting at his desk deeply engaged in writing when a loud knock on his door interrupts him. He opens the door haughtily. As the muffled sounds of the partying pilgrims grows louder, a MESSENGER hands him a letter. The messenger is dressed as a peasant, and dusted with the dirt of the fields.

MESSENGER

Are you the poet?

POET  
I am a poet.

MESSENGER  
The Pearl Poet?

POET  
Yes.

MESSENGER  
This is for you, sir.

POET  
From whom?

MESSENGER  
(shrugs)  
I hope you will read for the townspeople, sir. At your convenience of course. We are lacking in art, betimes.

POET  
Well, I would be happy to share a few words. Perhaps tomorrow evening, here at the inn.

MESSENGER  
I shall spread the news, sir. You will not want for an audience, I suspect.

Messenger exits as Poet turns back into his room. He breaks the wax seal on the letter and begins to read. As he reads we HEAR a VOICEOVER of Fan.

FAN (V.O.)  
My Poet, you write of torment so deep, yet so like mine it feels you have purged my soul of its most private emotions. How can you know me so well? My unrequited desires, my longing for peace. What you have given me is priceless; now when my senses dwell on that which I am not allowed, I close my eyes and am flooded with dreams of that place you speak of. That divine river whose waters purify, that glorious city where we will all earn our rewards no matter what the length of our working day. I  
(MORE)

FAN (V.O., cont'd)

will tell you that I have worked long, and hard,  
but sinful temptations still lurk hungrily at my  
door. They knock and shake at my threshold.  
But then I conjure-up this idea you have taught  
me, this "precious pearl without a spot," and my  
demons are thwarted at the door. But tell me,  
what am I to do when admiration of the poem  
becomes adoration of the poet? How can I  
defend myself then?

Poet finishes reading and flips the letter over. On the other side is drawn a portrait of poor quality featuring a beautiful but ambiguously gendered figure that seems mildly familiar. Poet, hiding the letter behind his back, walks out to the balcony and examines all the revelers suspiciously, wondering who can be the author of the letter. The pilgrims turn to stare at Poet. This leads to a transition into 1.9.

1.9

INT. CAMELOT, WHERE WE LEFT OFF

The knights, guests, and servants, still stuck in silence as they hope for a marvel that will satisfy the king, turn towards approaching SOUNDS: The GALLOPING HOOFS of a large horse, THREE LOUD KNOCKS, the DOOR BURSTING OPEN and the STORM outside. The galloping enters the castle, growing louder as the echoing hoofs approach the hall and the horse rears up and kicks open the door, which slams open to reveal the GREEN KNIGHT astride his steed. The knight's hair, beard, skin, and horse are green in tint. His eyes are red. His ornate clothing, armor, and livery are also green. The richness of his attire is striking. His clothing and gear is studded with emeralds and other gems, richly embroidered with butterflies and figures symbolizing the sensual spring. His long hair and beard are woven with green leaves and flowers. He is a giant; tall and broad yet very attractive. In one hand he holds a bob of holly; in the other, a giant ax with an engraved handle and a head made of green steel and gold plating that measures the same length as from his shoulder to his elbow. Green lace wrapped around the handle leads to a loop and tassels around the Green Knight's great hand. He stands there for a while, measuring-up the court. Then he speaks in a quiet, deep voice. By this time, the courtiers have left their seats and crowded to the back of the hall so that movement is impossible.

GREEN KNIGHT

Where is the captain of this crowd? Keenly I  
wish to see that sire with sight and to himself  
say my say.

Green Knight rides about the around the outer edge of the table, looking into the darkness of the back to find the leader. As he does so the courtiers begin to edge closer, examining and letting more light in to reveal their king.

ARTHUR

Fellow, in faith you have found fair welcome;  
the head of hostelry Arthur am I; leap down  
lightly, and linger I pray,

Guenevere looks at her husband as if he has suddenly gone insane.

ARTHUR

And the tale of your intent you shall tell us after.

GREEN KNIGHT

Nay, so help me, he that on high sits, to tarry  
here any time 'twas not my errand. But as the  
praise of you, prince, is puffed up so high, and  
your court and your company are counted the  
best, worthiest of their works the wide world  
over, and courtesy here is carried to its height,  
so at this season I have sought you out. You  
may be certain, by the branch I bear in hand that  
I pass here in peace, and would part friends. For  
had I come to this court on combat bent, I have  
a hauberk at home, and a helm beside, a shield  
and a sharp spear, shining bright, and other  
weapons to wield, I ween well, to boot. But as I  
willed no war, I wore no metal. But if you be so  
bold as all men believe, you will graciously  
grant me the game that I ask by right.

ARTHUR

Sir courteous knight, if contest here you crave,  
you shall not fail to fight.

GREEN KNIGHT

Nay, to fight, in good faith, is far from my  
thought; there are about on these benches but  
beardless children, were I here in full arms on a  
haughty steed, for measured against mine, their  
might is puny. And so I call in this court for a  
Christmas game, for 'tis Yule and New Year,  
and many young bloods about. If any in this  
house such hardihood claims, be so bold in his

(MORE)



## GREEN KNIGHT (cont'd)

blood, his brain so wild, as stoutly to strike one stroke for another, I shall give him as my gift this ax, that is heavy enough, to handle as he likes, and I shall bide the first blow, as bare as I sit. If there be one so willful my words to assay, let him leap hither lightly, lay hold of this weapon; I quitclaim it forever, keep it as his own, and I shall stand him a stroke, steady on this floor, so you grant me the guerdon to give him another, sans blame. In a twelvemonth and a day he shall have of me the same. Now be it seen straightaway who dares take up the game.

Green Knight looks from face to face in the pregnant silence. The knights look away rather than making eye contact with this scary man. They become suddenly fascinated by pieces of lint on their tunics or chips in their fingernails. The Green Knight stirs in his saddle as his head jumps from person to person. His hair and clothing CLINKS and RUSTLES as he moves.

## GREEN KNIGHT

What! Is this Arthur's house, whose fame is so fair in far realms and wide? Where is now your arrogance and your awesome deeds, your valor and your victories and your vaunting words? Now are the revel and renown of the Round Table overwhelmed with a word of one man's speech? For all cower and quake, and no cut felt!

## ARTHUR

(stands)

Sir, now we see you will say but folly, which whoso seeks, it suits that he will find. No guest here is aghast at your great words.

The courtiers throw him a look that proves they agree with the queen that the king has lost his mind.

## ARTHUR

Give me your ax, in God's own name, and the boon you have begged shall straight be granted.

Arthur jumps onto the table, runs across it and grabs the Green Knight's ax. The knight gets down from his horse, removes his cloak, and stands tall, waiting for Arthur's blow. Just as the king rears back the great weapon, Gawain interrupts.

## GAWAIN

Halt! In the name of all that is holy, I beseech before all here that this melee may be mine. Would you grant me the grace to be gone from this bench and stand by you, if I without discourtesy might quit this board, and if my lady mislike it not? I find it not fit, when such a boon is begged before all these knights that you be tempted to take this task on yourself while bold men on benches sit. I am the weakest, well I know, and of wit feeblest; the loss of my life would be the least of any. That I have you for uncle is my only praise; my body, but for your blood, is barren of worth. This folly befits not a king. 'Tis I that have asked it, it ought to be mine. And if my claim be not comely, let all this court judge.

Gawain looks at his uncle and the knights expectedly. After a pause, they all nod enthusiastic agreement.

## KNIGHTS

(simultaneously)

Be our guest, Sir Gawain.

I'm sure your legend will live in infamy.

God keep you, brave, virgin knight.

## AGRAVAIN

(clapping him on the shoulder)

May fate smile on you, my brother.

## ARTHUR

Come, stand beside me nephew.

Gawain begins to climb onto the table, then, on second thought, crawls underneath it. He emerges before Arthur and dusts off his knees. Arthur hands him the ax with reverent relief.

## ARTHUR

Keep, cousin, what you cut with this day. If you rule it aright, then readily, I know, you shall stand the stroke it will strike after.

Arthur backs away. Gawain turns to the Green Knight and begins to approach him with the ax raised.

GREEN KNIGHT

Have patience, Sir Knight. I trust this boon will be granted to the nephew of the king. First recount we our contract, ere you come further. And tell me true how you are called.

GAWAIN

In faith, Gawain am I whose buffet befalls you, whate'er betide after, and at this time twelvemonth will take from you another with what weapon you will.

GREEN KNIGHT

Sir Gawain. By Gog, I rejoice that your fist shall fetch this favor I seek. When the time comes, you shall seek me by yourself, wheresoever you deem my lodgings may lie, and look for such wages as you have offered me here before all this host.

GAWAIN

Pray tell, what is the way there? Where do you dwell?

GREEN KNIGHT

Enough. When I have taken your knock, and if you handily have hit, you shall hear straightway of my house and my home and my own name; then follow in my footsteps by faithful accord. And if, after your blow, I can spend no more speech, you shall speed the better: You can feast with your friends, nor further trace my tracks.

The Green Knight gets down on his hands and knees, and flips his hair over his head, exposing his massive neck. Gawain takes aim briefly, and then cuts off the knight's head cleanly. The blow is so heavy that the ax sticks into the floor. The body gushes blood, soaking Gawain, as the head rolls, laughing, a few feet. The knights back away as the head approaches their feet and finally comes to rest. Gawain begins to clean himself with a handkerchief when he is startled by the body heaving itself up, finding its head, and swinging gracefully onto the horse, holding the head by the hair. The ANGLE ON the shocked face of the queen.

3.10

## EXT. HISTORIC GRAVEYARD ON READER'S CAMPUS—JUST AFTER TWILIGHT

Reader is sitting under a dim light reading her text. ANGLE ON her face, which mirrors the horror of the queen, mixed with pleasure, as she reads of the Green Knight's beheading. A close noise startles her out of her reverie. She looks towards the noise and sees the dim figures of some college boys laughing and crashing through the graveyard. She looks around, realizes the potential danger and begins to walk towards her dorm. She hurries while trying to look relaxed and alerting all of her senses. As she is unlocking the dorm hall door, she narrows her eyes at a decorative bush that in her imagination becomes the shape of a headless man on a horse.

1.11

## INT. THE HALL AT CAMELOT—EVENING

The Green Knight holds up his dripping head. Its eyes slowly, heavily open, and it begins to speak.

## GREEN KNIGHT

Sir Gawain, forget not to go as agreed, and cease not to seek till me, sir, you find. I charge you, before the eyes of God and these noble knights, to the Green Chapel come. You have well deserved that your neck should have a knock on New Year's morn, therefore come, or be counted a recreant knight.

The Green Knight gallops out of the hall, sparks flying from under his horse's hooves. We see him disappear down the hallway and out the door, which closes of its own volition.

## ARTHUR

Well, let us eat! (laughs) For I have met with a marvel, I cannot deny.

The men hurry to begin their feasting. Gawain stands still and pale, staring after the Green Knight, until Arthur pulls the ax out of the ground with effort, reminding everyone of the infamous Excalibur incident, and passes it down. Each knight admires it briefly as blood drips from it onto their plates, until Agravain hangs it on the wall above the king. Gawain swallows, and gets down on his hands and knees to crawl under the table. By the time he emerges at his seat, he looks recovered, although he doesn't plunge into his meal as enthusiastically as the others. The king has him switch seats with Agravain, although he makes a humble gesture of protest. The knights around him pat his back jovially and

comment to him, spitting food in his face. All this noise is muffled under the POUNDING of Gawain's heart.

2.12

INT. POET'S CHAMBER—NIGHT

Poet leans back from his desk, cracks his knuckles, and picks up the fan letter again. Once more, he opens his door and looks down from the balcony to look for the author. By now, all the revelers are passed out messily in various pairings on the floor while Innkeeper looks on grumpily. She looks up to him and rolls her eyes. Poet returns to writing.

1.13

INT: ROUND TABLE HALL AT CAMELOT—EARLY MORNING

The knights are passed out in various positions amidst the remains of the feast. A TRAVELING SHOT goes out the widow of the hall and sweeps over the snow.

EXT. THE WOODS OUTSIDE OF CAMELOT—CONTINUOUS SHOT SHOWING THE CHANGING SEASONS, ENDING IN FALL—MORNING

Gawain watches servants pack his horse, GRINGOLET, right outside of the castle. The knight is decked out in a silk cloak lined with fur, finely wrought lightweight armor and chain mail, and a silk cord fastened to a broadsword at his side. Under his arm he carries a heavily ornamented helm, and tied to the saddle is his shield that displays a pentangle symbol on the outer side, and an image of the Virgin Mary on the inside. All of his gear is intricately embroidered and strikingly colorful. He examines the Virgin briefly and crosses himself, then returns the shield back to its outward facing position. He then joins Arthur, who is also overseeing the preparations.

GAWAIN

Now, liege lord of my life, my leave I take. The terms of this task too well you know—To count the costs over concerns me nothing. But I am bound forth betimes to bear a stroke from the grim man in green, as God may direct.

The queen and a crowd of knights collects around them to bid farewell.

ARTHUR

You have been to mass, nephew.

GAWAIN

Yes uncle. I have made my confession, as well;  
I depart with an untainted heart and a clear  
conscience.

Gawain pauses to take a long look at his fellow knights and at Camelot.

GAWAIN

Why should I tarry? In destinies sad or merry,  
true men can but try.

He kisses his helm and places it on his head, climbs onto Gringolet, turns the horse as he takes one final look, and rides off.

2.14

INT. INSIDE THE GREEN GIRDLE—EVENING

The pilgrims and other inn guests sit in chairs facing Poet who sits atop a table reading from *Gawain* in Middle English with modern English SUBTITLES. The inn is packed with townspeople who stand all around the room and sit between the tables. Messenger sits as close as possible and looks up at Poet happily.

