
Original Text

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
lines 950–69

But unlike on to look tho ladies were,
For if the young was yep, yellow was that other;
Rich red on that one rayled ayquere,
Rough wrinkled cheeks that other one rolled;
Kerchiefs of that one, with many clear pearls,
Her breast and her bright throat bare displayed,
Shone schyrer then snow that sheds on hills;
That other with a gorger was geared over the swyre,
Chymbled over her black chin with chalk-white veils,
Her front folden in silk, enfoubled ayquere,
Toretet and treletet with trifles about,
That nought was bare of that burde but the black brows,
The twain eyen and the nose, the naked lips,
And those were sore to see and sellyly bleared;
A mensk lady on mould men may her call,

for God!

Her body was short and thick,
Her buttocks bay and broad,
More lykkerwys on to look
Was that she had on lode.

J. R. R. Tolkien

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo.
New York: Ballantine, 1975.

But unlike in their looks those ladies appeared,
for if the younger was youthful, yellow was the elder;
with rose-hue the one face was richly mantled,
rough wrinkled cheeks rolled on the other;
on the kerchiefs of the one many clear pearls were,
her breast and bright throat were bare displayed,
fairer than white snow that falls on the hills;
the other was clad with a cloth that enclosed all her neck,
enveloped was her black chin with chalk-white veils,
her forehead folded in silk, and so fumbled all up,
so topped up and trinketed and with trifles bedecked
that naught was bare of that beldame but her brows all black,
her two eyes and her nose and her naked lips,
and those were hideous to behold and horribly bleared;
that a worthy dame she was may well, for God,

be said!

short body and thick waist,
with bulging buttocks spread;
more delicious to the taste
was the one she by her led.

Marie Borroff

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Patience, and Pearl:
Verse Translations. New York: Norton, 1967.

But unlike to look upon, those ladies were,
For if the one was fresh, the other was faded:
Bedecked in bright red was the body of one;
Flesh hung in folds on the face of the other;
On one a high headdress, hung all with pearls;
Her bright throat and bosom fair to behold,
Fresh as the first snow fallen upon hills;
A wimple the other one wore round her throat;
Her swart chin well swaddled, swathed all in white,
Her forehead enfolded in flounces of silk
That framed a fair fillet, of fashion ornate,
And nothing bare beneath save the black brows,
The two eyes and the nose, the naked lips,
And they unsightly to see, and sorrily bleared.
A beldame, by God, she may well be deemed,

of pride!

She was short and thick of waste,
Her buttocks round and wide;
More toothsome to his taste,
Was the beauty by her side.

Simon Armitage

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A New Verse
Translation. New York: Norton, 2007.

Those ladies were not the least bit alike;
one woman was young, one withered by years.
The body of the beauty seemed to bloom with blood,
the cheeks of the crone were wattled and slack.
One was clothed in a kerchief clustered with pearls
which shone like snow — snow on the slopes
of her upper breast and bright bare throat.
The other was noosed and knotted at the neck,
her chin enveloped in chalk-white veils,
her forehead fully enfolded in silk
with detailed designs at the edges and hems;
nothing bare, except for the black of her brows
and the eyes and nose and naked lips
which were chapped and bleared and a sorrowful sight.
A grand old mother, a matriarch she might
be hailed.

Her trunk was square and squat,
her buttocks bulged and swelled.
Most men would sooner squint
at her whose hand she held.
