**Notes – from “Sir Gawain and The Green Knight”**

Little is known about the author of this famous poem, other than that he probably lived in the area of England known as the northwest Midlands, perhaps in Lancashire, Staffordshire, or Cheshire, 150 miles from London. The author is commonly known as “The Pearl Poet” and wrote during the latter part of the 14th century, making him a contemporary of Geoffrey Chaucer.

The stories of the Arthurian legend like “Sir Gawain and The Green Knight” are called

***romances***.

the **Romance** is defined as any imaginative literature that is set in an idealized

world and that deals with heroic adventures and battles between good characters

and villains or monsters – originally, the term referred to a medieval tale dealing

with the loves and adventures of kings, queens, knights, and ladies, and including

unlikely or supernatural happenings.

Once again, there are important elements of **The Code of Chivalry** and knightly behavior illustrated in this famous story. Gawain is considered Arthur’s best and truest knight, and, as such, is the most obvious target of evil. His test and temptation is,

in truth, a test of the entire concept of chivalry and the Round Table itself.

As in many other Medieval tales of romance, we have the common themes of

**bargaining** and of **gift giving** as illustrated in the Green Knight’s challenge and

Gawain’s exchanging of “gifts” with Lord Bercilak.

Gawain both honors the Code and breaks it during his experiences at the castle and at the Green Chapel.

Gawain is seduced **three times** by the Lord’s wife (note the biblical parallel here)

1st morning - Gawain resists, but takes a kiss. ( Lord Bercilak brings a deer)

2nd morning - Gawain Resists again, but takes two kisses. (Lord brings a boars head)

3rd morning - Gawain resists even more seductive advances, but accepts the **green girdle** as protection, and takes three kisses. (the Lord brings a fox)

Gawain honors his host by returning the kisses, per their agreement, thus upholding the Code, *but* he keeps the green girdle, thus accepting an unfair advantage and, in so doing, violates the Code!

Note the **symbolic** nature of the color green, particularly in Medieval times, where it was frequently associated not only with love and man’s baser desires, but also with witchcraft, devilry, and evil for its connection to faeries and spirits.

Again, note also the familiar Medieval romantic element of an article of clothing which possesses magical properties, in this case, the **green girdle**, which is, in actuality, a belt worn around the waist.

Gawain’s behavior in his confrontation with the Green Knight also both honors and violates the code. Although, faithful to his word, Gawain shows up for his meeting as promised, he flinches as the Green Knight attempts the first of his three blows - a show of cowardice! Gawain does, however, show humility in his obvious regret over his actions at the castle and his deception of Lord Bercilak.