POET

*Now thenk wel, Sir Gawan,  
For wothe that thou ne wonde  
This auenture for to frayn  
That thou hatz tan on honed.*

SUBTITLES

Bold Gawain, best beware,  
Lest fear leave you unmanned;  
Consider knight, with care  
What now you hold in hand.

His audience applauds as Poet blushes modestly and puts his manuscript back in order.

TOWNSWOMAN

What happens to Sir Gawain? Does he prevail?

PREACHER

No, the Green man chops his head right off and he has to nail it back on with a rock. Isn't that right, Poet?

## POET

In truth, I do not know. It has not yet been written.

3.15

## INT. READER'S DORMROOM—NIGHT

Reader is searching for the perfect accessory to go with her somewhat funky outfit. She seems nervous, and jumps when there is a knock at the door. She opens it to four wild STUDENTS we can recognize from her class. FEMALE STUDENT is the social butterfly type. DOUG's hair is spiky and dyed multiple colors. He wears a plain black shirt and a bright sarong. NATHANIEL is the master of beatniky understatement in dress. And SARAH is an attractive, intelligent girl, with round curves, Buddy Holly glasses and short-cropped hair.

## FEMALE STUDENT

Hey Pheobe! Ready?

Reader, tongue-tied, makes "tadaa" gesture, indicating her outfit.

## FEMALE STUDENT

Very nice.

They exit through the dorm hallway, looking into rooms with open doors where students either study, or gather in groups listening to music, watching TV and burning incense. Reader nods at the others as she is introduced, and blushes at the last introduction.

## FEMALE STUDENT

Hey listen, this is Doug.

## DOUG

Wha' zup.

## FEMALE STUDENT

Nathaniel.

## NATHANIEL

Hey.

## FEMALE STUDENT

And you know Sarah, right?

## SARAH

Hi.

## FEMALE STUDENT

Are you gonna read tonight?

## READER

(Makes fragmented noises and gestures to the  
negative)

## SARAH

You should sometime, it's really...ethereal.

3.16

## INT. POETRY READING AT STUDENT UNION—NIGHT

A single microphone stands in front of a back corner of the room. Dim red lights illuminate the mike and the readers. The room is absolutely packed with students from diverse cliques clutching and writing in notebooks and journals of different shapes and sizes. Sarah is reading from a ragged notebook that contains both class notes and lines of poetry. Reader watches her with something more than admiration as she reads a rhythmical composition and sways her body with casual sexuality.

## SARAH

...the sounds of this train bounce before my  
Eyes  
The voice of this girl is begging, begging,  
Begging to feel-up my mind  
Won't you tell me how I can follow these too?  
Many echoes?  
I wanna know

This taste is punctuating these words  
My spit is like icing on a human cake  
This flavor is killing my morosity  
I have grown in boldness;  
Since leaving home, I started making up words

This train is headed down your destination  
You're magnetic; I can't stop you drawing me  
In  
Your growth is like an event horizon  
You've, we've reached that point of no turn  
Around  
No backward feeling  
We are nothing but momentum coalescing,  
Speeding up, climaxing, and falling in



DOUG

Ya! Give it up for Sarah!

Everyone hoots and applauds as Sarah returns to her seat.

DOUG

And next, straight from her O-chem. midterm,  
we have Spider.

While the audience applauds and the next poet, a depressed-looking girl in a black trench coat, reads in the background, Reader gazes at Sarah and they speak briefly, with low voices, ending in time for us to hear the final line of Spider's poem.

SPIDER

This life is so compounding!  
A sea of equations sweeps over everything real.  
It's all digital now.  
I should be lying under prehistoric oak trees  
For so long I would have to peel the spiked  
leaves out of the imprints on my back.  
I should be swimming with stinging rays,  
Screaming over loop-to-loops.  
Yet I'm here.  
This isn't life.

READER

That was good.

SARAH

Thanks, it was OK. It's never quite how I want  
it. You know, I'm no Anonymous.

READER

Well, you could be an Anonymous for the 20<sup>th</sup>  
century.

SARAH

Great.

SPIDER

This is faking it.

2.17

INT. MONASTERY—MORNING

Poet shivers as he enters the monastery. He looks around deliberately until he sees the two FRIENDLY MONKS from scene 2.3. They are watching him frankly and smiling. Poet smiles in return. Fan walks past them towards the scriptorium just as a short, SNEAKY MONK tiptoes behind the Friendly Monks and begins to hang a drawing on the wall. At the first tap of the hammer, the Friendly Monks spin around to see what he is doing. Fan and Poet are entranced by the exchange that follows.

FRIENDLY MONK 1

I don't think so, Brother Levi. We have already discussed this.

Friendly Monk 1 snatches the drawing from Sneaky Monk and holds it above his head while Sneaky Monk tries to retrieve it.

SNEAKY MONK

Give it back! It is practically a relic. You will ruin it.

Friendly Monk 1 passes the drawing behind Sneaky Monk's back to Friendly Monk 2, who holds it to his chest and spins to avoid Sneaky Monk's groping hands.

FRIENDLY MONK 2

We should apologize for relics such as these, not cherish them.

SNEAKY MONK

You are immoral men to reject your own history.

Sneaky Monk grabs for the drawing. Friendly Monk 2 tosses it to Poet yelling,

FRIENDLY MONK 2

Poet!

Poet catches it. For a moment the others watch him, stunned, waiting to see what he will do. He looks at the drawing. It is a small, ink on paper with an ornate wooden frame depicting men and women burning at the stake, wearing pointed caps as men of the church light the fires. A caption on the frame says in Middle English, "The Burning of the Sodomites." Poet looks up at Fan, and the other three monks. Sneaky Monk approaches him quickly. Poet stuffs the drawing down his pants. Sneaky Monk looks surprised, then angry. The Friendly Monks laugh as Poet turns to walk to the scriptorium.

INT. SCRIPTORIUM—DAY

Poet enters the scriptorium and barely glances at the waiting scribes while he mutters his instructions.

POET

Good morning. Please work on your illustrations.

Poet turns around and takes the drawing out of his pants. Fan bursts through the door, the two look at each other, look down at the drawing, then Fan lowers his head and moves to his seat.

INT. SCRIPTORIUM—LATER

Poet is DICTATING *Pearl* in Middle English with modern English SUBTITLES while watching Fan, who is beginning to look uncomfortable under his gaze.

POET

*More of wele watz in that wyse  
Then I cowthe telle thas I tom hade  
For vrthely herte mygt not suffyse  
To the tenthe dole of tho gladnez glade.  
Forthy I thogt that paradyse  
Watz ther ouer gayn tho bonkez brade;  
I hoped the water were a deuyse  
Bytwene mythez by merez made  
Bygonde the broke, by slente other slade,  
I hoped that mote merked wore.  
But the watz depe, I dorst not wade,  
And euer me longed ay more and more.*

SUBTITLES

More mirth was mixed amidst that scene  
Than I could properly portray.  
Nor could an earthly heart sustain  
A fraction of that fiery joy.  
It seemed that paradise, unseen,  
Was just beyond that waterway  
That formed a barrier between  
Myself and deep delight that lay  
Within that city's walls. A way  
Across that river, rich and rare,  
I sought, though unsuccessfully,  
While longing moved me more and more.

POET

(The following lines spoken in Modern  
English.)

More and more and ever more  
I pined and longed to penetrate...

Fan fumbles and breaks his quill, then rushes to ready another while blushing deeply.

POET

...That fine and fresh abode. For fair  
As was my side, far fairer yet  
Did seem that sweet, opposing shore.

2.18

INT. GREEN GIRDLE INN—SAME DAY, EARLY EVENING

Poet returns to the inn in a state of distraction. The pilgrims are assembled in the dining room; they have already begun their drinking. Woman Pilgrim, dressed in fine but abused and seductively loosened clothing, approaches him.

WOMAN PILGRIM

Poet, stop a moment. I wish to tell you that you  
have intrigued me. Indeed, intrigued us all.  
You are such a recluse; every day your fingers  
grow darker. Tell me, why do you not join us in  
our...worship? I'm sure there have been many  
offers. Do you object to our brand of  
theological hysteria?

POET

Madam, I must admit that the quiet of my cell  
and the solace of my quill are the closest I ever  
come to religious ecstasy.

WOMAN PILGRIM

How dull! You cannot be a typical poet; when I  
met Geoffrey Chaucer last spring he was much  
more...rambunctious. Tell me, wherefore your  
chastity? You are no monk. Are you in love?

The pilgrims laugh as Woman Pilgrim begins touching Poet, who blushes and tries to escape to his room.

## WOMAN PILGRIM

Aha, I have found it out! Pray tell, who is it?  
Eh, one of us? Could it be me? Or the widow?

## PREACHER

(calling out from the crowd)

If he is in love with anything, it is words.

## WOMAN PILGRIM

Well, his love eludes him now, does it not?

## POET

(barely heard over the laughter)

If you will excuse me, I will dine in my room  
this evening.

Poet returns swiftly to his room, and after throwing off his outer garments, begins immediately to write. As he writes the Professor's VOICEOVER recites the poetry, and Poet's posture shows his dejection as he descends into loneliness.

## PROFESSOR (V.O.)

Now he rides in his array through the realm of  
Logres,/ Sir Gawain, God knows, though it gave  
him small joy!/ All alone must he lodge through  
many a long night/ Where the food that he  
fancied was far from his plate;/ He had no mate  
but his mount, over mountain and plain,/ Nor  
man to say his mind to but almighty God.

Poet stops writing and pulls the letter out of his pocket. By now it is well worn and its creases are well established. He has obviously read it again and again. He turns the letter over to once again look at the portrait. His face solidifies into an expression of resolve.

## POET

I will look for you. I will find you.

1.19

## EXT. A CLIFFSIDE IN NORTHERN WALES—DAY

Throughout scenes 19-22 we HEAR David Bowie's "It Ain't Easy." The song fades periodically so we can HEAR the dialogue, and ends abruptly after the chorus following Gawain's closing line in scene 22.

Snow is beginning to fall as Gawain rides near the edge of a cliff. A LONG SHOT shows him from a distance. As the camera approaches we can HEAR him singing along to the music.

1.20

EXT. WOODS—NIGHT

The wind and snow picks up as Gawain roasts a rabbit over a fire where he is camping. He huddles, shivering, under his cloak. He has not removed his armor.

2.21

EXT. VILLAGE WHERE THE GREEN GIRDLE IS LOCATED—DAY

Poet pulls his coat around him as snow begins to fall. A continuous shot follows him as he goes from person to person on the street and shows them the portrait on the letter. After considering it, they each shake their heads. Poet stops in front of a textiles shop, looks at a cloak displayed in the window, and goes inside.

1.22

EXT. OUTSIDE OF HERMIT'S HUT IN HEAVY WOODS—DAY

Snow is piled on the ground heavily. ANGLE ON Gawain as he walks Gringolet up to the hut. As he approaches it to knock on the door, the hermit appears carrying firewood. He freezes in fear. Gawain on the other hand is delighted to see another human being. He tries to appear stoic, but his excitement is apparent.

GAWAIN

My good man, please do not fear me. I am but a humble knight of the Round Table on something of a quest. If you will offer me the hospitality of dining with you, I will in turn describe to you all the wondrous marvels I have come upon on this journey.

Hermit simply looks at him and shakes his head vigorously.

GAWAIN

My friend, I do not wish to impose, only to share your fire. The nights grow colder and I have had such amazing adven...

Hermit, grumbling inaudibly, drops some of his wood and heads for his door. Gawain follows him.

## GAWAIN

Wai...Halt, in the name of the King! At least  
tell me what you know of the Green Chapel.

Hermit slams the door in Gawain's face. The knight sighs, picks up the firewood that lies on the ground, and leads Gringolet away. The horse whinnies critically.

## GAWAIN

Quiet you...donkey.

## SONG

*"It ain't easy...  
It ain't easy...  
It ain't easy to get to heaven  
When you're going down."*

1.23

## EXT. NORTHERN WALES—WINTER DAY

Gawain seems to be half frozen and starving as he leads Gringolet weakly through a blizzard. Leonard Cohen's "WHO BY FIRE" begins to play

2.24

## EXT. OUTSIDE OF VILLAGE MONASTERY—WINTER MORNING

Poet approaches door of monastery. As he opens it and steps inside he pulls the *Pearl* manuscript out of the bag hidden underneath his new cloak. (The same one we saw in the window of the textiles shop in scene 21.)

## INT. MONASTERY ENTRANCEWAY

As Poet enters the building, the Friendly Monks call to him. He joins them.

## FRIENDLY MONK 1

Roger!

## FRIENDLY MONK 1

Good morning.

## POET

Morning.

## FRIENDLY MONK 2

We have learned your name; Abbot Jacob  
knows you well.

## POET

Indeed. He taught me much in my youth, and  
he is my oldest friend.

## FRIENDLY MONK 1

He says it is a great loss to the church that your  
noble patrons have taken you from us. I, for  
one, agree. My name is Joshua.

## FRIENDLY MONK 2

And I am Samuel. We are grievously sorry our  
welcome came so late. I cannot express how we  
appreciate your help the other day, and your  
silence.

## POET

Think naught of it.

## FRIENDLY MONK 2

What have you done with it?

## POET

(touching his bag)

Nothing yet. I never thought I'd want to destroy  
a piece of art.

## FRIENDLY MONK 1

It is not art. Do with it what you will.

## POET

Well. I really must go; my scribes are waiting.

## FRIENDLY MONK 2

Of course, Roger. Back to your Pearl. We shall  
speak with you again, I am sure.

