



# Cotton Nero A.x

The works of  
the 'Pearl' poet  
as believed by

**David Hadbawnik**  
**Daniel C. Remein**  
**Chris Piuma**  
**Lisa Ampleman**

Cotton Nero A.x

# Cotton Nero A.x

The works of the 'Pearl' poet,  
*retranscribed, retraced, rebelieved,*  
consisting of the following poems:

## Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

*David Hadbawnik*

### Pearl

*Daniel C. Remein*

### Tidy

*Chris Piuma*

### Patience

*Lisa Ampleman*



eth press · twenty fourteen  
buffalo · new york · toronto

COTTON NERO A.x

© 2014 David Hadbawnik, Daniel C. Remein, Chris Piuma, and Lisa Ampleman.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

“Sir Gawain and the Green Knight” first published in 2011 by Habenicht Press.  
“Pearl” first published in 2012 by the Organism for Poetic Research.

This edition published in 2014 by

**eth press**

an imprint of punctum books, Brooklyn, New York

ethpress.com | punctumbooks.com

eth press is a parascholarly poetry press interested in publishing innovative poetry that is inspired by, adapted from, or otherwise inhabited by medieval texts.

eth press is an imprint of punctum books, an open-access and print-on-demand independent publisher dedicated to radically creative modes of intellectual inquiry and writing across a whimsical para-humanities assemblage.

David Hadbawnik, Chris Piuma, and Dan Remein are the editors of eth press, and we can be contacted at [ethpress \[at\] gmail.com](mailto:ethpress[at]gmail.com). We are currently accepting proposals and submissions.

ISBN-10: 061598391X

ISBN-13: 978-0615983912

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

Cover and book design by Chris Piuma.



# Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

David Hadbawnik

*for Richard Owens*

Poker is a game  
that depends on the ability  
to keep perfectly  
devoid of emotion.  
Or to fake an emotion—  
slight rise of eyebrow—  
shift in one's seat, fingers  
absently fondling chips as  
the green knight strolls in

green hair, green coat, converse  
all stars painted green-blue. she cuts off  
her own head and rolls it  
at your astonished feet

Hello  
says the head  
I have come to warn you—  
all of her space between  
head and body is simply  
meant as a warning—  
silently  
a bird flies through  
a hole in her speech  
silently  
all of you sitting there  
waiting

I keep emptying something  
or  
something keeps emptying  
me  
blonde                 brunette  
                          redhead  
walks out from behind  
the counter dark  
smock smeared with blood  
how can we help you?

The game of poker is symmetrical as a poem, the poem of the green knight. There's nothing left over but a single chip, a smile that dangles in the mind of the last player to fold his or her cards and pick up his or her head from the long green table before strolling out.

Gawain comes into the poem  
polite and sloppy as death,  
gives up his name,  
gives up the ghost  
does not pass go  
does not make love  
to the king through  
the lady's body or  
any other body who  
would not make that mistake

It's imperative to shift  
the tongue downward  
almost as one would  
a glance. Any appendage  
tipped in blood, thrumming, this  
is the point of the hunt.  
Would you like another drink  
is not a question Gawain  
would know to ask  
never having even once  
been drunk

The strangest feature of the poem of the green knight is that everything happens at the very beginning like a game of poker where the cards are quickly dealt and then you just wait for the game to unfold as it has to. Quickly before the buzz wears off and the bed is revealed to be merely a clearing in the neck of the woods where Gawain was allowed to be himself for a change.

Yes, the green knight said  
in response to no question—  
but one night stands too  
are important. This  
in a little field where  
a garter precariously held  
the head of Gawain to  
his own neck. Nevertheless  
he declined this invitation  
and became the question  
to his own answer which  
came to be asked by  
Morgan le Fay



# Pearl

Daniel C. Remein

*for David Hadbawnik*

i dreamed a pearl  
that made me sad  
about myself and the first few  
friends in the tiles of a geodesic  
dome such a poem is more like the lacèd belt  
than the cup it arrives  
a question of jewelry faceted  
with what strings of pearl perceive  
when exposed to certain affective  
and cognitive background radiation  
are blueprints for some highly  
dreamed complicated pearled percepts

perceptive of the skinny-jeaned pearl-maiden  
and dressed in jewelry and embroidery  
the pearl-maiden busts coyly  
into the laboratory busts up  
the dreaming and standing-apace  
shows the space the spirit takes  
in an erlenmeyer flask about the  
space of a screw-on earring  
    the pearl-maiden should be a greeter  
but there is no setting only force-fields  
delight that eyes and ears restrain woods  
like knives and invisible gem-cliffs and sharp water

