

When christian morals collide with the nature of human

[Experience](#), [Human Nature](#)



While *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, chivalric romance by Pearl Poet, might seem as no more than a tale about heroic quest of the noble knight, an observant reader would notice a number of deeper issues discussed in this work. Perhaps the most curious question raised in the poem is Pearl Poet's criticism of the unrealistic values of the dwellers of Camelot. The author shows gentle criticism of the obsession with appearance and implies that in the final battle between nature and nurture even the most selfless aspirations for the elevated ideas do not outweigh simple needs of the human nature. This struggle between natural impulses and endeavor for the greater good is represented by a charming metaphor of the conflict between pagan beliefs and Christian moral standards. At the same time, the poet does not dismiss derived from religion values but insists that despite their greatest efforts people are still children of the Nature and should understand, accept, and remember that.

Throughout the poem Pearl Poet criticizes the widespread overvaluation of appearance and glamour over truth and action. During Christmas feast the pompous charm of the court is dimmed by the overpowering light of the Green Knight. For example, at the start of the poem the inhabitants of the Camelot are described as ideals of prestige, manners, and appearance, "The halls and chambers were heaped with happy lords and ladies as high as you like! There they were gathered with all the world's goodness: knights as kind as Christ himself, ladies as lovely as ever have lived, and the noblest king our nation has known. They were yet in their pride, in the prime of their youth, and filled as full of heaven's blessing as the king had strength of will. And mighty men surpassing all were gathered on that hill" (alliteration. n. p.,

n. d. Web. 20 February 2016). The detailed description of lavish meals, chosen guests, and merriment stops at its pinnacle with the sudden appearance of the Green Knight, who brings contrast to the conventional glamour with which the poem started. The newcomer uses simple words to convey his intentions and show some contempt for the social convention of the court, " I've a mind to see his face and would fancy a chat with the fellow who wears the crown" (alliteration. n. p., n. d. Web. 20 February 2016). Despite knights' and ladies' remarkable characteristics the appearance of the Priest of the Green Chapel leaves them abashed, " A silence fell filling that rich hall as if they'd all fainted or suddenly slept: their voices just vanished at their height" (alliteration. n. p., n. d. Web. 20 February 2016) The pretentious glamour of the dwellers of the Camelot is literally dimmed with the " natural" light of the Green Knight, "He looked a lightning flash, they say: he seemed so bright; and who would dare to clash in melee with such might?" (alliteration. n. p., n. d. Web. 20 February 2016) In this scene, obsessed with appearance and luxury Camelot surrenders for honest and realistic outlook represented by the Green Knight.

Excessive emphasis on the appearance is also shown in the attitude of the noble guests of the castle. While the Green Knight, during his visit to the Christmas feast, tries to provoke the merri makers for an open conversation, they prefer to preserve their image," Some, I suppose, were not floored, but chose to be polite, letting their leader and lord be first to speak to that knight" (alliteration. n. p., n. d. Web. 20 February 2016). However, right after the departure of Sir Gawain, " All that saw him so splendid sighed deep

within and whispered soft words one to another in compassion for that prince: “ By Christ, what a pity, to lose such a leader, whose life is so noble! There is hardly his equal anywhere on earth! A wary approach would have been wiser; better to have made such a man a duke — such a brilliant leader” (alliteration. n. p., n. d. Web. 20 February 2016). While taking great care to look courteous, brave, and compassionate, those people let “ the best in the land” to risk his life and show regret only after being safe from taking his place. This way, the author shows scorn for the dominance of the manners over true feelings and actions.

The main point Pearl Poet raises in his romance is the falseness of the believe in the infinite power of human motivation and effort. To better illustrate this point, the poet contrasts refined dwellers of the castle with the Priest of the Green Chapel to parallel elevated Christian values with humble pre Christian beliefs. During the Christmas feast The Green Knight seems to appear only to disrupt the well-established and renowned Christian event and, perhaps, the well-established and dear held ideas of the people of Camelot. This difference between the green-skinned stranger and elegant members of the court serves not to just contrast the newcomer with the rest of the guests but to parallel two sets of conflicting values better described as pre Christian believes based in acceptance of human nature and simple worldview with Christian well-defined more sophisticated codes of behavior. The Green Knight’s remarkable strength, powers perceived as magical cause subsequent quests’ abashment and show domination of the critical outlook over the popular one. Despite their remarkable characteristics, the ladies

and knights look inferior to the priest of the Green Chapel, the representation of author's thought, which supports the idea that even the most outstanding among people are victims to their natural weaknesses.

Pearl Poet uses final events of the poem to further criticize the excessive believe in the exalted ideas that force people to take futile attempts to ignore their limitations. The most noble among king's servants, Sir Gawain, aspires to meet unrealistic moral standards only to learn that even the finest among the people is not flawless. After leaving Camelot, that represents the Christian, more sophisticated worldview, Sir Gawain faces the real world and for the first time feels the limitations the Nature placed on the living. The noble knight faces hunger, cold, and tiredness before losing in the final battle with the strongest of his weaknesses. Sir Gawain flinches under the blow of the Green Knight and forced to forever wear a mark that represents his humane origin, ' He grieved when he had to tell; He groaned for grief and ill fame; In his face the blood did up well, When he showed the nick, for shame' (alliteration. n. p., n. d. Web. 20 February 2016). And while the protagonist even at the end of the poem fails to understand the lesson of the Green Knight, readers should learn not to be ashamed of the natural limits of their bodies and souls.

In the poem Sir Gawain and the Green Knight Pearl Poet criticizes the excessive value placed on appearance, artificial norms, and futile attempts to completely ignore natural limitations. To better illustrate his point, the author takes advantage of the metaphorical images of the Camelot and the Green Knight. While aspiring to meet chivalrous moral standards Sir Gawain

learns that even the finest of the people is capable of error. Therefore, Pearl Poet reminds readers about the importance of acceptance of their personal weakness and living according to the real values.

Work Cited Pearl Poet. " Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." alliteration. n. p., n. d. Web. 20 February 2016.