

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight



Chivalry

- “Chivalry” comes from the French *cheval*, or horse (*n.b.* Norman influence in language).
- Traditional code of conduct associated with knighthood.



Characteristics of Courtly Behavior

- Respect the king. Do nothing to bring him dishonor.
- Respect women. Do nothing to bring dishonor to any woman.
- Protect the poor and the weak.
- Honor God as a faithful Christian.

***SGGK* is an alliterative poem**

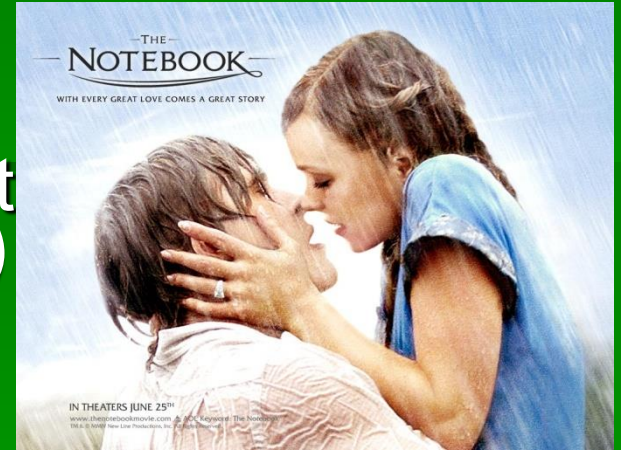
- Form of verse that uses alliteration as the principal structuring device to unify lines of poetry, as opposed to other devices such as rhyme or syllables.
- **Alliteration**-repetition of an initial consonant sound.

Example:

*The mane of the marvelous horse was much the same,
Well crisped and combed and carefully pranked with knots.*

So what kind of story is this?

- It's a MEDIEVAL ROMANCE (but not like the movie *The Notebook*)



- ROMANCE:
 - Idealized character (Sir Gawain)
 - Hero motivated by adventurousness
 - Supernatural elements
 - Hidden identity

Main Characters...



- King Arthur (ever heard of him?):
 - Legendary king of Britain
 - Husband of Guinevere
 - Uncle of Gawain
 - Over the famous Knights of the Round Table at Camelot
 - Brave, courageous, chivalrous



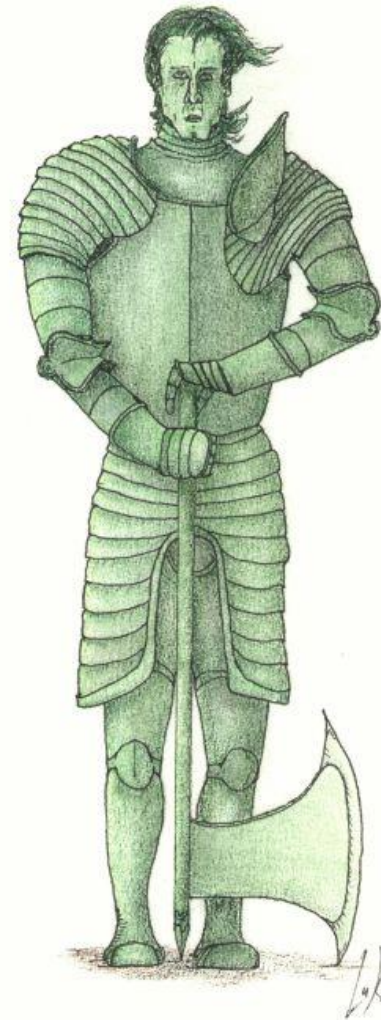
Main Characters...



- Sir Gawain:
 - Arthur's nephew and one of the most loyal, brave knights
 - Follows the chivalrous code (humility, piety, integrity, loyalty, honesty)
 - Courtly lover
 - One flaw: loves his life so much that he will lie to protect it (obviously breaking the code)

Main Characters...

- The Green Knight:
 - Yes...he is a green man.
 - Huge guy with big muscles/carries a huge axe
 - Says he comes in friendship but proposes that someone step forward to play the “beheading game.”
 - Expects the knights to be courageous and step forward to play.



Why the Green Knight?



- In medieval England, the “Green Man” was a pagan representation of nature.
- The “Green Man” was not Satanic, but did symbolize the nature worship that characterized pre-Christian tribal paganism.

Gawain's Shield



- In the poem, Gawain's shield is described as a golden pentangle on a field of red.
- Gawain was said to possess five qualities – one for each of the pentangle's points – wherein he far excelled other knights.

Red and Gold

- In medieval symbology, red signifies humility as the blood of Christ

Gold signifies perfection.

Other Characters...



- Lord and Lady of the castle where Gawain stays for Christmas
- Queen Guinevere: Arthur's wife and queen



Major theme...



- Chivalry:
 - The world of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is governed by well-defined codes of behavior. The code of chivalry, in particular, shapes the values and actions of Sir Gawain and other characters in the poem. The ideals of chivalry come from the Christian concept of morality.

Other Themes...

- Arthur is introduced to us as the “most courteous of all,” indicating that people are ranked in this court according to their mastery of a certain code of behavior and good manners.

- When the Green Knight challenges the court, he mocks them for being so afraid of mere words, suggesting that words and appearances hold too much power over the company (pride).
- The members of the court never reveal their true feelings, instead choosing to seem beautiful, courteous, and fair-spoken.

Central Message

- Gawain's faults throughout this story teach him that though he may be the most chivalrous knight in the land, he is nevertheless human and capable of error.