Poet nods his farewell and walks briskly towards the scriptorium.

## FRIENDLY MONK 1

Jacob was right.



## FRIENDLY MONK 2

Yes, he is a good poet.

1.25

## EXT. NORTHERN WALES—EARLY WINTER EVENING

Gawain mounts the crest of a snow-covered hill only to find a larger one in front of him. He unfastens his shield from the horse, and falls to his knees in prayer before the image of the Virgin Mary. “WHO BY FIRE” continues to play.

## GAWAIN

Blessed Virgin, I beg you to have mercy on your humble servant. I have traveled across vast, icy forests. I have dined on what the barren earth has had to offer. And I have done this all without complaint. But now I am tired, and I long only for a temporary shelter, a bed of straw on which to rest myself so I can be fully fit to have my head separated from my body.

Ashamed of this unworthy prayer, he shakes his head and starts again.

## GAWAIN

I beseech of Thee, Lord, and Mary, thou mildest mother so dear, for some shelter where solemn mass is sung, and your matins tomorrow morning—meekly I ask it, and thereto proffer and pray my pater and ave and creed.

Gawain then bows his head and begins to pray desperately. He crosses himself three times and kisses his hand, then looks up at the hill.

## GAWAIN

(whispering)

May Christ's cross me speed.

He begins to descend the hill so he can climb again.

3.26

## INT. READER'S DORMROOM—NIGHT

As medieval music plays, Reader works on constructing a complex paper castle. As she does so, she periodically refers to her text.

2.27

## INT. GREEN GIRDLE INN—EARLY EVENING

The wind shoves Poet through the front door along with an inch of snow. He turns around and forces the door closed, then, out of breath, begins to remove his plentiful outer garments. After a bit, he notices Woman Pilgrim watching him.

POET

Madam.

WOMAN PILGRIM

Cold, is it not?

POET

Yes. Very much so.

WOMAN PILGRIM

The Innkeeper says it has been snowing like this all day. I would not know because I only just left the comfort of my bed. She says we are temporarily snowed in. Is that true?

POET

I would say so. At least for the night, unfortunately.

WOMAN PILGRIM

Really. I find that quite fortunate.

Poet begins to question her attitude about this situation briefly, then realizes her motivations as she stares at him intently.

POET

Why...Oh.

WOMAN PILGRIM

I wish you would join me for a meal, Poet. We must try to keep each other warm. I have already ordered for us. I hope you don't mind me taking the liberty, uh, oh dear, somehow I have not yet learned your name.

POET

My name. It is Roger.

WOMAN PILGRIM

Roger. I am Gwendolyn, but you may call me Gwen, or Lyn. Perhaps even Doe.

POET

Thank you, Do...Ly...Madam Gwendolyn for your kind invitation, but I really must rush to my chambers immediately. My mind is simply teeming.

WOMAN PILGRIM

No, no, dear Roger. I refuse to let you escape this time. Poor Roger. It is as if you have never before dined with a lady. Please, sit.

POET

(nods and takes a seat)

As they sit, Innkeeper brings them a large platter of bread, cheeses, and meats and a lot of beer. They both reach for the food at the same time. Poet pulls his hand back shyly. Woman Pilgrim gestures towards the platter, inviting him to help himself, then makes a point of also reaching for the food so that their hands brush.

WOMAN PILGRIM

I must confess something to you; I do not think you will find it at all surprising: I like to have a good time. Regrettably, sometimes that good time occurs at the expense of another, and then I am always sorry. I hope you can forgive me for ridiculing you in front of all the residents. Normally it would not have been such an unusually cruel tease, but I see now that your disposition is extraordinarily sensitive.

POET

Please, think no more of it, Gwendolyn. I am sorry to have caused you any worry.

WOMAN PILGRIM

I accept your apology. You have not touched your ale.

POET

(taking a drink)

I find the innkeeper's brew rather strong. I like a lighter brew; it goes less swiftly to the head. There was a time when I over-indulged quite often, but I learned that in some places it is better to retain sober composure.

WOMAN PILGRIM

Like at monasteries, perhaps.

POET

Surely. Mostly I am speaking of court.

WOMAN PILGRIM

You've been at court?

POET

I have spent more time in the presence of royalty than most strong men can stomach.

WOMAN PILGRIM

I never knew sobriety was in any way a requirement amongst nobility.

POET

You are right. I am not noble.

WOMAN PILGRIM

Oh. (pause) I would like to be at court.

The two continue with their meal for a while without speaking or making eye contact.

WOMAN PILGRIM

I cannot remember a time when I had such an ordinary conversation with a man.

POET

I have always thought that men and women could be true companions.

WOMAN PILGRIM

How amusing. I too believe that the two sexes  
(MORE)

WOMAN PILGRIM (cont'd)

make the greatest friends. But a man is not a true comrade until he sees the world from inside a woman. Quite a different perspective, wouldn't you agree?

POET

I do not know madam. Excuse me; I have much writing to do.

ANGLE ON Gwendolyn's disappointed but slightly haughty face as Poet gets up to return to his room

POET

Thank you for your gracious hospitality. I hope I can return the favor some day, but I really am very busy.

2.28

INT. POET'S CHAMBER—EVENING

Poet returns, rolling his eyes, to his room, places his dripping cloak on a hook, lights a stove in the corner, then sits down to write. He pauses, pulls the drawing out of his satchel and props it up on the edge of his desk.

1.29

EXT. HILL THAT GAWAIN BEGAN TO CLIMB IN 1.25—NIGHT

Gawain, exhausted, finally mounts the crest of the hill; we see his eyes light up, then

EXT. CASTLE HAUTDESERT—NIGHT

We see a medium-sized medieval castle with large, stained-glass windows through which we can see the activity of a Christmas Eve feast.

3.30

INT. READER'S DORM ROOM—NIGHT

Reader lights a candle in the completed paper castle. She smiles as she looks at the glowing castle, and the colored light that radiates from the colored-paper windows. The sound of her door opening interrupts her revelry.

DOUG

Phoebe-ness! (seeing the castle) Oh, sweet!  
Nate, did you see this?

NATHANIEL

(dropping arm around Doug)  
Niiice. What's it for?

READER

I just felt like building something.

SARAH

Wow, Phoebe. It's just how I imagined it.

READER

Really?

SARAH

Yah, except for the paper thing.

They all gather around to look at the castle, huddled together comfortable.

NATHANIEL

Well, ya' ready?

READER

Yah, just let me grab my coat.

1.31

EXT. OUTSIDE OF CASTLE HAUTDESERT—NIGHT

Gawain, with effort, pulls himself onto Gringolet, sets his helm on his head, and canters down to the castle. He prays as he rides around the perimeter of the moat searching for the main entrance.

GAWAIN

Holy, blessed, mother, I thank thee with all my heart for hearing my prayer in my most desperate hour. Now fair harbor I humbly beseech. (as he nears the drawbridge) Fair harbor I humbly beseech. Fair harbor, I beseech. (Stopping in front of the drawbridge) Fair harbor...(yelling) Hello! In the name of the king, I swear I am a friend.

PORTER

(from his post in the turrets above the drawbridge)  
Yes, friend. I am here. I can see by your shield  
that you are no enemy of this dukedom.

GAWAIN

Good sir, would's't go to enquire if your lord  
would allow me to lodge here a space?

PORTER

By Peter! For my part, I think so noble a knight  
will not want for welcome.

Porter runs off briskly while Gawain embraces Gringolet's neck in relief. The porter comes back quickly with several other servants and lets down the drawbridge. Even before the drawbridge touches the earth, they all run across it to greet the knight. When they reach him, they help him off the horse and greet him with embraces and kisses.

PORTER

My lord, we are overjoyed to have you. I can  
tell you have had an arduous journey.

GAWAIN

Indeed. It is only by the Lord's grace that I  
stand before you now.

PORTER

Then by God's grace, you are welcome.

A STABLE HAND removes Gawain's gear from the horse and gives it to one of the servants, then begins to take Gringolet away. Gawain turns toward him in distress.

STABLE HAND

Do not worry my lord. He shall be treated as a  
prince.

Gawain nods, takes a farewell look at Gringolet, and then continues across to the castle.

INT. CASTLE HAUTDESERT

As Gawain enters the castle, the knights and honorable guests of the Christmas feast gather to greet him in the large entranceway. He scans those present in the room, then his eyes stop on SIR BERCILAK, the lord of the castle. Bercilak is tall, broad, and handsome. His dress is subtle, but elegant, displaying his prosperity. Scars upon his face hint at his valor in battle. He is the ideal knight. The chemistry between the two is

palpable. As they look at each other it is as if there is no one else in the room and Gawain seems to forget his hunger and weakness.

2.32

INT. POET'S CHAMBER—NIGHT

Poet starts up from his composition, astonished at what he has written. He looks at the words with confusion, but continues.

3.33

INT. ENTRANCE WAY OF CASTLE HAUTDESERT

As the drawbridge closes loudly with a bang that reverberates throughout, the castle, Bercilak and Gawain remember themselves.

BERCILAK

Forgive me, my good knight, please. I am overwhelmed to have you among us. To this house you are heartily welcome: What is here is wholly yours, to have in your power and sway.

GAWAIN

Many thanks. May Christ your pains repay.

BERCILAK

No pain, my friend. No pain.

The two embrace warmly as the others applaud.

BERCILAK

(breaking the hug and gesturing to two servants) Take this knight immediately and give him all he needs to replenish him. (to Gawain) You will return, I hope, this evening and join this host assembled here. (in good humor) Nay, I will not even hear your name until you are refreshed and comfortable. Then perhaps you will tell us of your ordeal and your noble lord, whoever he may be. (to Servants) Supply him with the finest.

SERVANT 1

Yes, my lord.



SERVANT 2

(overlapping)

Of course, my lord.

Bercilak sweeps out of the room before Gawain has the chance to thank him again. The two servants help him to his chamber and a third follows behind with his things.

1.34

INT. MAIN HALL OF CASTLE HAUTDESERT—LATER THAT EVENING

When Gawain enters the main hall, accompanied by Servants 1 and 2, it suddenly falls silent. He is dressed in fresh clothing, including a silk cloak embroidered around the borders that are ornamented with ermine. The servants lead him to a couch of blankets and pillows spread in front of the fire. As he reclines the servants bring him a low table covered with fine linen and silver, large servings of delicacies, and a water bowl to rinse his fingers. As a servant dries his hands he addresses Bercilak and the guests who have been watching him.

GAWAIN

Sirs and ladies please do not cease your celebration on my account. I confess this is a feast as fine as any I have seen at Camelot. And your hospitality rivals even that of the king himself.

BERCILAK

Well, that confirms our suspicions, my friends. Pray thee, eat, take all you can stomach. And between mouthfuls, tell us of your lord and your journey.

GAWAIN

Of course, I will tell you everything. But first, if I may ask, my lord, by what name shall I call my generous host.

BERCILAK

How can I have forgotten? I suppose I expected the servants to let their lord's name slip. But, of course, Camelot is too far for you to know my face. I am Sir Bercilak. These lands are mine to protect and nurture. Indeed, from your

(MORE)

BERCILAK (cont'd)

countenance I can tell that you have spent many a day's difficult journey to find me, but you have been in my little kingdom for many miles.

GAWAIN

Sir Bercilak. Although your legend has not yet breached the walls of Camelot, I know it will soon span the distance to do so. Allow me to again express my gratitude for this grand array of delicacies. I do not think I have ever had such a spread laid out before me.

BERCILAK

It is nothing. Believe me, tonight you only fast and pray; tomorrow will see you fed.

GAWAIN

Well, I am flattered by your hospitality. That you spared a room for me alone in a house full of holiday guests is beyond generous.

BERCILAK

These offerings are not simple boasts; they are only just for a knight with your status and I wish to give you more than what you are due. Now tell this host, pray, your illustrious name.

GAWAIN

I am Sir Gawain, of Camelot.

LADY (Bercilak's wife)

Gawain! The nephew of Arthur himself. Now, my lords, displays of deportment shall dazzle our eyes, and the polished pearls of impeccable speech; the high art of eloquence is ours to pursue since the father of fine manners is found in our midst.

BERCILAK

Sir Gawain, welcome to this court. This excellent lady who has spoken is my own wife. And there next to her, her companion.

Lady continues speaking as if she never heard her husband, and gets up to sit beside Gawain on his couch. Her companion, an old, short, plump and toothless woman,

follows her, bringing a stool on which to sit. Lady's looks rival even those of the queen. Her fine dress which exposes her throat and much of her bosom and her headdress hung with pearls is in stark contrast with her companion's deeply creased features and nun-like wimple.

LADY

Great is God's grace, and goodly indeed, that a guest such as Gawain he guides to us here when men sit and sing of their savior's birth. With command of manners pure he shall each heart imbue; who shares his converse, sure, shall learn love's language true.

Gawain looks at her in astonishment, then swallows.

GAWAIN

My lady. My lords, I am amazed. I had not guessed that word of my reputation had traveled so far, nor that it was so favorable. My lady, if it is no trouble to you, I wish you would sit with me and say what else you have heard.

LADY

Only all that I have already said and more. Fair knight, instead I wish you would tell us all about your deeds and tribulations.

GAWAIN

In all modesty, I cannot tell you much. My greatest deed is the arduous journey that brought me to your fine company, and that was only cold and wet. Instead, allow me to tell of the valor and charms of my lord and his champions, if such true tales you indeed long to hear.

BERCILAK

Sir Gawain, you may entertain us however you will or will not, as long as you remain in our company through the holidays.

Bercilak crouches down to embrace Gawain, so that Lady has to move aside.

BERCILAK (under his voice)

No guest on God's earth would I gladlier greet.

