

The heroic code expressed in beowulf and sir gawin and the green knight research

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



There is a vivid description of a heroic character in the two literature works: Beowulf and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. The heroic protagonist is portrayed, in both cases, as a plain human being with imperfections in one way or the other. In this work, I have critically analyzed and given a comparison of the heroic qualities of both the characters.

On the onset, Beowulf crosses the ocean to fight and the main reason for the fight is to attain fame and honour. In his society, one of the greatest achievements is fame, especially after death. This is the notion that drives Beowulf all through his lifetime.

Responsibility, as a quality of a hero, is seen to be acquired by Beowulf. In his previous endeavors, he was a completely irresponsible man who always portrayed the ability to “quit” whenever he felt like in several battles. In the battle that involved Grendel's mother, he carried himself in a way to suggest that he was prepared to complete his task: a job he started. This, he did after the threats from Grendel's mother. Initially, he had made up his mind to save Herot, and at the same time, killed Grendel. Beowulf had a strong and mature response to the murder of Grendel, though at a given point the response may be seen to be insensitive. He says “let your sorrow end!” He continued encouraging her that they needed to avenge their friends rather than mourning them forever (67). The promise he gives is seen as the greatest bind. At later age when Beowulf is as an old king, his responsibility in the fight with Grendel's mother is seen to reach the maturity state. In the poem, we are told that Beowulf, after the return from Herot, “took the throne he'd refused” (92). He was not old enough and mature enough to

accept the throne previously, but currently he was. During his time as the king of Greatland, he had no alternative but to take care of his people in the adventure into foreign lands. He didn't abandon them; instead, he defended them to the latter. During the Beowulf's battle with the dragon when the Greatland was threatened, he made no intensions of requesting for God's help. The poem is open and does not mention God's assistance. We are told that Beowulf managed to kill the dragon by the help of Wiglaf. This portrays him as a man who undertakes to go through dander whole heartedly at the expense of seeking divine intervention.

In summary, Beowulf is presented as an almost unbeatable and very powerful hero. He is also portrayed as lacking self-character.

In the book *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Sir Gawain can be said to be Bold, Brave, Heroic and chivalrous. This is seen by virtue of being knighted by King Arthur. In the poem, he is described as "faithful" and as "pure as gold", without any villainy, and with all qualities, as represented on his shield by the pentangle.

On the onset, Gawain is in perfect agreement with the chivalric code and in the first scene; he rises and defends the honor of King Arthur, his liege lord. He says "I beseech ye, my lord, let this venture be mine". He goes ahead and confirms that he is the weakest and the feeblest of wit and it would be the loss of his life "if ye seek sooth". In Gawain's society, the "self-effacement" is very conflicting with the "self-aggrandizement" which is so much valued in the Beowulf's society. However, these two traits, self-

effacement and self-aggrandizement, are so much ideal for the respective heroes, and they manage to pursue the traits throughout their lifetime.

King Arthur's knights are seen to be "beardless children" according to the Green Knight. It is said that he would only spot with them, and never to fight them. As a real servant and believer of the supernatural being, there is a real strife tainting of the Green Knight, whereas, the world of a medieval Knight is portrayed physical with societal jousting for the perfect harmony with loyalty. In spite of all these, King Arthur bear no mischievousness that no one could conclude that his main aim was to sustain the innocence of Sir Gawain.

From the last lines of the poem, there is a clear signal that by a virtue like that of Sir Gawain's, an individual is brought closer to Jesus, the Christ. He went through series of temptation including that of the Green Knight. Of the tests of Sir Gawain, the first part wanted him to decline the advancements of Lady Bertilak and at the same time avoiding un-chivalry. He manages to get through this test with very courteous words. The second part wanted him to authentically play the exchange of the winning game and give the entire that he got at the castle to his host. However, he failed this test by deciding not to get back to Lord Bertilak and by complying with the magically protecting green girdle from Bertilak. We are told that after the cutting of Sir Gawain with an ax, Green Knight told him not to make confessions of his wrongful deeds. The poet tries to make it clear that a good quality is safeguarded through tests, both passed and failed. At the same time, the author says that a failed test comes along with divine punishment, which enables the sinner to realize and confess his/her sins. We can see this in the Green Knight

encouragement to Sir Gawain to maintain the green girdle which he had committed a sin. This was to act as a reminder of his failure and would keep him away from sin.

In summary, Sir Gawain can be said to be a semi-perfect hero. He always minces his words. In very rare occasions does he live up to his words. His loyalty to the lord makes him surrender everything that he won for that day. The virtues of Gawain can be said to be five. They include:

1. Generosity
2. Love for the fellow men
3. Cleanness
4. Courtesy beyond failure
5. Pity

In the poem Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, we expect to meet Gawain as the most noble of the knights. On the contrary, Gawain is not perfect. He is very much susceptible to fear and conflict. All these resulted into dishonesty. The conflict is most seen in Gawain's failure of the tests posed by Morgan le Fay, the wicked. The tests of temptation and courage that Gawain is taken through, allows for the ridicule of his knightly ideals as he fails. The inner conflicts of Gawain are revealed by satire. From this, we learn that no man is perfect and even the best still have some selfishness. The best of men are also subjected to some crafty thoughts that are completely not in line with the morals that are expected from them. His disloyalty is evident when he refused to hand over the green girdle that his wife gave him to Sir Bercilak. (384). Gawain's courtesy is beyond any failure. This is seen when he failed to

offend the fair lady. When he played the winning game, we all see Gawain's generosity at a glance. In this game, he always gave the Lord his fair winnings.

Conclusion

In the Christian context, both the two stories portray their heroes as catastrophic in their own ways. The two heroes, Beowulf and Sir Gawain, possess similar traits which are paradoxically different in their individual styles of heroism. The similarity between these two characters is that they are tragic heroes. However, the difference is seen in the way the characters are formed and developed. Beowulf remains a very tragic hero because, his legacy and character lives through various hearts within the story, even though his physical life was eliminated. In the case of Sir Gawain, he does not actually die physically. This makes him a tragic hero. However, Sir Gawain's self-esteem and internal pride dies. This leads to a summary that life not only ends when the physical being dies, but also when the self-esteem and internal is destroyed.

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