hal, the thing about a gem  
the setting of a gem  
is the last stream  
thinks you pristine  
like the setting of a gem  
and what is emerald is a translucent fish  
with green scales  
pushed out of a national forest  
campground back into the back-  
garden and ecological guidebooks  
to this fair region (say, the adirondack peaks)  
bank the poem's sloped decor

beyond the slant

or slope

a bivalve dome at the spot where the gem  
sets the percepts strung in eurhythmy around the band  
sometimes the city assembles from a mauve nacre  
in an active chain and this force field has to be flung  
and the more the marvel the more kind the mind  
on the surface of a pearl it is  
difficult to discern the difference  
between a militant intention (percept)  
and an atmosphere an active chain  
arrayed in situatedness more and more

arrayed in percepts more and more  
the pearl-maiden is always reciting  
the elementary distinction in phenomenology  
between content and act  
the intentio vs. the intentum

(without the intentio the intentum still going along  
just fine again the problem of shelter  
proposed by the stanza testing gilded water  
the dodecahedron rafters of the pavilion  
you cannot see that the pearl-maiden  
rests in the very spot keeps dreaming me  
that stop without in any spot



garland of jewels much more than kind  
is thus an architectural problem like the booth  
at the entry to a national park what kind of roof  
should it have a belt of pearls around the head inset with the people's  
delights arrayed the dream and drove me the wonder  
of the stream and the miraculous waters and the invisible  
force field is the out-pusht out-dropt  
the poem dropt outside behind the bar in the mountains  
at the pay-phone tests for water quality peerless what the pearl  
does is to roll out the hole poked  
in the poem by the edges of the setting into the green  
garden but the pearl-maiden didn't drop



the dreamer of the poem has melted brains  
in the garden because the globe of a fair region breaks in  
and dreams up this one

    a rock-garland                      fair region

    a peerless vision arrayed  
in percepts more and more the pearl is a tent  
of irradiated calcium

    that poetry stretches through time



# Tidy

Chris Piuma

*for Sweety*

Everyone loves a tidy poem.

Everyone loves a tidy poem,  
a poem told in a tidy manner,  
told in tiny, tidy morsels,  
tightly timed in tidy lines.

Everyone loves the tidy love  
a tidy poem tells us of,  
of tidy manners and tiny morsels,  
marked by the manner of its telling

Everyone loves a poem in which  
the manner of the poem's telling  
and the matter that it tells  
match up in a tidy way.

Everyone loves a tidy love.

A tidy order to the dress  
kindles a careful wantonness:  
The hair about the shoulders combed  
into a fixed attraction:  
A beardless face, which here and there  
Admits a crimson character:  
A shirt of white, a suit of blue,  
a belt that matches well the shoe:  
A wholesome scent, which yet is good  
beneath a long preputial hood:  
A sturdy cock, whose prudent flow  
will propogate the status quo:  
I am enamoured by this art  
that is precise in every part.

A tidy line is an ordered line.  
A tidy line is a numbered line.  
A tidy line is a measured line.  
A tidy line is a patterned line.

A tidy line is a lucid line.  
A tidy line is a limpid line.  
A tidy line is a well-spelled line.  
A tidy line is a well-spelt line.

A tidy line is a simple line.  
A tidy line is a dimpled line.  
A tidy line is a braided line.  
A tidy line is a plaited line.

A tidy line is a well-kept line.  
A tidy line is a well-kempt line.  
A tidy line is a crystal line.  
A tidy line is crystalline.

Everyone loves a tidy meal,  
a square meal, at regular hours,  
just proportions, evenly cooked,  
and eaten among a quorum of friends.

The pound cake is a tidy cake:

1 lb flour  
1 lb butter  
1 lb eggs  
1 lb sugar

The simple syrup is a tidy syrup:

1 c water  
1 c sugar

The Negroni is a tidy drink:

1 oz gin  
1 oz sweet vermouth  
1 oz Campari

A glass of water is not tidy,  
for what is it in proportion to?  
Likewise, a man who eats alone  
is unproportioned and untidy.

But two men and two women dining,  
who dip their pound cake into syrup,  
who clink and drink their four Negronis:  
This is very tidy indeed!

Life is a tidy food  
Upon a spotless plate,  
Whose table for some Guests, but not  
A solo meal, is set.  
Whose crumbs the waiters seek  
And with a metal blade  
Swipe away the maculate;  
Men eat a while and die.