## INT. A LARGE, COMMUNAL COLLEGE HOUSE—NIGHT

Reader is sitting with her friends on a decrepit couch. A party is raging around them with a large band playing 14<sup>th</sup> century music, drinking, joint smoking, and dancing. Her friends are yelling back and forth at each other, leaning over her so they can be heard. They pass a smoking pipe right in front of her nose. She notices none of this because she is watching a gay couple kiss. She is so touched by this isolated, private moment that it brings tears to her eyes. The party and the dialogue are quite loud in the beginning of the scene, but become muted as Reader focuses on the couple.

NATHANIEL

So the Prof was like, if you don't take your hat off right now, I will have to ask you to leave this class.

DOUG (handing him the bong)

That's crazy.

NATHANIEL

Thanks. Yah, everybody was so uncomfortable.

DOUG

Did he take off his hat?

NATHANIEL

No, he got up and left. But the class was awesome.

1.36

## INT. MAIN HALL OF CASTLE HAUTDESERT—THREE DIFFERENT NIGHTS

This scene is a montage of the three feasts that followed the one in 1.34. On the first night, Gawain and Lady sit conversing and drinking while Companion embroiders a cloth. They laugh in admiration of each other while Gawain periodically steals glances at Bercilak. Everyone is wearing different festive clothing to indicate that it is a different night. The sounds of the party are only muffled; we HEAR primarily a medievalized version of "Please, Please Me."

On the second night, we HEAR a slow, medievalized version of "Love, Love Me Do" as Gawain and Bercilak eat from the same dish and examine Bercilak's excellent sword. Lady and Companion watch this exchange carefully and bemusedly.

On the third night, we HEAR a mellow, medievalized version of "Dear Prudence," which fades into the background as the montage ends and transitions to the next scene.

1.37

## INT. MAIN HALL OF CASTLE HAUTDESERT

Another feast has ended. Several guests are beginning to fall asleep in their seats, some have already, and others are getting up to find their beds. The feasters have had a good time; they are all fairly drunk.

## BERCILAK

My friends, it has been yet another a night to remember, but I must retire to ready myself all the more for hunting and fellowship to come tomorrow. (addressing Gawain) As long as I may live, my luck is the better that Gawain was my guest at God's own feast!

## GAWAIN

Noble sir, I cannot but think all the honor is your own—may heaven requite it! And your man to command I account myself here. (addressing Lady and Companion) My ladies, I hope you as well will consider me your servant, as I am bound and beholden, and shall be, come what may.

## BERCILAK

These are words of parting, fair knight. I hope you are not considering leaving us so soon.

## GAWAIN

I regret that my stay here has by necessity come to an end.

## LADY

No. You cannot go. I'm sorry, dear knight, but I forbid it. We will take you as our hostage, if we must.

## GAWAIN

My lady, I must say farewell though it saddens me to no end. You have paid me with more kindness than I deserve, and I am forever in your debt.

BERCILAK

Nonsense, Gawain. We are in yours. But you have never before spoken of leaving. Why depart before the New Year?

GAWAIN

In truth, my lord, I am on a quest, and I have an appointment to keep by that holiday you speak of; my very honor depends on it. On a high errand and urgent I must hasten away, for I have already tarried here too long. I am summoned by myself to seek for a place, would I knew whither, or where it might be! For rather I would find it before the New Year than own the land of Logres, so help me Our Lord! Wherefore, sir, in friendship this one last favor I ask, that you say in sober earnest, if something you know of the Green Chapel, or the lone knight that lives there, of like green in hue.

BERCILAK

Why must you know?

GAWAIN

A certain day was set by the assent of us both to meet at that landmark, and from now to the New Year is nothing too long. You see, this green man came to Camelot a year ago and proposed a Yule time game. In the end I found myself subject to receive a fatal blow, and I must honor our agreement.

LADY

A contest, was it, an exchange of blows?

GAWAIN

Yes, my lady.

BERCILAK

And what came of your initial stroke?

GAWAIN

The decapitation of my opponent, sir.

BERCILAK

A mighty chop indeed.

LADY

You cannot go, Sir Gawain. This contest will make your end. Stay here, and we will guard you with our very lives.

BERCILAK

No, no, wife, he must go.

GAWAIN

I would as soon sink down dead as desist from my errand.

BERCILAK

Rejoice, sir, for your search is done. We shall see you to that site by the set time. (raising his voice and waking some of the feasters) Let Gawain grieve no more over the Green Chapel; you shall be in your own bed, in blissful ease, all the forenoon, and fare forth the first of the year, and make the goal by midmorn, to mind your affairs, no fear! Tarry till the fourth day, and ride on the first of the year. We shall set you on your way; it is not two miles from here.

GAWAIN

Now I thank you for this, past all things else!  
Now my goal is here at hand! With a glad heart  
I shall both tarry, and undertake any task you  
devise.

After a thoughtful pause, Bercilak grabs Gawain's arm and pulls him into a chair. They begin to speak in confidence as Lady and her Companion move away to give them more privacy.

BERCILAK

You have bound yourself boldly my bidding to do—Will you stand by that boast, and obey me this once?

GAWAIN

While I lie in your lodging, your laws will I follow.

## BERCILAK

As you have had many hardships abroad and little sleep of late, you are lacking, I judge, both in nourishment needful and nightly rest: You shall lie abed late in your lofty chamber tomorrow until mass, and meet then to dine, when you will, with my wife, who will sit by your side and talk to you at table, the better to cheer our guest. A-hunting I will go while you lie late and rest.

Gawain nods.

## BERCILAK

And Gawain, agree now to this: Whatever I win in the woods I will give you at eve, and all you have earned by daylight you must offer to me. Swear now, sweet friend, to swap as I say, whether hands in the end be wealthy or want.

## GAWAIN

By God, I grant it forthwith. If you find the game good, I shall gladly take part.

## BERCILAK

(while signaling to a servant)

Then let the bright wine be brought and our bargain is done.

The servant brings them two full chalices of wine and they drink them completely. The sound fades and the MUSIC comes up as Gawain and Bercilak embrace and kiss each other as well as Lady.

1.38

## INT. SIR BERCILAK'S CASTLE—JUST AFTER DAWN

Main Hall. Early morning light streams through the lofty windows. The great banquet table and floor are littered with all the evidence of a party. There is no one to be seen. A CONTINUOUS SHOT travels through the long hall towards the high double doors that lead out to the drawbridge. From the right we HEAR the sound of approaching footsteps, running. A SQUIRE appears from that direction clutching a short bow and quiver with arrows. He skids to a stop in front of the doors and shoves through. We HEAR low-pitched creaking as Squire struggles to open the doors.



EXT. DRAW BRIDGE SPANNING OVER MOAT. JUST BEYOND, A LARGE PRACTICE FIELD SURROUNDED BY WOODS—JUST AFTER DAWN

A hundred knights and noblemen astride horses collect in the practice field, decked out for a hunting trip. A couple dozen hounds mill about anxiously. We HEAR periodic baying and horns blowing. The squire runs up and delivers his weapon to a hunter, then stands aside to observe. The hunters BLOW THEIR HORNS into the air then take off at a gallop, the hounds barking and trailing after them. A CONTINUOUS SHOT follows their progress until it reaches the other side of the castle.

ANGLE ON TOWER WINDOW

POV—WINDOW

INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER WHERE HE SLEEPS

The door opens with a creak. Lady sneaks in and turns to close the door softly. Gawain raises his head, looks through the partially opened curtain, then falls back against his pillow, astonished, pretending to sleep. As Lady approaches the bed silently, we HEAR a slow, seductive, medievalized version of "Like A Virgin." Lady sits on the bedside and watches as Gawain pretends to start from sleep, stretches, opens his eyes, and signs himself.

LADY

*God Mouroun, Sir Gawayn, a sound sleeper you are, since one may steal here. Now you are taken and trapped! Unless a truce takes shape, I shall bind you in your bed; of that you may be sure!*

EXT. WOODS

Sir Bercilak and other nobles gallop up to where the dogs have cornered a deer.

INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER

GAWAIN

*Goud moroun, gay. I shall be at your will, and well does that suit me, for I surrender myself swiftly and seek your mercy, and that is best, to be sure, for obliged am I. But if, lovely lady, you misliked it not, and were pleased to permit your prisoner to rise, I should quit this couch and accouter me better, and be clad in more comfort for converse here.*

## LADY

Nay, not so, sweet sir. You shall not rise from your bed; it is better to recline. Here, I hem and hold you on either hand to converse with the courtier I have caught. For as certain as I sit here, Sir Gawain you are, whom all the world worships. Whereso you ride, your honor and courtesy are highest acclaimed by lords and by ladies, by all living men. And lo! We are alone here and left to ourselves: My lord and his liegemen are long departed, the household asleep, my handmaids too, the door drawn, and held by a well-driven bolt. And since I have in this house him whom all love, I shall while the time away with mirthful speech at will. My body is here at hand, your every wish to fulfill; your servant to command I am, and shall be still.

## GAWAIN

In good faith, a gain that seems to me. Though I am not he of whom you speak. To reach such reverence as you rehearse here, I am a knight unworthy, I know myself well.

## LADY

In good faith, Sir Gawain, there are many ladies who would be more desirous now to have you, handsome man, in their hold, as I have you here, to dally thus dearly with your delightful words, recover their comfort and cool their cares, than much of the goods or gold gained by them ever. But I thoroughly thank the Lord who thrives in heaven, for here in my hands all hearts' desire doth lie.

## GAWAIN

Madam, may Mary reward you, for I have found, in good faith, your beneficence noble, and because of the great kindness from other folk, fame of fair deeds runs far and wide. But the deference they deliver I do not deserve; they should honor only you who is sure to please.

## LADY

By Mary, different meaning do I see,...

## EXT. WOODS

Sir Bercilak hunting with spear. We HEAR Lady's speech over commotion of hunting.

LADY (cont'd)

...for were I worth all the multitude of women alive, and all the wealth of the world were in my hand, and I should seek and decide to choose a

LADY

lord, because of qualities that I have discovered in you, good knight, of kindness and courtesy and gracious manner, and what I have heard before and hold true now, no champion on earth would be chosen ahead of you.

## INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER

GAWAIN

Indeed, dear wife, more wisely did you choose.

## EXT. WOODS

Sir Bercilak spears the flank of a female deer. The hunters rejoice, butcher the deer and return to the castle.

## INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER—MID DAY

The knight and lady are laughing together as she gets up to leave. Suddenly she turns back to him from several feet away, the mirth gone from her face. The chamber darkens as if a cloud has passed over the sun.

LADY

May He who speeds conversation spur your speech always, but I cannot conceive that you are Gawain.

GAWAIN

Why not?

LADY

(gentler)

So gallant a knight as Gawain is given out to be,  
(MORE)

LADY (cont'd)

and the model of fair demeanor and manners  
pure, had he lain so long at a lady's side, would  
have claimed a kiss, by his courtesy.

GAWAIN

Good lady, I grant it at once! I shall kiss at your  
command, as becomes a knight.

They kiss, the lady bending over the knight in his bed. His eyes follow her as she exits  
silently, then he leaps up and begins to dress for the day.

1.39

INT. THE GREAT HALL—EARLY EVENING

Sir Bercilak bursts through the front doors with his retinue behind him and servants  
dragging tarp-loads of slaughtered meat. Gawain and the lord meet, embracing with  
much enthusiasm. Sir Bercilak then gestures for servants to place a tarp-load of meat  
ceremoniously in front of Gawain.

SIR BERCILAK

What think you, sir, of this? Have I thriven  
well? Have I won with my woodcraft a worthy  
prize?

GAWAIN

In good earnest, this game is the finest I have  
seen these seven years in the season of winter.

SIR BERCILAK

And I give it you, Gawain. For according to our  
covenant you claim it as your own.

GAWAIN

That is so, and the same say I: What I worthily  
have won within these fair walls herewith I as  
willingly award it to you.

Gawain takes a large step over the meat and kisses Bercilak thoroughly on the lips.

We HEAR mingled sounds of amazement and delight, plus the familiar laugh of the lady.

## SIR BÈRCILAK

(breathlessly)

It is good. Gracious thanks therefore; but perhaps it would be better if you boldly would pronounce where you won this same wealth, so welcome to me.

## GAWAIN

That was not part of the pact; press me no further, for you have all that behooves; all other claims forbear.

2.40

## INT. POET'S CHAMBER BY CANDLE LIGHT—EVENING

Poet drops his quill and rubs his eyes. He sinks back on his stool and picks up The Letter, turns it around to examine the portrait. He cannot help himself; he kisses it.

3.41

## INT. AUDITORIUM ENGLISH CLASS—DAY

She closes her eyes and smiles slightly as the professor reads:

## PROFESSOR

“He embraces his broad neck with both his arms,/ And confers upon him a kiss in the comeliest style.”

Student's eyes snap open as she hears the whispered word “FAGS” from someone in the auditorium.

2.41

## INT. GREEN GIRDLE INN—MORNING

Poet emerges from his room and steps over the corpse-like pilgrims, exhausted from a night of partying, on his way out the door.

2.42

## EXT. MAIN HOUSE OF MONASTERY—MORNING

Poet knocks on the door. A BOY opens it and shows him inside.

## INT. PRIVATE DINING ROOM IN MONASTERY—MORNING

Boy shows Poet into the dining room where ABBOT JACOB awaits him. When the two see each other they embrace happily.

ABBOT

Roger, my old pupil. I am sorry it has taken so long for us to dine together. Please forgive my full schedule.

POET

My Abbot, days spent in prayer are by a long way more important than breakfasts spent in jest.

ABBOT

Prayer indeed. I'm too occupied with the troubled consciences of court officials to say more than my morning ablutions.

