

Yvain essay example

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Yvain, the Knight of the Lion by Chretien de Troyes is a romantic story about a knight-errant (Yvain) who is tasked to go on a series of adventures in order to regain the love of his woman. Despite the fact that Yvain, as a knight-errant, is meant to be a lone warrior, someone isolated from society before he accomplishes his task, he has many different guides and aids along his quest. This sets him apart from other lone warriors who wander the countryside, as he does enlist the help of others, whether man or beast, who defeat dragons and giants together. While this is still Yvain's story strictly, the presence of aids like the lion make him far from alone in his journeys.

The most important and well-known character in the story besides Yvain is the lion. Rescuing the lion from a serpent, the lion repays his debt by accompanying him on his mission. First encountering the lion while captured by a dragon-like serpent, he defeats the dragon and frees the creature. Looking at the situation, he decides that " he would take the lion's part, since a venomous and wicked creature deserves only harm: the dragon was venomous and fire leapt from its mouth because it was so full of wickedness" (p. 337). The lion turns out to be a fiercely loyal creature, and " Pity summoned and urged him to aid and succour the noble and honorable beast" (p. 337).

With a lion by his side, Yvain has a companion, someone or something for emotional support and aid in combat. This changes the dynamic of the knight-errant story considerably; part of the appeal of the story is that he is doing these things on his own - the knight walks alone, slays enemies alone, helps people alone. The lone nature of his journey is meant to be a symbol of his separation from the woman he loves - in this case, the widow Laudine.

With a lion, this burden is somewhat lightened, which may threaten to undercut the isolation he is supposed to feel, suffering for his lady love. However, this is leavened by the power of the lion, particularly symbolically, as the lion is a symbol for Yvain's courageous spirit, and also a token of his kindness, as he saved the lion's life. By having such a powerful, wild beast fighting by Yvain's side, one shows Yvain's power - in fact, the lion submits to him, further showing his worth. "“ it stood up on its hind paws, bowed its head, joined its forepaws and extended them towards Yvain, in an act of total submission" (p. 337).

The lion does more than demonstrates Yvain's worth - it redeems him. Yvain is shown to have broken his warrior honor by not returning in one year to be with his woman; he goes " mad" as a result, strips naked and lives " in the forest like a madman and savage" (p. 357). This type of untoward behavior is not a good sign from a brave warrior following the code of a knight-errant. However, the lion is one of his final steps toward redemption, showing his power and his strength. While Yvain's story does not follow the normal codes of a knight-errant story, and he is far from isolated, these differences make for a stronger character and more interesting story of redemption overall.