

1. What do you think of the character of the lady of the castle? Does she strike you as a typical medieval aristocratic woman?

In many ways, this lady seems more modern than a medieval woman. She chooses her lovers for herself and pursues her own desires, and she shows a keen ability to read people and a shrewd talent for arguing. When simple seduction fails to convince Gawain, she shows that she knows how to get under the knight's skin by questioning his reputation and accusing him of discourtesy. The verbal battle that ensues between the lady and Gawain escalates in intensity every day, and it seems possible that she eventually would have won if Gawain hadn't left the castle. She shows herself to be every bit as clever at arguing as Gawain, if not more so.

Yet the Gawain-poet limits the lady in some interesting ways. First of all, he never gives her a name. Guinevere and Morgan le Faye, the other major female characters, both possess names, but the host's lady—arguably the most important of the three women—remains anonymous. Furthermore, we discover at the poem's end that the host's wife is not in fact her own agent. Though she clearly possesses beauty, intelligence, and skill, her use of all three is authorized and legitimized by her husband. To this extent, the lady acts on his behalf in seducing Gawain. In the most negative reading, Bertilak acts as his wife's pimp; in the most positive, the two act as partners. In any case, the lady does not act independently.

**Sir Gawain is very upset with himself for having behaved dishonourably, but the Green Knight shows understanding and calls him a noble knight. Why would Gawain be so upset, but the Green Knight be okay with his behaviour?**

At the end of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, we encounter opinions of how bad Gawain's sin really was from three sources: Bertilak, King Arthur, and Sir Gawain. Sir Gawain's view of his own sin seems harsh. When he realizes that the Green Knight and the host are the same man, Gawain curses himself, saying, "Accursed be a cowardly and covetous heart! / In you is villainy and vice, and virtue laid low!" (2374–2375). He proceeds to deprecate himself as a coward who has fallen short of his chivalric code. He calls himself a "faulty and false" knight (2382), and asks if he can regain the host's "good grace" (2387).

Though he initially chastises himself, Gawain goes on in lines 2411–2428 to recall several Bible stories about men who sin because of women. The host's wife exposed Gawain's

flaws, he claims, just as Eve exposed Adam's, Delilah exposed Samson's, and Bathsheba exposed David's. Though Gawain couches his discussion of the "wiles of a woman" in terms of a woman's ability to make "a dullard . . . dote" (2414), he comes close to blaming the lady for his own downfall. Gawain decides to keep the girdle not only as a reminder of his fault, but as a sign for others, metaphorically equating himself with Cain (the son of Adam and Eve and the first murderer) who bore a mark so that everyone could recognize him as a sinner. Gawain's sin seems much less profound than Cain's, yet his decision to wear the girdle as a "sign of excess" (2433) that recalls "[t]he faults and the frailty of the flesh perverse" (2435) aligns him with one of the greatest sinners in the Bible.

Bertilak claims that Gawain's morally exceptional behavior impresses him, even though Gawain kept the lady's gift of the girdle a secret. Bertilak says that the difference between Gawain and other knights is like the difference between a pearl and peas. He admits that Gawain has flaws, but he spares him from the fatal blow out of an appreciation for how well Gawain stood up to the tests. Though at first it seems that Bertilak believes only in the letter of the law, in Part 4 he shows a justice tempered with mercy. Bertilak is realistic about what happened and therefore seems best suited to judge the severity of Gawain's sin.<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Elaborate answers courteously taken from <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/gawain/mini-essays/>