

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Background and Important Terms



The Middle Ages (Medieval)

- The Middle Ages lasted from 1066-1485.
- France's William of Normandy conquers England in 1066, bringing a new emphasis on law and order, including feudalism.



Big Events

- The Crusades (1095-1270): European Christians fought Muslims, with Jerusalem and the Holy Land as the prize; the Europeans failed.
- The Black Death (1348-1349): Caused a labor shortage, eventually leading to serfs' freedom and the end of feudalism

Feudalism

- Feudalism was a pyramid system based on a religious concept of a hierarchy
- Any males above the social class of serf were expected to serve the king as warriors



Women in Medieval Times



- Women had no political rights and were subservient to men
- A woman's social standing depended on her husband's or father's status

Chivalry

- Chivalry (or the Chivalric code) was a system of ideals and social codes governing the behavior of knights and gentlewomen
- Militaristically, knights had to keep their oaths of loyalty and observe certain rules of warfare



Courtly Love



- Courtly love required a knight to admire and act in the name of a certain lady
- However, courtly love was not supposed to cross the line into physical love; the lady should always remain pure and out of reach

SGATGK Facts

- Composed after the Crusades, around 1375
- Though composed in the 12th century, it is set in the 500's
- The tale centers around the semi-legendary King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table (King Arthur ruled from 516-537)



SGATGK Context

- During and after the Crusades, promoting Christianity (particularly Catholic beliefs) became very prevalent
- Even though not set during the Middle Ages, *SGATGK* includes feudalism, chivalry, and courtly love



SGATGK = Romance



- Chivalry gave rise to a new genre of literature, called romance
- Romance: a poetic narrative which usually records the adventures of a brave knight who must go on a quest and overcome great danger for love of a noble lady or high ideal
- Romances typically contain supernatural or magical events
- The world of romance suspends the laws of nature and idealized heroes almost always conquer evil

SGATGK Literary Terms

- ◎ Alliteration
- ◎ Symbol
- ◎ Bob and wheel: in alliterative verse, a group of five lines with an “ababa” rhyme scheme. The “bob” is the first line in the group and is shorter than the rest; the “wheel” is the quatrain that follows.
- ◎ Foreshadowing: the use of clues to hint at what is going to happen later in the plot; builds suspense

SGATGK Characters

- Sir Gawain
- Green Knight
- King Arthur
- The Lord
- The Lady