POET

That is tragic.

ABBOT

(shrugging)

Eh. Come, join me for some lovely monk food.

Abbot gestures towards a table spread with a light, simple meal and they sit. Early monastic music plays in the background.

2.43

## INT. DINING ROOM—LATER

They have finished their meal and recline in their chairs as Boy clears the table. Abbot is sipping wine while Poet's mind wanders.

ABBOT

Where are you now, Poet.

POET

Not far, my friend. Just thinking critically.

ABBOT

About me, I hope.

POET

In part, Jacob, in part. But mostly I was thinking of the church.

ABBOT

Oh. Let me share the burden of your troubled mind, brother.

POET

I could not dream of adding yet more weight to the cross you bear.

ABBOT

If you do not tell me immediately I swear I will never pray for you again.

POET

In short, I am troubled by certain behaviors I have witnessed, un-Christian behaviors.

ABBOT

Oh? Have my scribes been somehow inappropriate?

POET

Mm, no. Their conduct has been flawless. I have no intention of citing names, Jacob...

ABBOT

Good. I despise discipline.

POET

...but I have seen religious men indulge in more than just communal wine.

Poet leans towards Abbot confidentially.

POET

It is not so much out in the open. Indeed, a person's powers of perception would have to be quite refined for him to notice it.

ABBOT

Like your own, my Poet. I certainly hope your imagination is not skewing your perspective.

POET

No, I do not believe so. In fact, what I have observed has captured me. Since coming here, the very organ of my creativity has been...on fire.

ABBOT

Nothing throws off your humors more than flames in your head. What exactly are we speaking of?

POET

The problem is this, Jacob: Some of the monks seem unusually, well, particularly... sanguinated.

ABBOT

I see. And you have witnessed some interactions in the bodily sense?

POET

No, no. I really have not seen anything physical. I have only sensed shifts in mood, intense familiarity, small, hidden touches; delicate speech that mirrors that of lovers. Really, I can hardly describe the subtle nuances of conversation, simple physical proximity, bodily expressions that have given me this impression. I am not speaking only of the inhabitants of this monastery, Abbot, when I say; I believe some monks are not only in love with our savior.

ABBOT

And you are scandalized, I suppose.

POET

Even though I should, I fail to see anything wrong with these intimacies. I cannot conceive that such strong devotion is in any way anti-church. Indeed, when these men adore each other, are they not revering the image of God? Why would God give us this ability, this sensuality between souls if he did not intend us to express it?



ABBOT

Oh, but Roger, you speak only of platonic sensuality. There are those who take it even a step further, who touch hands, who...

POET

...exchange kisses.

ABBOT

The Lord created us with those abilities as well.

POET

But he bid us to have the strength to resist them.

ABBOT

That is ridiculous. Roger, you were educated by learned men of the church, did we not teach you that God is many things, indeed he is everything, but he is certainly not silly?

POET

Abbot, I...

ABBOT

God forbade us to covet another man's wife, to succumb to unclean temptation, and to spill the precious seed of creation, but if anything he encouraged brotherly love.

POET

Yes, but desire? What about coveting another man's brother?

ABBOT

Of course there are instances of more overt interactions that are not permissible in ancient Jewish law. In Leviticus God gives a list of laws that will set his people apart from all others. These laws forbid lying with another man, but they say nothing of loving another man. However, the covenant was meant for the Jews, we gentile Christians received a different covenant, that of Christ, and we are not bound by the ancient laws, as was decided at the Council of Jerusalem.

POET

Yes, but did not that self-same council censure fornication?

ABBOT

Indeed. However, the Greek word interpreted as fornication implies sexual immorality, and nothing more. One must prove that sensual contact between men is immoral in order to criminalize it under the council's law.

POET

It must be wrong if it has sexual pleasure as its end.

ABBOT

What if it is simply a form of worship? If God made us after his own image, if he gave us the finest products of his invention to preserve, and finally, if he sacrificed his only beloved son for our benefit, does that not make us in some way divine? We are the very reflection of God. Of course, the copy is pitifully pale compared to the original, but we are, in fact, pieces of the creator. Our skin has been washed with the sweet blood of Christ; why should we not admire the holy qualities we find in one another? What love, excepting love for our Savior, can be more pure than that which arises between two men? Even Paul of Tarsus said "unto the pure, all things are pure." Besides, Love between a man and a woman is so often, well, perverse. They cannot understand each other, and they refuse to try. They argue bitterly yet cannot find a resolution. Most of all, they are never satisfied. Why do you think so many of us opted for celibacy? But men can converse and debate and do nothing but raise their opinion of one another. The bond of their common features, ideas, and moods lets them know each other, totally. And a simple exchange of opinions, artfully rendered, can be in itself so satisfying that they need nothing else to fulfill their appetite.

POET

I do not know that that is true, Abbot.

ABBOT

You do not find spiritual connections fulfilling?

POET

No, I find them fully rewarding. But, for others, perhaps the lack of physical connection, the touch that augments the words, is quite frustrating. Even I, when I read aloud, want to reach out and stroke the faces of my audience, to acknowledge what we are sharing.

ABBOT

I cannot deny that the physical often enters into the spiritual, even within these walls. Every man has a different method of worship.

POET

But not all of these methods are sanctioned.

ABBOT

Yes, but some of their practitioners are canonized. You have read Song of Solomon, have you not?

POET

Certainly, in many ways it changed my life.

ABBOT

Then you know its influence already. You know that it is nothing more than a lot of love poems, extraordinarily poignant love poems, but love poems nonetheless.

Abbot recites the opening lines of *Song of Songs* in LATIN with English SUBTITLES.

SUBTITLES

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth-/  
for your love is more delightful than wine./  
Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes;/  
your name is like perfume poured out./ No  
(MORE)

## SUBTITLES (cont'd)

wonder the maidens love you!/ Take me away  
with you—let us hurry!/ Let the king bring me  
into his chambers.”

## ABBOT

These are the words of the soul of Man,  
addressed to our savior. This song describes  
divine love through human desire. A fellow  
abbot once said, “What a great thing is love,  
provided that it always returns to its origin.”

## POET

Can it be so simple? Did Saint Bernard really  
mean that human love in all its incarnations is  
divine as long as it flows back to heaven?

## ABBOT

Oh yes, simplicity is divinity. My poor Roger,  
you seem most troubled.

## POET

These are not the answers I anticipated.

## ABBOT

Remember what Aquinas said? “Because of the  
diverse conditions of humans, it happens that  
some acts are virtuous to some people, as  
appropriate and suitable to them, while the same  
acts are immoral to others, as inappropriate to  
them.”

## POET

Dear master, we have moved to quickly from  
poetry to Aquinas, I shall take this as my cue to  
leave.

The two shake hands and kiss each other on the cheek as Boy runs to fetch Poet’s cloak  
and satchel.

## ABBOT

Be careful, Roger, these things we have said are  
dangerous.

## POET

I know. My mouth is shut, but...

Poet and Abbot go on to quote Andreas Capellanus' *Art of Courtly Love* in Latin with English SUBTITLES.

SUBTITLES

"...love can deny nothing to love."

ABBOT

Ah, but...

SUBTITLES

"...when made public, love rarely endures."

POET

I heed your words, but I must return to my scribes. (pause) I have much to ponder.

ABBOT

Farewell, my Poet. Do not over-think, just write.

POET

(clasping his hands)

Until we meet again.

Poet thanks Boy as he drapes his cloak over his arm and hangs the satchel over his neck and shoulder.

2.44

INT. HALLWAY OF MONASTERY—LATE MORNING

Poet looks puzzled and confused as he walks slowly towards the Scriptorium. Light flooding in from the high windows casts long shadows across the floor and the various religious icons, but Poet looks only at his feet, deep in thought.

2.45

INT. SCRIPTORIUM—LATE MORNING

The scribes quickly cease leaning over their desks and talking jovially as Poet enters the room. With the same expression of confusion, and without looking up, Poet pulls off his satchel and removes the manuscript, sits at the podium, finds his place, and begins to dictate in Middle English with modern English subtitles.

## POET

*'Neuer the les let be my thonc,  
 Quoth I, 'my perle thas I appose;  
 I schulde not tempte thy wyt so wlonc,  
 To Krystez chambre that art ichose.  
 I am bot mokke and mul among,  
 And thou so ryche a rekan rose,  
 And bydez here by this blysfyl bonc  
 Ther lyuez lyste may neuer lose.'*

## SUBTITLES

“Nevertheless, then let me thank  
 My pearl,” said I, “although I pose  
 More questions now to you whose link  
 With Christ is intimate. He chose  
 Your hand! In sinfulness I’m sunk,  
 But you’re a fine and fresh new rose  
 Abiding by this blissful bank.

Poet looks up from his dictation to stare directly at Fan, who blushes deeply and ducks under his hood as he sinks into his seat.

1.46

## EXT. PRACTICE YARD IN FRONT OF CASTLE HAUTDESERT—MORNING

OVER-THE-SHOULDER SHOT of Lady as she waves goodbye to her husband and the other hunters. They blow their horns and gallop off as Lady turns around and eyes Gawain’s window.

1.47

## INT. GAWAIN’S CHAMBER—MORNING

Lady comes though the door more boldly than the morning before. Gawain wakes immediately and smiles with his eyes still shut, shaking his head slightly. Lady pokes her head through Gawain’s bed curtains, now deliberately closed. Gawain smiles at her sleepily.

1.47

## EXT. WOODS NEAR CASTLE HAUTDESERT—MORNING

The hounds bellow after prey and the hunters follow.

1.48

## INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER—MORNING

GAWAIN

(sitting up as she leans towards him, thus avoiding an embrace)

*God Mouroun*, my lady. I trust the merriment of yesterday fares you well this morning?

LADY

(upset)

Sir, if you be Gawain, it seems a great wonder—a man so well-meaning, and mannerly disposed, and cannot act in company as courtesy bids, and if one takes the trouble to teach him, 'tis all in vain. That lesson learned lately is lightly forgot, though I painted it as plain as my poor wit allowed.

GAWAIN

(alarmed)

What lesson, dear lady?

LADY

My counsel was of kissing. Where favor has been found, freely to claim as accords with the conduct of courteous knights.

GAWAIN

My dear one, dismiss that thought; such freedom, I fear, might offend you much. It were rude to request if the right were denied.

LADY

But none can deny you. You are stout enough to constrain with strength, if you choose.

GAWAIN

By heaven! Threats never throve among those of my land, nor any gift not freely given, good though it be. I am yours to command, to kiss when you please; you may lay it on as you like, and leave off at will.

Lady bends and kisses him, then the two look into each other's eyes and laugh.

## EXT. WOODS NEAR CASTLE HAUTDESERT—MORNING

Bercilak, hounds, and other hunters leap over a creek in hot pursuit of a wild boar.

1.50

## INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER—MORNING

Lady lies on Gawain's lap and plays with her braided hair as they speak.

## LADY

I should like, by your leave, if it did not annoy you, to know why you, the noblest knight known in your time, and here by your side I have sat for two days, yet never has a fair phrase fallen from your lips of the language of love, not one little word! Why? Are you artless, you whom all men praise? Or do you deem me deaf to such words? Fie, fie! In hope of pastimes new I have come where none can spy.  
(earnestly) Instruct me a little, do, while my husband is not nearby.

## GAWAIN

God love you, gracious lady. It is a pleasure surpassing, and a peerless joy, that one so worthy as you would willingly take the time and trouble to talk with your knight. But to take to myself the task of telling love, and touch upon its text and treat of its themes to one that, I know well, wields more power in that art, it were folly, fair dame, in the first degree.

1.51

## EXT. WOODS NEAR CASTLE HAUTDESERT—MORNING

Bercilak catches up to the boar and stabs it several times with a dagger until it stops moving. He then raises his blood-sprayed arms triumphantly as the men all cheer.

1.52

## INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER—MORNING



## LADY

One of these mornings I will move you.

Lady leans over and kisses the knight again then gets up and leaves. Gawain lingers a moment then jumps from his bed, kneels at its side, crosses himself, and then rises.

1.53

## INT. MAIN HALL OF CASTLE HAUTDESERT—EARLY EVENING

As Bercilak bursts through the doors with his kill, Bob Dylan's "Leopard Skin Pill Box Hat" (modern version) begins to play. The song overwhelms the scene as the two knights exchange favors. Bercilak gestures to two squires who drag the boar carcass over to Gawain. Gawain smiles and claps Bercilak's shoulder in congratulation. As everyone gathers around, Gawain delivers first one, then another kiss. Bercilak shakes his head breathlessly as the two clasp hands and approach the feast while the others laugh and applaud.

3.54

## INT. READER'S DORMROOM—EVENING

Reader starts at the sound of a girl running down the hallway SCREAMING,

## GIRL

Hey, give me back my towel!

and the slamming of a door. She finds herself staring off into space with the text lying face down on her chest and her hand resting over her lips. She lifts the text and looks at it blearily.

2.55

## INT. POET'S CHAMBER—MORNING

The reader's text blurs and transforms into Poet's Gawain manuscript. Poet blinks at the manuscript, and rubbing his eyes, sticks his quill back in the ink pot and cheerily puts on his jacket, exits, and heads for the monastery. His mood is shattered as he walks through the inn and hears the pilgrims laughing and quoting Chaucer.

## PREACHER

*"This Absolon gan wype his mouth ful drye  
Derk was the night as pich, or as the cole,  
And out the window out she put her hole..."*

## WOMAN PILGRIM

(laughing)

He's brilliant!

## PREACHER

*"And Absolon, him fil no bet ne wers,  
But with his mouth he kiste hir naked ers..."*

## NUN PILGRIM

(laughing)

Mary, help me! My sides ache so.

