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Knights, Camelot, courtly romance, and magic are commonly recognized themes in modern adaptations of King Arthur. One reason Arthurian legend is so easily recognized in modern media is that it has been boiled and stripped down to those four ideas. In 1984, the film *Sword of the Valiant* was released, subtitled as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. This film is actually a remake of one made 10 years earlier, *Gawain and the Green Knight* (Harty 104). Both were directed by Stephen Weeks and both claimed to be a cinematic adaptation of the anonymously written poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*SGGK*). The film, however, only shares characters and a few plot points with its source material and entirely misses the main points of the original poem. On top of that, it “conflates as many unrelated storylines into one...”, including the plot from *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion*, a separate Gawain story written by a different poet. The Gawain poet criticizes the false humility and chivalry of the Round Table that Gawain represents while *Sword of the Valiant* gives Gawain a generic hero arc, attempting to fortify a worldview that elevates a falsified and idealized knighthood.

In the original poem, the Gawain poet characterizes Gawain with false modesty to symbolize the feigned chivalry of the Round Table. The Round Table in the poem is meek and not at all the Round Table typical of Arthurian Legends. Every knight except Gawain is “petrified” to step up and take the Green Knight’s challenge (*SGGK* 301). When Gawain steps up to take Arthur’s place in the Green Knight’s challenge, Gawain states: “I am the weakest of them...and the dullest-minded...” (354-355). This is blatantly false, as Gawain's knightly reputation is widely known. When Gawain flinches away from the Green Knight's axe at the first blow, the Green Knight says to Gawain: "You're not Gawain...who never quailed from an

army...and now flinches for fear before he feels my hurt" (2270-2272). Gawain exhibits false humility because he is afraid of the Green Knight. He sees the power of the Green Knight and attempts to play some kind of mind game with him, hoping that if he says he's the weakest, the Green Knight will be less likely to refuse him as a challenger. Gawain is afraid to die, and the fact that he's afraid to die is exactly what he needs to learn just how valuable his life is. The Gawain poet takes the high-and-mighty reputation of the knights of the Round Table to highlight the weakness: they're mortals and they can't reattach their heads were they to be cut off. The knights of the Round Table are regarded, as the Green Knight elucidates in the poem, "the most valiant and excellent of all living men," but Gawain poet, in crafting this poem, foretells the collapse of a Round Table built on a room full of sword-wielding shams (*SGGK* 261).

*Sword of the Valiant* takes the character of Gawain from *SGGK* in name only, sidestepping the message of false chivalry and instead simplifying to a man going on an adventure for a reason. In this film, Gawain begins as a "humble squire" and becomes Arthur's "only true knight" when he requests to take the king's place in the challenge (*Sword* 10:35-10:52). Gawain has no reputation in this film, as the Green Knight points out he has "seen nothing of the world yet", and therefore barely represents the Round Table because he has only just joined it (13:51-13:53). In giving Gawain a way out through the Green Knight's riddle, it lessens the severity of the punishment Gawain anticipates. The story becomes less about Gawain ultimately learning to have true humility and more of a typical story of a hero going on a quest to save a girl. This movie reflects knighthood that most people would want to see. In *SGGK*, Gawain shows weakness and even loses to the Green Knight, but this film shows a hero with no flaws, always a winner even when it doesn't look like he will, and saves the girl in the end. It eliminates the complex themes in the original poem, reducing it to an every-day adventure film.

Touching on the topic of the riddle in the film brings to light yet another series of misguided decisions for this film: the absence of tension and true conflict to elevate the lone wolf status of *Sword of the Valiant* Gawain even higher. The biggest problem this film has is from the production side of things, meaning it deviates heavily from its source material. In the poem, Gawain and the Green Knight's exchange ends with the Green Knight reminding Gawain of their deal that should he fail to follow through, he will "merit the name of craven coward" (*SGGK* 456). In the film however, the Green Knight outright threatens Gawain, saying if Gawain cannot find the Green Knight, the Green Knight "will most assuredly find [him]" (15:56 - 16:00). Typically, such a threat would cause tension. The problem is, Gawain believes he will die either way. The Green Knight will either chop off his head here or there. He is "forced to seek out the deadly blow" effectively "[eliminating internal tension]" from the story (Blanch 25). Even symbolically, the less violent option is removed. The Green Knight originally rides into court bearing a holly branch, "a sign of peace", and an axe, "a sign of war" (Blanch 25). In the film, however, the branch, and therefore the more peaceful option, is removed entirely. The Green Knight appears more threatening as he sends his axe flying to the front of the room, narrowly missing the King and two young boys, eliminating the perception of choice in the film.

