

Sir Gawain and The Green Knight Analysis

Written at the end of the 14th century by an anonymous author, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a celebrated piece of literature. It tells the tale of Sir Gawain, a brave knight of King Arthur's court, and the game he participates in with the Green Knight. The Green Knight is a supernatural being that challenges King Arthur's court in a risky game. To save his King from the dangerous game, Sir Gawain takes up the challenge. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a poem written in the medieval romance genre as characterized by the supernatural elements, the importance of chivalry, and Sir Gawain taking up the challenge.

Traces of Celtic mythology can be found in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The Celts were people who lived in the British Isle before the Anglo-Saxons. They believed that at certain times of the year, otherworldly events were more likely to happen. Originally, this time was around November 1, but with the influence of Christianity, it was shifted to the days between Christmas and New Years. The timing of the Green Knight's appearance can be linked to Celtic mythology, thus suggesting him as a supernatural being when he interrupts King Arthur's New Year's Eve feast. In addition to the timing of his entrance, it becomes obvious that he isn't an ordinary human when he survives getting his head chopped off by Sir Gawain. It is later revealed in the story that the Green Knight is a minion of Morgan le Fay, King Arthur's half-sister and an evil sorceress. She devised the game from the beginning for her own amusement.

As with other medieval romances, the code of chivalry plays an essential role in the poem. At the beginning of the story, the author detailed how courtly King Arthur and his guests acted during the feast. When the Green Knight appears, he mocks King Arthur's famed round table when no one accepts his challenge. In response to the insult, King Arthur decides to take up the challenge himself, but is stopped by Sir Gawain. Sir Gawain says he will take up the challenge and reasons that King Arthur is important to Camelot and claims himself as the weakest of the knights. Gawain's actions here portrays his knightly qualities as he is humble and gives himself up for his King and uncle. After a year

pasts, Sir Gawain embarks on his journey to find the Green Knight as part of the challenge. On his journey, he meets a lord who is hospitable to him. During Gawain's stay with the lord, his chivalry is tested. The lord's wife attempts to seduce Gawain but he fails and kisses her. Prior to the seduction, Gawain and the lord had made a deal; the lord would share the spoils of his hunt with Gawain and Gawain would share whatever he received with the lord. The day before Gawain departs the lord's castle, the lord lady gives Gawain a green and gold girdle to protect him. Gawain fails to keep his deal with the lord when he keeps the girdle to himself because he is afraid of death. This part of the story shows a break in chivalric code. Gawain is later ashamed of this and wears a green belt as remembrance of his weakness.

A third characteristic of medieval romance in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is Sir Gawain's journey itself. Medieval romances often tell stories of knights taking on challenges for the glory of their king or country. In this particular story, Gawain's acceptance of the challenge counters the Green Knight's mockery of King Arthur's court. If King Arthur had went through with the challenge himself, his knights could possibly be labeled as cowardly for letting their king take on such a risky challenge. While the other knights were indeed scared to accept the challenge, Sir Gawain exemplified how a brave and chivalric knight should act. Although Gawain did falter in chivalric code, his completion of the challenge proved the bravery of King Arthur's court.

With the inclusion of supernatural elements, chivalry, and Sir Gawain's acceptance of the challenge, it can be concluded that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a medieval romance. Unlike romances today, the poem does not focus on the romantic relationships of characters, but rather the chivalric actions of a knight in a supernatural setting. Although the poem was almost satirical of medieval romances, it still contains the elements that classify the story as a medieval romance.