

Student Essay on Hero Archetype in Sir Gawain

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Essay

The hero archetype plays a major role in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. In this poem, Gawain embodies the Transcendent Hero. This hero is often the subject of a tragedy. His fatal flaw leads to his demise, but from this demise he gains some greater understanding.

In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Gawain's journey is certainly more tragic than success-ful. He goes to the Green Knight and takes the axe blow to keep his part of the bargain, but he fails the Green Knight's test by taking the green belt and showing his fear. By this act, Gawain reveals his tragic flaw, and the Green Knight explains it to him. "But you failed a little, lost good faith/--Not for a beautiful belt, or in lust,/But for love of your life, I can hardly blame you" (121). Gawain then curses his cowardice and greed because it destroys chivalry and virtue (121). Gawain does, however, achieve a new realization from his experience. The knights of Arthur's court were held in high re-gard by all at the time, and they held themselves in high regard as well. From his experience, Ga-wain learned how easily men can fall into sin--even those who seem the most honorable. When he comes to this realization he lists off Adam, Solomon, Samson, and David as examples of other hon-or-able men who were tempted into troubles or sin because of women (122). Gawain then goes onto speak of his newfound understanding of the fallibility of good men. "...to remember/The weakness and error of this feeble flesh,/How easily infected with the filth of sin--/and if ever pride for my feats of arms/Stirs me, this belt will humble my heart" (122). The green belt which he thought would save his life serves as the symbol of Gawain's new realization and humility.

I chose this topic to explore because I was intrigued by the hero archetype and all the differ-ent ways in which a hero can be portrayed to further a story's theme or point. I wanted to look at all of categories and come to a conclusion on which hero Gawain embodied. Until the end, Gawain is portrayed as the perfect knight and a selfless hero. At the end, his flaw of love of his own life is ex-posed, but as a transcendent hero, his new realization allows him to grow.