An even death is a tidy death:

	<i>yrs</i>	<i>mos</i>	<i>days</i>
Raphael, the painter	37	0	0
Kamehameha V of Hawaii	42	0	0
Juan Ponce de Leon	63	0	0
Ingrid Bergman	67	0	0
Henry I of Portugal	68	0	0
Alfred Kazin	83	0	0
Walter Diemer, inventor of bubblegum	93	0	0
Astrid Zachrisson	113	0	0

Round even deaths, the more so:

Johann Ambrosius Bach, father of J.S.	50	0	0
Yasujiro Ozu	60	0	0
Constantine Cafavy	70	0	0
Bidhan Chandra Roy	80	0	0

They say that Moses, Muhammad, and Shakespeare all had tidy deaths, because they were so beloved, and this seems tidy enough to be true.

MRS. Kamlesh Vats alias Sweety born on 06-Feb-1967 at 09:005 am on Monday had shared the day of her death on 06-Feb-2012 at 09:10 am that too on Monday. She was a Pharmacist by Profession

Yet there are those who trash the tidy life!  
Who bid the bare edge of a blade to cut  
The flesh of any fair and faultless person,  
Bash their babies, spill their blood and brains,  
Crush their pets, their cats and dogs, to death,  
Gash the gut and gullet of the good  
To spill their stomachs in a sloppy ditch!  
Who kill those who they kill, but don't kill all  
Lest even killing be done tidily,  
But subjugate the rest in servitude  
And dank eternal toil—or leave them be,  
That, for the moment unmolested, they  
Might spend untidy time awaiting Trnta  
high  
etoel  
winw!

Amen.



# Patience

Lisa Ampleman

*in response to the 'Pearl' poet*

*Blessed are the bus  
riders, the wall-  
flowers, the righteous,  
the pure, those who  
break up a bar fight,  
who weep for their  
lost, those who wield  
mercy like a healing  
balm, or endure the  
malice of others. They  
will be heaven-rich.*

So, have patience. When the poet  
turns the virtues into Dames,  
vulnerable old ladies with tight  
snoods, and whines about his  
post to Rome. When he, bound  
to Poverty, plays with her and  
Patience,

(dallies? praises?  
something less than  
pure?)

have patience.

When the poet asks you to tarry  
a little time. When he tells—for  
four hundred sixty lines—the story  
of Jonah (so much more than  
whale bait), have patience.

When the meek are welders, torch  
at hand. When you're in the  
stocks, your wrists out and  
vulnerable, your face an open  
plate. When Tarshish is a  
hundred nautical miles away.  
When the wind blows the waters  
so high the ship drinks them, have

(when the foreign,  
useless gods  
are women)

patience. When Jonah snores through  
the storm, when he's hauled up  
to deck and tossed out, when  
the fish, rolling too, opens  
his leviathan maw, and Jonah,  
the shirker, tumbles heel over head,

but, as the poet

sings,

ever is our God

sweet.

Have patience.

When Jonah dreams in the gullet.  
And the whale is sick at heart.

(when even the whale  
is *he*):

When God's word wails in a wind  
but Jonah still pledges his troth.  
When he's dropped at Nineveh's gates,  
and the bachelors get the news  
of their fate. When they repent,  
and drop dust on their heads,

(not while cleaning—  
not a man's job)

when that's not enough for our man.



Have patience. After all, when the city  
is saved, who cares that there are fools  
who can't tell their left from  
their right, or accept the Lord's  
judgment. Those stupid little bairns,  
those unwitted women. Be naught  
so gryndel, good man (or good woman).  
Have patience. In pain and in joy.

For if you rend your clothes

(tearing blue jeans at the soft seam,  
scissoring a sock, a blouse)

you'll just have to sew them again.

The poet can suffer in silence, travel  
to Rome (perhaps not, as he sees it,  
a punishment), have patience.



## Cotton Nero A.x

David Hadbawnik, Daniel C. Remein,  
Chris Piuma, and Lisa Ampleman

The medieval manuscript known as Cotton Nero A.x (after its shelf mark in the British Library) contains the only versions of the poems we now know as *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. They were composed in the latter half of the fourteenth century—the time of *Piers Plowman* and Geoffrey Chaucer, though radically different from either. No one knows who the poet was. No one knows if more than one poet wrote some or all of the poems.

Together, they present a stunning array of themes, allegories, and images that critics continue to puzzle over: *Patience* offers a psychologically complex rendering of the Old Testament story of Jonah and the whale; *Cleanness* explores its homiletic theme in carnal and spiritual terms with complexity, irony, and even humor; *Pearl* provides a dream allegory that pushes at the distinction between its earthly and heavenly meanings, challenging the very notion of metaphysical transcendence its form seems to point towards. Finally, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the most secular of the poems, is a sophisticated take on Arthurian legend that unfolds like a psychosexual mystery novel, with no easy solution in sight.

This book, *Cotton Nero A.x*, is not quite a translation, nor an interpretation of these four poems. It is what might be called a trace. A response. It is a homework assignment from beyond the grave, for four students who should have known better. A dream we hope to dream.