



Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (A New Verse Translation)

By Simon Armitage

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"Compulsively readable. ... Simon Armitage has given us an energetic, free-flowing, high-spirited version."?Edward Hirsch, *New York Times Book Review*

One of the earliest great stories of English literature after *?Beowulf?*, *?Sir Gawain?* is the strange tale of a green knight on a green horse, who rudely interrupts King Arthur's Round Table festivities one Yuletide, challenging the knights to a wager. Simon Armitage, one of Britain's leading poets, has produced an inventive and groundbreaking translation that "[helps] liberate *?Gawain ?from academia*" (*?Sunday Telegraph?*). 2 illustrations

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Composed in medieval England by an unknown poet and set in what were (even then) the old days of King Arthur, the tale of Sir Gawain begins when a magical warrior with green skin and green hair interrupts the Christmas party at Camelot with a bizarre challenge: If a person here present, within these premises,/ is big or bold or red blooded enough/ to strike me one stroke and be struck in return in once year's time, says the knight, I shall give him as a gift this gigantic cleaver. Pure, loyal Sir Gawain accepts the agreement: the adventures that ensue include a boar hunt, a deer hunt, and an extended flirtation with a noble lady, designed to test Sir Gawain's bravery, fidelity and chastity, and to explore—with some supernatural help—the true meaning of virtue. The Gawain-poet, as he is known to scholars, wrote in Middle English (reproduced here); though it is slightly harder to read than Chaucer, the grammar is more or less our own. Armitage (*The Shout*), one of England's most popular poets, brings an attractive contemporary fluency to the Gawain-poet's accentual, alliterative verse: We hear the knights of Round Table chatting away charmingly, exchanging views. This is a compelling new version of a classic. (*Oct.*)

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Review

“Drives the force of the old poem through the green Armitage fuse. Highly charged work.” (Seamus Heaney, Nobel Prize-winning translator of Beowulf)

“Simon Armitage's luscious version of *?Sir Gawain and the Green Knight?* continues the tradition of great poet-translators such as Edward FitzGerald, Arthur Waley, and Seamus Heaney. Like them, he has taken an artifact from a remote era and made it his own, while simultaneously restoring it to itself.” (John Ashbery)

“Brilliantly orchestrated.... Armitage has produced a brilliantly well-tuned modern score for one of the finest surviving examples of Middle English poetry.” (Poetry Review)

“[Armitage's] version inventively recreates the original's gnarled, hypnotic muscle, its vivid tableaux and landscapes, its weird, unsettling drama.” (Mark Ford - Financial Times)

“A free and wonderfully offbeat version of this unusual masterpiece... fresh and startling, as though it had been written yesterday; it is rough-knuckled and yet it sings.... From start to finish, Mr. Armitage has clearly had great fun; each of his words has been tasted with gusto.” (Eric Ormsby - New York Sun)

“Full of make-believe and festivity, this wonderful narrative poem possesses a Mozartean lightness and wit. Luckily, several modern versions, particularly those by W.S. Merwin and Simon Armitage, deftly replicate much of the feel and rhythm of the Middle English original.” (Michael Dirda - Wall Street Journal)

“I enjoyed it greatly for its kick and music; its high spirits, its many memorable passages. I enjoyed it because, like the Gawain poet, Armitage is some storyteller.” (Kevin Crossley-Holland - The Guardian)

“Armitage makes it utterly, even compulsively readable, and as fresh as it must have been in 1400.” (Brian Morton - Sunday Herald)

About the Author

Simon Armitage is the award-winning poet and translator of both Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and The Death of King Arthur, as well as several works of poetry, prose, and drama. He is the Oxford Professor of Poetry.

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From reader reviews:

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