

# The knight without blemish and without reproach: the color of virtue essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



If there is something that the English Middle Age literature is definitely famous for, these are the numerous legends about knights, beautiful damsels and King Arthur; and, one must give these legends some credit for keeping its audience well in their seats for several centuries long.

However, it seems rather unfair that the legend of such a peculiar historical character as Sir Gawain has been in the shadow of more popular ones like Sir Galahad or King Arthur; just as compelling and, for that matter, more complex story of the knight who in one kind of sources is portrayed as the saving grace, and in another as a lady-killer is definitely worth taking a closer look at, which the story about Sir Gawain and the Green Knight will help in.

The work belongs to the genre of poetry. Although there is no actual rhyme in the given piece, the way it is structured clearly shows that this is a poem; for instance, the line “ At the head sat Bishop Baldwin as Arthur’s guest of honor” (Armitage 27) breaks, and the sentence continues on the next line; the given manner of writing is typical for poetry with obvious elements of a narrative and dramatic style.

Indeed, too short to be epic, it still has the tension of drama (the line “ exchanging views” (27), for instance, bears a lot of hidden innuendoes) and the pace of a third-person narration.

Like any other poem, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight has its evident prosodic elements; however, they are quite different from what is defined as poetry today.

For instance, as it has been already mentioned, there is no rhyme (“ himself -views - Guinevre” (Armitage 27)), nor is there any specific meter: “ And still he stands there just being himself” (Armitage 27) does not fit into any of the existing meters.

However, written in the era of the “ Alliterative Revival”, it does have a lot of alliterations in every line. Indeed, taking any line, one can see the repetitive pattern: in “ and at Arthur’s other side sits Agrawain the Hard Hand”, there are three clear-cut instances of alliteration.

First of all, the sound “ a” is stressed: “ and at Arthur’s”, “ Agrawain” (Armitage 27); then, “ s” is emphasized: “ side sits”; finally, the harsh “ h” sound echoes in the end of the line: “ Hard Hand”. Another instance of alliteration, “ Bishop Baldwin” makes it clear that this stylistic device was intended (Armitage 27).

The poem also has several peculiar symbols to consider. In the given excerpt, Sir Gawain is the symbol himself – the symbol of the whole idea of knighthood, with its codes of honor, luxurious feasts and specific hierarchy.

Mentioning the way the guests are seated, the author stresses the latter, showing the specific relationships between the characters.

For instance, the fact that Guinevere sits next to Gawain: “ Good Sir Gawain is seated by Guinevere” (37) points at the fact that there might be tension between these characters and that they are closely related to each other.

However, mentioning all these characters, the real author of the story stays in the shadow, which makes the narration a true legend, the ancient myth, the veracity of which cannot be checked, and that adds certain charm to the poem.

Although the author mentions the names of actual people who did exist, according to the historical record, it is rather hard to pin the actual year when the events took place. Known as the XIV-century tale, this piece is practically timeless.

Nevertheless, the elements of the given poem can relate to a number of other literature works of the given time period, mostly owing to the legendary names mentioned in the excerpt, such as King Arthur, Guinevere, and the rest of the characters.

In addition, the whole idea of knighthood which the extract is shot through relates well to most of the literature works of the given time slot. Indeed, the idea of describing the life of “ the nobles” (Armitage 27) is quite common for the given epoch.

Despite being a translation of the original Middle English poem, the given piece is still very impressive. It helps create the atmosphere of the famous Camelot and imagine the people who lived there in the most graphic way.

Telling not only about the history of England, but also emphasizing the significance of fraternity and togetherness which ruled in the XIV century Camelot, the given poem truly is a work of art.

Therefore, it is clear that the story of Sir Gawain is typical for its time period and reflects the standard set of values, yet it manages to convey the traditional messages about purity in a specific way.

It is quite peculiar that the poem is not preachy in sharing the moral values of the Middle Ages with the readers; in addition, there is little of the self-appraise element in the poem, which is also quite unusual for the time period of the Knights of the Round Table.

With its story which is easy to track and the pace which is easy to follow, the poem makes a perfect specimen of the English Middle Age literature.

Armitage, Simon. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. New York City, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007. Print.