

Main themes of the sir gawain and the green knight

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



The legendary land of Camelot and King Arthur's castle is a common location within British Literature. It is also the main location in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. This place is described as having the bravest and most chivalrous knights of all the land guarded by a great king known as Arthur. Even in the tale of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight the knights are described to be great by the Green Knight saying,

" Whose fame is so fair in far realms and wide?

Where is now your arrogance and your awesome deeds,

Your valor and your victories and your vaunting words?

Now are the revel and renown of the Round Table

Overwhelmed with a word of one man's speech,

For all cower and quake, and no cut felt!"

This quote is from the villain of the story, the Green Knight, a very tall, strong knight that has an unusual green tint to his armor. It shows that even the villains of this world give credit to the knights of Camelot, showing them respect and knowing they are quite chivalrous. This medieval quest-like story can be viewed upon in two very different aspects. The first one is a literal analysis which is that the story is a quest for Sir Gawain. Gawain is ultimately challenged by the Green Knight. The " game" as the Green Knight calls it is to hit him with his gisarme and if he dies, then it is over. However, if the Green Knight lives, then in one year Gawain must travel to the Green Chapel and the knight gets to hit him back. Gawain fails and must travel on a quest

like adventure to the Green Chapel. During his time away, he learns more about himself and matures as a human. The second way that this story can be analyzed is on a maturity level. It can be viewed as Gawain starting as a child, to maturity, and finally up to adulthood.

The scene is set when the Green Knight rides in on his strange green horse. It is assumed by King Arthur that he wants to fight but the knight merely shrugs it off and says he wants to play a "game" with one of the other knights. The Green Knight is expecting at least one of the knights to accept the "game" since they are supposed to be the most chivalrous but not one volunteer's one self. The Green Knight is not pleased and says, "There are about on these benches but beardless children." By saying this to King Arthur and all of the knights in the courtyard, he is deeply insulting each and every one of them. Having a beard in medieval times showed manliness. The Green Knight has a big beard and strokes it as he talks to King Arthur. He is basically calling all of these knights children because they do not have a beard and questioning why none of the knights will take on his "game" if they are the bravest and most courteous knights in all the land. The Green Knight wants to put the knight's chivalrousness to the test. The text also says, "The stranger before him stood there erect,/ higher than any in the house by a head and more." This quote also backs up the idea of being a child. When a child grows up, they grow and therefore become taller which shows that the Green Knight has already gone through "maturity", explaining why he is so much taller than the other knights. This section of

the story represents Sir Gawain as in childhood by being a beardless child and not immediately accepting the Green Knight's requests.

The story progresses as Sir Gawain eventually takes the gisarme from King Arthur. King Arthur, upset that the Green Knight insulted the knights of Camelot and himself in such a manner, accepts the "game" from the Green Knight. This is a crucial part and realization for Sir Gawain. He realizes that King Arthur has the potential to lose his life in this game and knows that Camelot will suffer greatly without Arthur. Gawain knows what must be done as he doesn't fear the loss of his own life, he accepts it if it may come down to that. Gawain tells the king that he will be a part of this, to keep Arthur safe.

"The court assays the claim,

And in counsel all unite

To give Gawain the game

And release the king outright."

As soon as this is said and done, it is maturity starting to form for Sir Gawain. A child might be scared of an intimidating task compared to someone starting to mature who might accept it. In this case, Gawain is accepting what must be done for a greater good of Camelot. Also, when Gawain sets out to find the Green Chapel is also a sign of maturity. A whole year later, Gawain still kept his word to the Green Knight and set off to find him. He had no idea where he was going; he just left Camelot in search of a man he made

an agreement with. This shows maturity because he is being loyal to what he said. Gawain doesn't know exactly where to go while in search of the Chapel. This is also like maturity because at that point in life, people often think of what their life will be like during adulthood, but they don't know exactly where they will be.

Sir Gawain is alone on his travels when he finds a castle. This is the location of where Gawain reaches adulthood. A man named Bertilak occupies the castle with his wife, the Lady of the Castle. He allows Gawain to stay until he has to cover that final stretch to the Green Chapel. The only rules are that Bertilak will share everything he acquires with Gawain but Gawain must share everything he gets in the castle with him. For three days, Bertilak goes out hunting and shares what he caught with Gawain. Gawain receives kisses from the Lady of the Castle each day and gives them to Bertilak. However, on the third day Gawain receives a magical green girdle which will protect him. He doesn't share this with Bertilak and keeps it for himself. This is a sign of adulthood because all adults do wrong things every once in a while; nobody is perfect. Another sign of adulthood is at the end of the story when the Green Knight teaches Gawain a lesson about his life.

“ I confess, knight, in this place,

Most dire is my misdeed;

Let me gain back your good grace,

And thereafter I shall take heed.”

This shows adulthood in Gawain. He has learned a lesson from the Green Knight. He is one of the knights of Camelot and supposed to be the most chivalrous in the land. The actions that were taken were not that of a chivalrous knight and Gawain learns this. He is ashamed of what he has done and wears the girdle as a sign of failure. The other knights do not understand this because they have not matured like Gawain has.

The tale of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is that of a medieval quest and that of maturity and growing up. The theme of maturity fits exceptionally well with this tale as there are moments throughout the entire story that represent childhood, maturity and finally adulthood. The theme of a typical medieval quest is the common theme within this story as finding and understanding the maturity theme requires the story to be analyzed on a deeper, more thorough level.