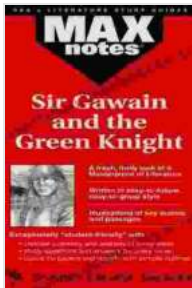


# Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Maxnotes Literature Guide

## Summary

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a 14th-century chivalric romance poem that tells the story of Sir Gawain, a knight of King Arthur's Round Table, and his encounter with the mysterious Green Knight. The poem is set in the winter of 1385-1386, during the Christmas season.



## Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (MAXNotes Literature Guides) by Boria Sax

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

Language : English  
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Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Print length : 98 pages  
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The poem begins with a description of the Green Knight, a giant knight who appears at King Arthur's court on New Year's Day. The Green Knight challenges any knight to strike him with his axe, on the condition that the knight must then receive a blow from the Green Knight in return. Sir Gawain accepts the challenge and beheads the Green Knight. However, the Green Knight does not die, and instead picks up his head and rides away.

Gawain sets out on a quest to find the Green Knight and receive the return blow. He travels for a year and a day, and eventually arrives at the Green Knight's castle. The Green Knight reveals that he is in fact Bercilak de Hautdesert, the lord of the castle. He tells Gawain that the challenge was a test of his character, and that he passed the test by showing courage, loyalty, and humility. The Green Knight then gives Gawain a magical girdle that will protect him from harm.

Gawain returns to King Arthur's court and is hailed as a hero. He wears the girdle for the rest of his life, as a reminder of his adventure and the importance of following the chivalric code of honor.

## **Analysis**

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a complex and multi-layered poem that explores a variety of themes, including honor, loyalty, temptation, and the nature of good and evil.

**Honor** is one of the most important themes in the poem. Gawain is a knight of the Round Table, and as such, he is bound by a code of honor. This code requires him to be brave, loyal, and courteous. Gawain's encounter with the Green Knight tests his honor in a number of ways. He is tempted to break his promise to receive the return blow, and he is also tempted to give in to despair when he is faced with the prospect of death. However, Gawain ultimately remains true to his honor, and he passes the Green Knight's test.

**Loyalty** is another important theme in the poem. Gawain is loyal to King Arthur and to his fellow knights of the Round Table. He is also loyal to the Green Knight, even though he does not know who he is or what his

intentions are. Gawain's loyalty is tested when he is forced to choose between his own life and the life of the Green Knight. He chooses to spare the Green Knight's life, even though it means that he will have to receive the return blow.

**Temptation** is a recurring theme in the poem. Gawain is tempted to break his promise to receive the return blow, and he is also tempted to give in to despair when he is faced with the prospect of death. However, Gawain ultimately resists temptation and remains true to his honor.

**The nature of good and evil** is another important theme in the poem. The Green Knight is a mysterious figure who can be seen as both good and evil. He is a challenger who tests Gawain's honor, but he is also a protector who gives Gawain the magical girdle. The Green Knight's true nature is ultimately ambiguous, and this ambiguity reflects the complex nature of good and evil in the world.

## **Major Characters**

**Sir Gawain** is the protagonist of the poem. He is a knight of King Arthur's Round Table, and he is known for his courage, loyalty, and humility. Gawain is the hero of the poem, and he passes the Green Knight's test with honor.

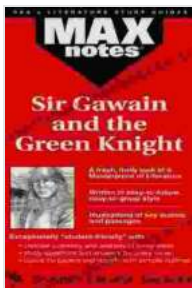
**The Green Knight** is a mysterious figure who appears at King Arthur's court on New Year's Day. He challenges any knight to strike him with his axe, on the condition that the knight must then receive a blow from the Green Knight in return. The Green Knight is a powerful and enigmatic figure, and his true nature is ultimately ambiguous.

**King Arthur** is the king of Britain and the leader of the Round Table. He is a wise and just ruler, and he is a role model for his knights. Arthur is a symbol of order and stability in the poem, and he represents the ideal of chivalry.

**Queen Guinevere** is Arthur's wife and the queen of Britain. She is a beautiful and virtuous woman, and she is a source of support for Gawain. Guinevere is a symbol of love and beauty in the poem, and she represents the ideal of courtly love.

**Bercilak de Hautdesert** is the lord of the castle where Gawain spends the night before his encounter with the Green Knight. He is a kind and hospitable host, and he tests Gawain's honor and loyalty. Bercilak is a symbol of hospitality and generosity in the poem, and he represents the ideal of a good host.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a masterpiece of medieval literature. It is a complex and multi-layered poem that explores a variety of important themes, including honor, loyalty, temptation, and the nature of good and evil. The poem is full of vivid imagery and memorable characters, and it is a timeless classic that continues to be enjoyed by readers today.



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