Gawain's internal conflict to decide who he will devote himself to is simplified in the film. Between the King and the Round Table, Lord Bertilak, and Lady Bertilak, Gawain faces challenges and trials that require him to weigh his allegiances to each party and choose whom he owes it more (Blanch 21). When he chooses to take Arthur's place in the Green Knight's challenge, he chooses loyalty to the court over his own life. In Lord Bertilak's domain, he is given a choice between upholding his promise to Lord Bertilak or succumbing to Lady Bertilak's temptations and gifts, which in turn is also a choice to uphold a commitment to himself and "the

courtesy and love talk for which he is personally famous” (Blanch 21). The film eliminates all of these decisions. After the initial scene where the challenge is issued, the court becomes “largely irrelevant” (22). It is barely mentioned and never revisited. The entire Bertilak event, people and all, has been removed from the film, with Gawain’s “romantic” interest being replaced with Linet, a character from *Yvain*, written by Chrétien de Troyes. In removing these decisions and conflicts, the film is left with surface-level troubles for the character to face, all of which are solved with some kind of deus ex machina, such as Linet’s ring when he is trapped on or the return of Baron Fortinbras as Oswald is about to have him tortured. All of the omissions and alterations of the film serve to create a Gawain who is an unbeatable, blameless hero. By having exterior forces determine the path that Gawain takes, any blame or failure is removed from Gawain’s shoulders, so everything he does is right and just because he does not have the ability to make a wrong decision or a decision at all. This further elevates the falsified idea of knighthood in that they appear to be pure, blameless, and always doing the right thing.

In lacking any devotion to anything but his romantic interest, Linet, this film emphasizes two of Hollywood’s most popular themes: romance and the power of an individual. Gawain in the film is largely removed from the Round Table the second he steps out of Camelot and places Linet and his romantic feelings for her above all else. After learning the Lady of Lyonesse intends to wed Gawain, Gawain reassures Linet that “love can bend fate” (40:16 - 40:23). Gawain is willing to change anything, even break the vow he made to the Lady of Lyonesse to protect the kingdom and marry her. A vow which the poem Gawain would take more time to consider breaking, but as mentioned before, this film avoids internal conflict, such as this would cause, entirely. As Sandra Alvarez puts it, Gawain “after meeting her once, for five minutes, is madly in love and can’t live without her” (Alvarez). Gawain even goes so far as to mock the

chivalric benefits that seem to come with being a knight. Humphrey informs Gawain that “noble knights are supposed to hunt for it...or requisition it” to which Gawain remarks “that is what [he calls] chivalry” (18:54 - 19:02). This is in stark contrast to the Gawain in the poem who serves essentially as an emissary for the Round Table and states, himself, that his ultimate authority “[belongs] to the court” (*SGGK* 903). Gawain in *SGGK* is a proudly established member of the Round Table with great influence over how the group is viewed as a whole, whereas *Sword of the Valiant* Gawain champions no part of the fellowship, even going so far as to mock this cinematic universe’s version of the Round Table. Ironically, in attempting to make a simple modernized joke about chivalry, the film touches on one of the larger points the Gawain poet makes: that the Round Table is not as chivalrous as they claim to be.

Finally, *Sword of the Valiant* butchers the courtly love between Lady Bertilak and Gawain in the poem (besides the fact that she’s entirely eliminated from the film). Gawain’s “love” for Lady Bertilak in the poem is decidedly courtly. He resists her sexual advances at every turn and proclaims himself to be solely “duty bound...the servant of [her] wishes” (*SGGK* 1547-1548). It is “supposed to be an adulterous love” where a knight serves a married woman, as marriage at that time was typically done less for romantic love and more for tying families together for wealth and status (Ruys 126). Gawain’s love for Linet is blindly romantic. He doesn’t serve her nearly as much as she technically serves him, saving his life a number of times. This, again, serves to vindicate Gawain of any wrong-doing. If he had fallen for Lady Bertilak, viewing audiences would disagree with his romance with a married woman. Replacing the plot with one where Linet is devoted to no other man allows for a generic Hollywood romance plot where Gawain’s ultimate goal is to have her and marry her.

*Sword of the Valiant* is barely an adaptation of *SGGK*, only taking place in the same universe with the same familiar names from hundreds of years of Arthurian texts. The film succumbs to the Hollywood tradition of rewriting famous legends and stories in a way that the filmmakers think would garner more revenue. Rather than adhering to a story where the character actually goes through significant development, making choices that ultimately affect who he is in the end, and even takes that development back to the Round Table, it's a generic hero story with few consequences or real dangers. As Robert Blanch and Julian Wasserman comedically point out, the events of *Sword of the Valiant* "contradict...its own title, for no one here is valiant, and hardly anyone uses a sword" (Blanch, 24). John Aberth's description of *First Knight* is shockingly similar to *Sword of the Valiant*: "an allegory of a conflicted male..seeking masculine identity...when besieged by a strong female type" (Aberth 17). This second attempt by Stephen Weeks to adapt *SGGK* cost even more than the first one (Harty 104). Perhaps the budget should've been spent on fewer gallons of tanning spray to cover Sean Connery and more on hiring medieval scholars.

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