## PREACHER

*"Ful savourly, er he was wer of this.  
Abak he stirte, and thoughte it was amis,  
For well he wiste a womman hath no berd."*

The pilgrims laugh and hoot, starting up a chant of "PRAISE CHAUCER" as Poet storms out the door.

1.56

## INT. CHAPEL OF CASTLE HAUTDESERT—EVENING

This scene occurs on the same night as scene 53, after the feasting. Gawain has sneaked down to the chapel where he is kneeling before a large crucifix, deep in prayer. The chapel is simple yet beautiful. It is built of thick, dark wood posts and panels, and it has rows of delicate stained glass windows that depict God and Jesus in some of their most intimate moments: God reaching down to touch Abraham and excuse him from the task of killing his son, Jesus reviving Lazarus, speaking with Peter about the coming betrayal, his hands resting on the apostle's shoulders, Jesus helping Mary Magdalene up from the ground, and Jesus communing with the apostles at the last supper, their hands clasped together in prayer and admiration. The crucifix depicts Christ as a beautiful young man who only slightly sags from the arms of the cross. While the icon depicts his renowned humility, he is still a warrior, holding himself up on the cross. Gawain is praying in earnest; the task before him is becoming even more daunting, and he fears disgracing his host due to the propositions of his wife. However, he stops praying and looks up at the crucifix, staring into the face of Christ and becoming transfixed with androgynous beauty. As Gawain stares at the image of Christ in this state, Bercilak enters and startles him.

## BERCILAK

My Gawain, I send you off to bed and I find you praying. We should all be noble men if we could muster half your meekness.

## GAWAIN

Gentle host, you are too kind. Prayer comes easily of late, considering the task before me. Is it not time for me to seek my adversary? I fear I will arrive too late at the Green Chapel, and my challenger will attack Camelot, speeding untrue rumors of my cowardice.

## BERCILAK

I assure you, honored guest, two more nights in my home will not harm you, as the Green Chapel is only a short distance. I could not dream of letting you go before our final exchange of gains. Now, go to your chambers, rest well, and we will meet again tomorrow.

1.57

## INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE GAWAIN'S CHAMBER—NIGHT

Gawain and Bercilak walk slowly and in silence to Gawain's door. Bercilak leans over to open it for him. The two look at each other for a long moment, kiss each other on either cheek, and smile their farewells as Gawain enters his room.

## INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER-NIGHT

A candle lights the room faintly. Gawain smiles as he closes the door, then, noticing the doorknob, wonders whether he should lock it. He decides against it, blows out the candle, and climbs into bed with most of his clothing, eyeing the door warily.

2.58

## EXT. ROAD LEADING TO MONASTERY—EARLY EVENING

Poet, returning from scriptorium, sees MESSENGER working in one of the church's fields.

## POET

By Job, I count it lucky that I have found you!

## MESSENGER

Roger the Poet? I did not know you were seeking, or else I would have come running. You cite Job; you're certainly more lucky than he. I never expected to return here. Are you in need of help?

POET

Yes! Oh, yes. Please, tell me, do you remember the letter you delivered to me?

MESSENGER

Aye.

POET

Good! Wonderful. Good man. Now, who was it that assigned you that task?

MESSENGER

Well, honestly, sir, I couldn't say.

POET

Why, have you forgotten?

MESSENGER

No sir, I recall in detail that particular chore. My employer made requests that were somewhat out of the ordinary.

POET

Oh? For example.

MESSENGER

I was not, and he was very severe about this, I was not under any circumstances to reveal his identity.

POET

His identity?

MESSENGER

That's right. And he would call the ten plagues upon me if I read the letter. As if I could read.

POET

(trying to hand him a coin)  
Perhaps with a little coaxing you might brave frogs and locusts to tell me what I must know.

MESSENGER

Oh, no way will I take your money, sir.

POET

No?

MESSENGER

But you could persuade me to hear a word or two of poetry.

POET

Can that be all you want? Very well, let me think a moment.

Poet recites from *Pearl* in Middle English, with Modern English SUBTITLES.

POET

*Delyt that Hys come encroched  
To much hit were of for to melle.  
Thise aldermen, quen He aproched,  
Grouelyng ti His fete thay felle.  
Legyounes of aungelez togeder uoched  
Ther kesten ensens of swete smelle;  
Then glory and gle watz new abroched;  
Al songe to loue that gay Juelle.  
The steuen moyt stryke thurg the yrthe to helle  
That the virtues of heuen of joye endyte.  
To loue the Lombe Hs meyny inmelle  
Iwysse I lagt a gret delyt.*

SUBTITLES

His coming brought delight, too dear  
For merely a mortal man to tell.  
For when that lofty Lamb drew near  
The elders at His feet all fell.  
Fine angels came, each casting clear  
And strong incense of sweetest smell.  
Anew that company did cheer  
That Jewel; their song did grow and swell.  
That sound could sink through earth to hell,  
That the virtues hailed from heaven's height.  
I loved that lofty Lamb as well  
As all the rest, with dear delight.

## MESSENGER

The man you want lives in the woods behind the monastery. He called to me one day while I was gardening from a tiny hut that was hardly more than a mound of earth. He was in monk robes, and his fingers were bathed in ink, much like your own. When you go to him, try to do it on some other errand; I do not wish to lose my livelihood.

## POET

I promise, if I do see him, I will make every effort to protect you. Thank you, a thousand times.

2.59

## INT. POET'S CHAMBER—NIGHT

Poet enters his room, deep in thought. He shuts the door to the noise of the revelers and moves to his desk, unconsciously shedding garments. He sits, pulls the worn letter out of his shirt, smooths it out, props the portrait before him, and begins to write. He pauses, looks at the drawing propped up in front of him, then knocks it face down to the table.

1.60

## INT. PRIVATE DINING ROOM—CASTLE HAUTDESERT—MORNING

Bercilak crams some bread into his mouth, takes a mighty drink, and calls out to a servant.

## BERCILAK

Ready my horse.

## EXT. FIELD OUTSIDE OF CASTLE HAUTDESERT—MORNING

Bercilak pulls on his gloves as he bursts through the castle doors and crosses the drawbridge to join his fellows. They are all ready for this final hunting trip. Bercilak leaps enthusiastically onto his horse.

## BERCILAK

Let us mark the end of this holy season with triumphant note. Trumpets!

The men all SOUND THEIR HORNS as they gallop off, YELLING happily.

1.62

## INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER—MORNING

Gawain does not wake at the sound of the HORNS or Lady entering the room. The back of her dress flows to the floor and is trimmed with ermine. The cloth holding back her hair is ornamented with rich gems; her bosom and back are all but bare. These are last-ditch efforts. She closes the door carefully, but throws open the window exuberantly. It is as if she has made the room cold on purpose.

## EXT. HOLLOW IN WOODS OUTSIDE OF CASTLE

The SOUND of the window opening seems to startle a FOX awake, but what has actually wakened him is the BELLOWING of hounds nearby. JAZZ MUSIC muffles these sounds, the same music plays in Gawain's chamber.

## INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER

LADY

Ah, man, how can you sleep? The morning is so clear.

Gawain still does not wake, he only grips his neck and mumbles darkly. Lady laughs and leans over him, delivering a friendly kiss. He opens his eyes, and the sight of her is almost too much to resist.

GAWAIN

Though I have dreamt of you this night, my lady, I feel now you are before me that I have never known you. Surely your beauty has surpassed what even the greatest poets could describe. You leave me breathless.

LADY

My love, your dreams this morning betray you. Unless you have me strangle you in the night, I think in your mind you walk without me.

GAWAIN

You believe me bold in action if not in love mistress, but even in sleep my thoughts return in fear to the peril ahead.

## EXT. WOODS OUTSIDE OF CASTLE

The fox makes a clever, evasive move as the hounds and horses almost catch him with their weapons raised.

Lady makes a SYMPATHETIC SOUND and moves in to seduce Gawain. He almost gives in.

GAWAIN

God forbid! That shall not befall.

Gawain looks immediately apologetic, but Lady speaks before he does.

LADY

I find you much at fault. Who can be so cold to a creature so close by your side, of all women in this world most wounded in heart? Unless you have a sweetheart, one you hold dearer, and allegiance to that lady so loyally knit that you would never love another, as now I believe. And sir, if it be so, then say it, I beg you; by all your heart holds dear, hide it no longer with guile.

GAWAIN

Lady, by Saint John, lover have I none, nor will have, yet awhile.

LADY

Those words are the worst of all, but I have had my answer, hard though it may be. Kiss me now kindly.

They kiss. Lady straightens and sighs.

LADY

Now, dear, ere I depart, do me this pleasure: give me some little gift, your glove or the like, that I may think on you, man, and mourn the less.

GAWAIN

By heaven, I wish I had here my most precious possession, to put in your hands. But a love-token, lady, were of little avail; it is not to your honor to have at this time a glove as guerdon from Gawain's hand.



LADY

Nay, noblest knight alive, though you be loath  
to give, yet you shall take, by right.

Lady takes a gold ring with a tremendous stone from her finger and tries to put it in his hand.

GAWAIN

Before, God, good lady, I forego all gifts; none  
have I to offer, nor any will I take.

LADY

I beg you, good knight, take it as a  
remembrance of my devotion. Mind you, when  
your memory of me darkens, you look on its  
light.

GAWAIN

I thank you, fair one, for this present too  
precious to procure. I hope you will understand,  
Never will I need reminder of your beauty.

EXT. WOODS OUTSIDE OF CASTLE

The fox continues to make successful evasive moves as the hunters behind him call:

HUNTERS

Come, Reynard, give it up. Your speed is no  
match to our steel!

INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER

LADY

If my ring is refused for its rich cost—you  
would not be my debtor for so dear a thing—I  
shall give you my girdle; you gain less thereby.

Lady unfastens the knot in the green, silk sash, gilded with gold that is bound around her waist

GAWAIN

My lady, this I cannot disgrace you to take, any  
more than the other.

LADY

Oh please, unworthy though it were, I wish it would not be scorned so.

GAWAIN

Dear lady, I scorn it not. I have no means to accept neither gold nor any gift, till by God's grace the fate that lay before me is fully achieved.

LADY

Ah, now I grasp the gist of your reservations. You think repayment far passing your power to bestow, once you have received that deadly blow.

GAWAIN

Be not offended, fair lady, I beg, and give over your offer, for ever I must decline.

LADY

Sir Gawain, think again on your resolution. This is one gift you cannot afford to refuse. If the virtue that invests it were verily known, it would be held, I hope, in higher esteem. For the man that possesses this piece of silk, if he bore it on his body, belted about, there is no hand under heaven that could hew him down, for he could not be killed by any craft on earth.

Gawain takes the sash from her and looks it over.

EXT. WOODS OUTSIDE OF CASTLE

Bercilak gains on the fox, his sword raised.

INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER—MORNING

LADY

Take it.

Gawain swallows and nods his head.

EXT. WOODS OUTSIDE OF CASTLE

The hounds descend on the fox as Bercilak raises his bloody sword in triumph.

## INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER

LADY

I give it gladly; a great weight lifted from my mind. For my sake, conceal it well lest the noble lord should know.

GAWAIN

Yes, my lady. As you have saved my life, I could never cause you harm. I thank you. I thank you. I thank you. With fervent heart.

They kiss. Lady leaves without a word.

1.63

## INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER—LATE MORNING

As Gawain begins to dress for the day, he attempts to put on the girdle as he had seen it on Lady. He finds the task difficult.

## INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER

Gawain checks himself out in the mirror. He is deeply unsatisfied with the appearance of the girdle, but as soon as he HEARS the hunting party returning, he throws his clothing on quickly and tries to appear dignified as he heads out the door.

1.64

## INT. MAIN HALL OF CASTLE—EVENING

Bercilak and his men are LAUGHING and DISCUSSING the hunt when Gawain enters looking slightly nervous.

BERCILAK

And here he is, my honored guest. Gawain, have you readied your day's earnings for our final exchange? I have killed a wily fox; I only hope, for your sake of course, that your stay here continues to be profitable.

GAWAIN

Have no fear, noble host. I shall follow forthwith the form of our pledge.

Gawain reaches for Bercilak and kisses him three times.

BERCILAK

By heaven, you have had some luck since you took up this trade, if the terms were good.

GAWAIN

Never mind the terms, since all that I owe here is openly paid.

BERCILAK

Marry, mine is much less. For I have hunted all day, and naught have I got but this foul fox pelt, which but poorly repays those precious things that you have cordially conferred, those kisses three so good.

Bercilak wraps his arm around Gawain and leads him to the feast.

1.65

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE OF CHAMBERS OF CLERGY GUEST—MORNING

Gawain knocks on the guest-chamber door of a visiting PRIEST, portrayed by the same actor as frame two's Abbot and frame one's Professor. We HEAR rustling and inaudible voices; Gawain leans his ear to the door to try to hear better. The abbot pulls on his robes as he opens the door, looking sleepy, just as a length of cloth is pulled outside from the window.

PRIEST

Yes, my son, Knight, Sir Knight Son. What service can I provide?

GAWAIN

I have come only to beg confession.

PRIEST

Oh. Of course. Come in. Sit.

The abbot sits on his bedding across from Gawain's chair, presses his fingers together, and looks at the knight.

GAWAIN

Shall I begin then?

## PRIEST

Please. Forgive me, I am out of practice, (under his breath), unlike my sword. Go on.

## GAWAIN

Well...Abbot, I have naught to confess, but I have made my peace with God. I only pray to be taught to lead a better life and lift up my mind, lest I be among the lost when, if I leave this world.

## PRIEST

Is that all? Yes. Well noted; I shall pass the message along.

