Analysis On Sir Gawain Essay, Research Paper

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

As with so many stories written in the Middle Ages Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is filled with wonders, magic and knightly pursuit of fame and nobility. It combines folklore and romance as does, according to The Norton Anthology, no other known work. The character of the Green Knight fascinates and amuses. Most people would not think of it as an Arthurian-time creature. The Green Man in fact, is a part of an ancient folklore where the beheading of a green man would assure the return of spring next year.

The passage that I am discussing takes place almost a year after the Green Knight has visited King Arthur’s court to challenge the court. He has specifically challenged Sir Gawain who steps forward to accept the challenge. The passage starts with the appearance of a castle. This is very significant to the story, and this fact is communicated to the reader in the description of the castle and even by the initial fact that it appears so suddenly and so very conveniently after Sir Gawain’s prayer.

Sir Gawain has been suffering, trying to find the Green Knight. The Green Knight has set a date on which they will meet, and Sir Gawain, as is the custom for knights, has to keep his promise that he will fight him. Furthermore, Sir Gawain is the best of King Arthur’s knights and his five-pointed star symbol on his shield stands for truth so there is no way he will not keep his promise.

We are made aware of the importance of the castle first when it just suddenly appears from nowhere and secondly when we notice it is set in a green field. The green field makes no sense to the reader because it is the middle of winter, but it does signify the fact that the appearance of the castle is not accidental. It is the combination of Sir Gawain’s prayer, the appearance of a beautiful summer landscape and the castle in the middle of it that strikes the reader and asks the question: What does it mean?

The castle is great with a “palisade of palings” planted about for about two miles. It is shining in the sun, and Sir Gawain is standing in awe looking at it. He is thankful to “Jesus and Saint Julian” that they have put this castle there for him.

The castle is described as very large and well fortified: “The gates were bolted fast; the walls well framed to bear the fury of the blast.” There is a wall built around the castle, and deep water surrounds it. The watchtowers with many holes to look through are protecting the gate.

Behind all the fortification, there are tall, ornamented turrets with spikes. White chimneys indicate also that it is a very beautiful place. The reader gets a feeling that it is not just another gloomy medieval castle with stench, a cramped and drafty interior, and a general feel of coldness. It is in fact the best-fortified castle Sir Gawain has ever seen, but it is also very appealing to the eye. This again is a clue that the castle is special.

Christmas day is coming and Sir Gawain would like to spend it there. He calls out, and a porter answers him politely. This is unlike what would be the case in a regular castle where a guard would answer a holler and not a porter. Then the drawbridge is lowered, and Sir Gawain is greeted with high honors and led inside. There he meets with the lord of the castle who welcomes Sir Gawain with these words: “To this house you are heartily welcome: what is here is wholly yours to have in your power and sway.” Sir Gawain thanks him and they embrace each other.

The way Sir Gawain is greeted gives us a hint that something is not right. Why would the people from the castle kneel in front of Sir Gawain? This behavior tells us that they know something that Sir Gawain is not aware of. Sir Gawain is just grateful that he has found this castle (or that he has been led there) and that he will have a place where he can spend Christmas day. He does not see all the symbols that make this castle special.

From all the clues that the author gives us, we know that the castle is crucial for the story as well as for Gawain’s life. He is not aware of it, but the castle is the place where he is tested, and ultimately his future is decided there. It is very typical of this kind of story to include such symbols, like the castle, to convey to the reader that whatever happens there should be remembered because it is important part of the story.

333