The abbot gets up and leads Gawain out the door, pounding him on the back.

## PRIEST

Fare you well, Sir Gawain. We have all enjoyed your time with us.

1.66

## INT. MAIN HALL OF CASTLE HAUTDESERT—MORNING

Gawain enters the hall dressed in polished armor. Every servant and holiday guest has gathered to see him off; they applaud when he enters.

## GAWAIN

Enough! I thank you by the rood! (addressing all those present) The courtesies countless accorded me here, your kindness at Christmastide, may heaven's king repay! (addressing Bercilak) Henceforth, if you will have me, I hold you my liege. As I have said, I must set forth today; if I may take some trusty man to teach, as you promised, the way to the Green Chapel, that as God allows I shall see my fate fulfilled on the first of the year.

## BERCILAK

In good faith, with a good will.

Bercilak gestures to a GUIDE who runs to him.

## BERCILAK

Set him on the path; see him safe and sound  
over snowy hill; follow the fastest way through  
the forest green and grove.

## GUIDE

I swear it will be done, sire. (to Gawain) When  
you are ready, sir.

Gawain nods and surveys the room.

## GAWAIN

(addressing all present)

Never in my short time on earth, whether  
wandering abroad or harbored safe at Camelot,  
never have I met with such generous kindness. I  
mark this day more mournful than triumphant.

(raising a chalice of wine)

Here is a household in hall that upholds right!  
The man that maintains it, may happiness be  
his! Likewise the dear lady, may love betide  
her!

Gawain kisses his primary hosts. They are all tongue-tied. Lady pats his clothing secretly, looking for the knot of the Girdle. They share a confidential smile. He kisses her companion on the forehead; she ominously does not have tears in her eyes. Lastly, Gawain embraces his host, then follows Servant out of the hall. Everyone follows him to the doorway of the castle where Gringolet, Gawain's weapons and shield, and ornate, new gear supplied by Bercilak stand waiting. Gawain greets the horse happily and mounts him.

## GAWAIN

May Christ this house maintain and guard it  
from mischance.

He and Guide ride off as the crowd cheers them.

## CROWD

God save Sir Gawain!

2.67

## INT. POET'S CHAMBER—LATE MORNING

Light pours in the window and wakes Poet. Poet stirs and watches the day outside, then, making a sudden decision, gets up and begins to get dressed.

2.68

## EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE OF INN—LATE MORNING

Poet pulls on his cloak as he runs outside holding the letter between his teeth. He runs in the direction of the monastery, slipping on the melting snow.

1.69

## EXT. WOODS OUTSIDE OF CASTLE HAUTDESERT—MID DAY

Gawain and his guide survey the damage left by the hunters in silence. His guide watches him as he pulls on his shield and mops his brow.

2.70

## EXT. PATH LEADING TO MONASTERY—MID DAY

Poet sees the messenger working in the fields and waves to him. They share a confidential look as Poet turns toward the hut he was told about.

## EXT. WOODS BEHIND MONASTERY

Poet looks around as he trudges through the woods. He finally sees the hut. Its thatched roof is protected from the snow by the dense wood over it, which casts the landscape into dappled darkness. The hut looks more like a lonely hill than a dwelling; moss and grasses grow from the rooftop. Poet approaches the door and stands before it.

1.71

Gawain and his guide descend a slope into a lush valley, relatively unaffected by the snow because of the surrounding mountains. Jagged rocks tower above them; the landscape is wild without a soul in sight. The guide stops.

## GUIDE

Here we are, then.

Gawain looks around for signs of civilization. Seeing none, he turns to the guide, who nods his head toward a distant mound of earth covered with moss and grasses.

## GAWAIN

That is the Green Chapel?

## GUIDE

It is, for I have seen you here safe at the set time, and now you are not far from that notable place that you have sought for so long with such special pains. But this I say for certain, since I know you, sir knight, and have your good at heart, and hold you dear—Would you heed well my words, it were worth your while—You are rushing into risks that you reckon not of: There is a villain in yon valley, the veriest on earth, for he is rugged and rude, and ready with his fists, and most immense in his mold of mortals alive. He gets his grim way at the Green Chapel. None passes by that place so proud in his arms that he does not dash him down. He is heartless wholly, and heedless of right. Be it chaplain or churl, monk or mass-priest, or any man else, he would as soon strike them dead as stand on two feet. Wherefore I say, just as certain as you sit there astride, you cannot but be killed, for he would trounce you in a trice had you twenty lives for sale. Good sir Gawain, let the grim man be: Go off by some other road, in God's own name! Leave by some other land, for the love of Christ! And I shall get me home again, and give you my word that I shall swear by God's self and the saints above to conceal this day's deed, nor say to a soul that ever you fled for fear from any that I knew.

## GAWAIN

Many thanks! Fair fortune befall you for your friendly words. Conceal this day's deed I doubt not you would, but though you never told the tale, if I turned back now, forsook this place for fear, and fled, as you say, I were a caitiff coward. I must to the Chapel to chance my luck, befall what may befall through fortune's will or whim.

## GUIDE

Marry. I see you are set to seek your own harm. If you crave a quick death, let me keep you no longer. Now goodbye in God's name, Gawain

(MORE)



GUIDE (cont'd)

the noble! For all the world's wealth I would  
not stay here, or go with you in this wood one  
footstep further.

Guide kicks his horse and rides off, leaping over the obstacles in his way. Gawain watches him go, then turns towards the Green Chapel. Leonard Cohen's "WHO BY FIRE" begins to play.

GAWAIN (V.O.)

By God, I shall not give way to weeping; God's  
will be done, amen! I commend me to his  
keeping.

2.72

EXT. FAN'S HUT—MID DAY

Poet continues to stand before the hut. His VOICEOVER begins

POET (V.O.)

He puts his heel to horse, and picks up the  
path...

3.73

INT. READER'S DORMROOM—EVENING

Reader sits cross-legged on her bed, deeply immersed in the text.

POET (V.O.)

...goes in beside a grove where the ground is  
steep, rides down the rough slope right to the  
valley...

1.74

EXT. VALLEY OF GREEN CHAPEL—MID DAY

Gawain follows the action dictated by the VOICEOVER.

POET (V.O.)

...And then he looks a little about him—the  
landscape is wild, and not a soul to be seen or  
sign of a dwelling, but high banks on either  
(MORE)

POET (V.O. cont'd)

hand hemmed it about, with many a ragged rock  
and rough-hewn crag; the skies seemed scored  
by the scowling peaks. Then he halted his  
horse, and hoveled there a space.

Gawain pauses and looks at the Green Chapel. It is nothing but a large mound of earth with a large opening leading into a vast, dark, cavern. It is nestled against a steep hill with a creek running over it. Gawain leaps off Gringolet, loops the horse's reins around a branch, and briskly covers the remaining distance to the Chapel.

GAWAIN (V.O.)

Can this be the Green Chapel? Here might the  
devil himself be seen. Now I feel that it is the  
Fiend, in my five wits, that has tempted me to  
this tryst, to take my life. This is a chapel of  
mischance, may mischief take it.

With renewed resolve, Gawain begins to enter the Chapel.

2.75

EXT. FAN'S HUT—MID DAY

Poet knocks on the door.

3.76

INT. READER'S DORMROOM—EVENING

A KNOCK on her door startles Reader from her text. She opens the door to reveal a smiling Sarah.

2.77

EXT. FAN'S HUT

The hut's door opens to reveal Fan. He and Poet stare at each other in astonishment.

1.78

EXT. VALLEY OF GREEN CHAPEL—MID DAY

As Gawain starts to enter the Chapel the SOUND of a large, loud, GRINDSTONE begins to reverberate off the cliffs. He reaches under his clothing to touch the girdle.

EXT. GRINDSTONE IN WOODS ATOP HILL

Sparks fly as the hands of the Green Knight sharpen a giant ax.

EXT. VALLEY OF GREEN CHAPEL

Gawain is barely heard over the din.

GAWAIN

Ay, me! This business is arranged for my arrival, unless I am much misled. Let God work! Ah me! All hope of help has fled. Forfeit my life may be, but...

The GRINDING stops as suddenly as it started.

GAWAIN

...noise I do not dread.

Gawain waits and listens.

GAWAIN

Who has power in this place? Why does he not greet Sir Gawain, or give him good day? If any would a word with him, let him walk forth and speak now or never, to speed his affairs.

EXT. GRINDSTONE IN WOODS

The Green Knight's thumb tests the sharpness of his blade.

GREEN KNIGHT (O.S.)

Abide, and what I promised shall straightway be given.

EXT. VALLEY OF GREEN CHAPEL

Gawain notices CRASHING noises moving out of the woods atop the hill next to him. As he watches, the Green Knight emerges, runs down the hill, and uses his ax to vault over the creek and land in front of Gawain.

GAWAIN

Friend mine, it seems your word holds good.

## GREEN KNIGHT

God love you, Sir Gawain! Well met this morning, man. You have followed me faithfully and found me betimes, and on the business between us we are both agreed. There is none here to halt us or hinder our sport; Now unhasp your high helm, and have here your wages. Make no more demur than I did myself when you hacked off my head with one hard blow.

## GAWAIN

No, by God that granted me my life, I shall grudge not the guerdon, grim though it prove. Bestow but one stroke, and I shall stand still.

Gawain removes his helmet and kneels, baring his neck. The Green Knight raises the ax, and as it descends Gawain glances up at it and winces when it comes close to his neck. The Green Knight stops the stroke before it does any damage.

## GREEN KNIGHT

You are not Gawain the glorious! You flee for fear, and have felt no harm. News of such a knight I have never heard yet. I moved not a muscle when you made to strike; my head fell to my feet, yet steadfast I stood. And you, all unharmed, are wholly dismayed—By all odds, I the better man must be.

## GAWAIN

Strike once more; I shall neither flinch nor flee; But if my head falls to the floor, there is no mending me. Go on man, in God's name, deliver me my destiny. I shall stand to the stroke and stir not an inch till your ax has hit home—on my honor I swear it.

## GREEN KNIGHT

Have at thee then.

The Green Knight, once again raises his weapon, but he stops the blow before it reaches Gawain, who does not flinch.

## GREEN KNIGHT

So now you have your nerve again.

## GAWAIN

Thrash away, tyrant! I tire of your threats and taunts. You make such a scene, you must frighten yourself.

## GREEN KNIGHT

In faith, so fiercely you speak that I shall finish this affair, nor further grace allow.

For the third time, the Green Knight strikes. This time he purposefully grazes Gawain's neck, leaving a mere scratch. When Gawain sees his blood on the snow, he jumps up and quickly replaces his helmet, gathers his shield from his back, and points his sword at his foe.

## GAWAIN

Have done with your hacking! Harry me no more! I have born, as behooved, one blow in this place; if you make another move I shall meet it midway and promptly, I promise you, pay back each blow with brand.

The Green Knight sets his ax upright on the ground and leans his weight on the head while he listens to this speech.

## GREEN KNIGHT

Bold fellow, on this field your anger forbear. No man has made demands here in a manner uncouth. I owed you a hit and you have it; be happy therewith. I could have justly dealt more directly, and done you some harm. First I flourished with a feint, in frolicsome mood, and left your hide unhurt—and here I did well on the fair terms we fixed on the third night. And fully and faithfully you followed accord, gave over all your gains as a good man should. A second feint, sir, I assigned for the morning you kissed twice my comely wife—each kiss you restored. For both of these there behooved but two feigned blows by right. True men pay what they owe; no danger then in sight. However...

The Green Knight pulls Gawain's clothing aside to reveal the girdle.

## GREEN KNIGHT

...you failed at the third throw, so take my tap,  
sir knight.

The Green Knight removes his face and hair to reveal Sir Bercilak Hautdesert.

2.79

## INT. FAN'S HUT—MIDAY

Fan stumbles backward into his hut and sits in a chair. Poet follows him through the door. Poet takes out the letter and compares the portrait to the actual man.

## POET

I do not...I...All this time. You? It was you?

Fan gets up quickly to close the door and draw the blinds. He is careful not to look at or touch Poet.

## POET

But you were right there in front of me, looking  
at me every day. I have looked...You cannot  
imagine how I have searched...For once I am at  
a loss for words.

## FAN

I do not know of what you speak.

## POET

Oh now, sir, there will be none of that, if you  
please.

1.80

## EXT. VALLEY OF GREEN CHAPEL—MIDAY

## BERCILAK (cont'd)

For that is my belt about you, that same braided  
girdle, my wife it was that wore it. I know well  
the tale, and the count of your kisses, and your  
conduct too. The wooing of my wife—It was  
all my scheme! She made trial of a man most  
faultless by far of all that ever walked over the  
wide earth; as pearls to white peas, more  
precious and prized, so is Gawain, in good faith,

(MORE)

BERCILAK (cont'd)

to other gay knights. Yet you lacked, sir, a little in loyalty there, but the cause was not cunning, nor courtship either, but that you loved your own life; the less then to blame.

GAWAIN

(to himself)

Accursed be a cowardly and covetous heart. In you is villainy, and vice, and virtue laid low.

Gawain rips the girdle from his body and hands it in haste to Bercilak.

GAWAIN

Behold there my falsehood, ill hap betide it!  
Your cut taught me cowardice, care for my life.  
Now I am faulty and false, that fearful was ever  
of disloyalty and lies. I confess, knight, in this  
place, most dire is my misdeed...

Gawain kneels and bares his neck again.

GAWAIN (CONT.)

...Let me gain back your good grace, however it may be done.

BERCILAK

Such harm as I have had, I hold it quite healed.  
You are so fully confessed, your failings made  
known, and bear the plain penance of the point  
of my blade, I hold you polished as a pearl, as  
pure and as bright as you had lived free of fault  
since the first you were born.

Bercilak puts the girdle in Gawain's hands.

BERCILAK (CONT.)

I give you, sir, this girdle that is gold hemmed  
and green as my garments, that, Gawain, you  
may be mindful of this meeting when you  
mingle in the throng.

GAWAIN

Noble knight, you have stolen the words from  
my throat with this token and this absolution.

(MORE)

## GAWAIN (cont'd)

Now Gawain, renowned for prowess of tongue  
and lovely speech, has naught to say but  
“thanks.”

## BERCILAK

Blessed Gawain, your high ordeal is over. Now  
stay another night with us, with my wife so  
dear, we shall see you friends this day, whose  
enmity touched you near.

Gawain removes his helm and holds it.

## GAWAIN

Indeed, I have lingered long enough. May good  
luck be yours, and may He reward you well that  
all worship bestows. And commend me to that  
comely one, your courteous wife that has  
trapped her true knight in trammels so quaint.  
But if a dullard should dote, deem it no wonder.  
But your girdle, God love you, I gladly shall  
take and be pleased to possess, not for the pure  
gold, nor the bright belt itself, nor wealth, nor  
worldly state, nor workmanship fine, but a sign  
of excess it shall seem oftentimes when I ride in  
renown and remember with shame the faults and  
the frailty of the profane flesh. When praise and  
high prowess have pleased my heart, a look at  
this love-lace will lower my pride. But one  
thing would I learn, if you were not loath, how  
runs your right name?—and the rest let go.

## BERCILAK

This shall I give you gladly. Bercilak de  
Hautdesert this barony I hold, through the might  
of Morgan le Fay, that lodges at my house.

INT. SPINNING ROOM OF CASTLE HAUTDESERT—DAY

MORGAN LE FAY spins as Lady embroiders nearby.

## BERCILAK (V.O.)

She guided me in this guise to your glorious  
hall, to assay, if such it were, the surfeit of pride  
that is rumored of the retinue of the Round

(MORE)



BERCILAK (cont'd)

Table. She put this shape upon me to puzzle  
your wits, to afflict the fair queen, and frighten  
her to death. She was with my wife at home,  
that old, withered lady; your own aunt is she,  
Arthur's half-sister. Morgan the Goddess, she,  
so styled by title true; none holds so high degree  
that her arts cannot subdue.

EXT. VALLEY OF GREEN CHAPEL

BERCILAK (cont'd)

And therefore, good friend, come feast with  
your aunt, make merry in my house, for my men  
hold you dear, and I wish you as well, sir, with  
all my heart.

GAWAIN

Nay, by no means can I tarry another day. I  
have been long away from home, and I have  
such news to tell. I must commend you to the  
king, and let him know his sister lives.

Gawain embraces Bercilak and they kiss one last time.

GAWAIN

Farewell. God keep you.

BERCILAK

Go carefully, good knight.

Bercilak watches Gawain as he ties the girdle around his body in plain sight, like a Miss America sash, and departs.

2.81

INT. FAN'S HUT—MIDAY

Although the sun shines brightly outside, the hut is drenched in darkness. Poet and Fan have been conversing for some time.

POET

How long?

FAN

All my life, Poet.

POET

Roger.

FAN

Roger. Since I was a boy I have loved in all the wrong places. And that is not all.

POET

Tell me.

FAN

I turned to the church for cleansing, but not before years of unspeakable longings. And behavior. Still, a cure eludes me.

POET

In spite of your belief in the extremity of your sin?

FAN

That's the rub, Roger; I cannot make myself believe it is sin absolutely. Oh, I am a man with no sense of what is right, of no conscience. I have impulses...I...I should not have sent you that letter. Please, forgive me. I need your forgiveness before I can ask for God's.

POET

Sssshh. My sweet scribe, there is nothing to forgive. Believe me, I have been delving into this so deep I've thought I might drown at times. You need not punish yourself any more; you've committed no sin.

FAN

You've delved...no, you...I do not, I cannot fathom what you are saying.

POET

Listen, there are many of us, everywhere. It amazes me that you have not noticed. Common men, holy men, worshiped men. Men at their coronations and their wives, men praying before

the altar. Christian men, all of us. God's children.

FAN

No. No, please, you must leave. You know not how you torment me. Please, leave this place and never return; I cannot bear to see you again.

Fan opens the door.

POET

Do not drive me away. Imagine what we could have, what could be.

FAN

It cannot be; can never be. Please, you must go. I need you to go.

Poet begins to walk out the door.

POET

Please, I have never learned your name.

FAN

Gregory.

POET

Gregory. (pulls the drawing out of his satchel and hands it to Fan.) You have it now. Do with it what you will; I do not want it anymore.

Fan closes the door abruptly. After a moment, Poet walks away.

Gregory sits on the edge of his bed and looks at the drawing. Leonard Cohen's "TAKE THIS LONGING" plays as Fan tries not to weep.

2.82

INT. POET'S CHAMBER—MORNING

Poet packs while we hear a VOICEOVER of his final dictation.

POET (V.O.)

To please that Prince, to be contrite,  
Can all good Christians still incline.  
For He is near, both noon and night,  
Our God, our Lord, and Friend...

## INT. SCRIPTORIUM—AFTERNOON, THE DAY BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE

POET (cont'd)

...For mine  
 Was a fair fortune when on height  
 For my pure pearl I swooned, supine.  
 Since then I've stayed both true and right.  
 So with Christ's blessings, free and fine,  
 Which in the form of Bread and Wine  
 Many a mortal daily sees,  
 Oh, may we serve him well and shine  
 As precious pearls our lord to please.  
 Amen Amen

As he finishes, he turns the final page upside-down over the rest of the manuscripts, and looks up at Fan. "TAKE THIS LONGING" begins again to play and continues throughout the next two scenes.

2.83

## INT. GREEN GIRDLE INN—MORNING

Poet walks out of his room with his small pack and trunk. Innkeeper sees him and gestures to a boy to bring his trunk outside to the waiting cart. Innkeeper smiles at Poet, who touches the relics once he descends the stairs. The remaining pilgrims look up from their breakfast as he travels through the inn. Woman Pilgrim approaches him.

WOMAN PILGRIM

Leaving so soon?

POET

I'm afraid so.

WOMAN PILGRIM

Well, you have a fine day for traveling, anyway.

POET

Good day, madam, I am glad to have known you.

## EXT. CART OUTSIDE INN—MORNING

Poet climbs onto the cart and sits on his trunk. He takes one last look at the village as the cart pulls away and "TAKE THIS LONGING" plays.

1.84

## EXT. NORTHERN WALES COUNTRYSIDE—MANY DIFFERENT DAYS AND NIGHTS

“TAKE THIS LONGING” continues to play as Gawain travels back to Camelot.

He rides through the snowy countryside, thoughtfully fingering the Girdle.

He roasts a rabbit over a fire at night.

He walks Gringolet through swampy terrain.

He rides on the edge of a seaside cliff. He stops at the sight of Camelot in the distance.

3.85

## INT. STUDENT UNION POETRY READING—NIGHT

Reader and Sarah enter the student union, both carrying journals. They find the reader list at the coffee counter and sign-up; Reader makes sure to sign her name last.

## INT. POETRY READING—LATER

## SPIDER

...makes me want to scream.  
I swear this institution plucks at my fingernails,  
It drives nails into my brain.  
But still, I stay,  
Because my parents want me to,  
And because I'm completely insane.

## DOUG

All right, give it up for Spider!

Those left at the poetry reading applaud.

## DOUG

And now, this is very exciting, at her public  
poetry debut, please welcome heartily and  
heartily welcome: Phoebe!

Reader gets up from the small table she shares with Sarah and Nathaniel. She moves into the red spotlight, and adjusts the mike until it suits her.

## PHOEBE

Um, hey. Thanks for hanging around 'till the bitter end. I was kinda hoping no one would be left, but, there you go. I've been writing poetry forever, but it wasn't until I read this anonymous 14<sup>th</sup> century poet that I started to think about sharing my work. He, or she, you know, whoever it was, made me realize it's OK if nobody knows you, as long as you know who you are. And you have a refined sense of irony. Anyway, here goes.

Deeply, deeply descending  
 A crescendo, a climb uplifting  
 Feeling, falling ever over  
 Tangling, tossing, the waves  
 We have traveled and travailed  
 We have conquered nothing better than a kiss  
 We have sought sarcasm and uncovered  
     Sacrifice  
 And in this path of sacred trust  
 What we've learned is this:  
 The sexes share bonds of love and lust;  
 There is no vast difference.

The audience laughs and applauds as Reader grins and mouths thank you. She and Sarah seem very close as Sarah helps her with her coat.

1.86

## EXT. FIELD IN FRONT OF CAMELOT—EARLY EVENING

The sound of CHEERING from the previous scene bleeds into this one as the courtiers run out to greet Gawain. They pluck him from Gringolet and carry him into the castle.

## INT. HALL OF THE ROUND TABLE

The courtiers bring Gawain into the hall and plop him in his customary chair. Servants pile food in front of him.

## KNIGHTS

Gawain! How came you to return to this court.  
 Was the green man absent, or did you miss your date?

AGRAVAIN

Check his head, my lords; is it attached?

GAWAIN

Please, noble knights. I swear these questions will be answered, but not before I see my liege and hear how the kingdom has fared in my absence.

Arthur has entered the hall and heard this speech.

ARTHUR

The kingdom, Sir Gawain, drones on as always. Having you in my court again is my greatest joy since coronation.

Queen Guenevere at his side shoots him a nasty look. Arthur approaches Gawain, kisses and embraces him, as does the queen.

ARTHUR

Now, Gawain, how chanced it at the chapel?

2.87

EXT. ROAD NEAR MONASTERY—DAY

Poet watches the monastery as the cart drives past. He hears MEDIEVAL music coming from the chapel.

1.88

INT. HALL OF THE ROUND TABLE—EVENING

Gawain looks around at the wholly engrossed faces surrounding him. He has just finished his tale. He stands up and gestures to the girdle.

GAWAIN

Behold, sirs; this is the blazon of the blemish that I bear on my neck; this is a sign of the sore loss that I have suffered there; for the cowardice and coveting that I came to there; this is the badge of false faith that I found there, and I must bear it on my body till I breathe my last. For one may keep a deed dark, but undo it no

(MORE)

GAWIAN (cont'd)  
 whit, for where a fault is made fast, it is fixed  
 evermore. You honor me as triumphant, but  
 really I have returned in disgrace.

ARTHUR  
 (makes a raspberry)

Arthur and the court commence to comfort the knight and laugh away his self-imposed shame.

ARTHUR  
 Now hear this: All the fine lords and ladies  
 belonging to the Table Round, each brother of  
 the band, a baldric should have, a belt born  
 oblique, of a bright green, a new banner of our  
 court to be worn with honor to all who are  
 worthy.

The men laugh and shout their agreement; they do not heed Gawain's half-hearted protest.

3.89

#### INT. AUDITORIUM CLASSROOM—DAY

Reader watches Professor read the last lines of the poem. She is sitting very close to Sarah, and has a pink triangle boldly displayed on her backpack.

PROFESSOR  
 "So that was taken as a token by the Table  
 Round,/ And he honored that had it, evermore  
 after,/ As the best books of knighthood bids it be  
 known./ In the old days of Arthur this  
 happening befell;/ The books of Brutus' deeds  
 bear witness thereto/ Since Brutus, the bold  
 knight, embarked for this land/ After the siege  
 ceased at Troy and the city fared amiss./ Many  
 such, ere we were born,/ Have befallen here, ere  
 this./ May He that was crowned with thorn/  
 Bring all men to His bliss! Amen."

Thus the Order of the Garter was formed, an  
 institution that still exists today. In this ending,  
 Gawain, shame-filled, expects to be

(MORE)



## PROFESSOR (cont'd)

reprimanded for the unchivalrous care of his life. Instead his king takes it as a sign of his humanity, and honors him for it. Perhaps that is why this poem ends with a prayer. The Gawain Poet asks Christ to bring all men into the light of His selfless sacrifice, but he is also reminding us that even Jesus loved his earthly life.

2.90

## EXT. ROAD NEAR MONASTERY—DAY

## POET

Stop!

Poet suddenly jumps from the moving carriage and addresses the DRIVER, handing him his purse.

## POET

Please, return my things to the Green Girdle.  
Tell the keeper I wish to stay. Here, take these  
coins.

## DRIVER

How long should I tell her you are staying, sir?

## POET

Indefinitely.

Poet runs off toward the monastery. He waves at Messenger as he passes him in the garden and plunges into the chapel during mass. Abbot Jacob is distributing wafers near the altar. Poet creeps along the wall, and ducks under the fabric that functions as a decorative backing for the crucifix. Abbot is holding a tray of wafers for the local PRIEST, who places a wafer on the tongue of an older, female peasant.

## POET

Pssst. Pssst, Jacob.

Abbot turns and looks toward Roger crouching under the fabric.

## ABBOT

Roger?

POET

Yes.

ABBOT

What are you doing?

The Priest and the peasant look at Jacob strangely.

POET

I must tell you something.

ABBOT

Can it not wait? I am doing God's work, here.

POET

No.

Abbot gestures to a YOUNG MONK and hands him the wafers. Fan looks up briefly from where he is kneeling in prayer. Abbot then joins Poet under the curtain.

ABBOT

Well?

POET

Have you already committed your scribes?

ABBOT

All they have is chronicles; it is not important.

POET

Good. I am staying; I have another poem.

ABBOT

Is it religious?

POET

Sssh. Go back to church.

Poet exits the chapel and hums happily as he strolls down the road back to the inn.

FADE OUT.

THE END