

Univerzita Pardubice
Fakulta humanitních studií
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Sir Gawain in Arthurian Legends

Diplomová práce

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Lenka Altmannová

University of Pardubice
Faculty of Humanities
Department of English and American Studies

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Thesis

Author: Lenka Altmannová
Supervisor: Doc. PhDr. Bohuslav Mánek, CSc.

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Práce se zaměří na vystižení postavy rytíře pana Gawaina v rámci literárních děl středověkého cyklu o králi Artušovi a jeho rytířích Kruhového stolu. S využitím sekundární literatury bude sledovat tuto osnovu:

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5. Závěry.
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Vedoucí diplomové práce: Doc. PhDr. Bohuslav Mánek, CSc.



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Podpis:

Abstrakt

Tato práce se zabývá původem a vývojem artušovského cyklu; zvláštní pozornost je věnována jednomu z rytířů u Kulatého stolu, panu Gawainovi. Práce zmiňuje nejvýznamnější literární díla popisující pana Gawaina. Zaměřuje se na přístup jednotlivých autorů k této postavě, jak ji zobrazili v období od středověku po současnost. Dále je zde srovnáván způsob zachycení této postavy ve vybraných literárních dílech.

Abstract

This thesis deals with the origin and development of the Arthurian cycle, with special attention being devoted to one particular Knight of the Round Table, Sir Gawain. This work concentrates on the various literary sources describing the character of Sir Gawain, as well as the various approaches to this character taken by the writers in literary works from the Middle Ages to the present. Furthermore, this thesis compares and contrasts the varying pictures of Sir Gawain in the selected literary works.

Děkuji Doc. PhDr. Bohuslavu Mánkovi, Csc. za poskytnuté rady a vedení při zpracování této diplomové práce.

Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. The Origin and the Development of the Arthurian Cycle.....	3
3. Sir Gawain in the Literature.....	14
4. Comparing Interpretations of Sir Gawain.....	25
4.1 Sir Gawain's Origin.....	25
4.2 Sir Gawain's Character.....	25
4.3 Gawain and Women.....	37
4.4 Gawain's Adventures and Quests.....	47
4.5 Gawain and the Round Table.....	52
5. Conclusion.....	56
6. Summary.....	58
7. Bibliography.....	64

1. Introduction

King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table belong to the most famous stories in medieval literature, and are considered to be the most powerful and enduring in the western world. Although literary critics agree that the heroes of these stories never existed, they still remain very popular motives for many writers.

Many modern Arthurian works have been produced in Britain and the United States, however, the original writing about King Arthur was an international phenomena. Medieval Arthurian stories were found in many European countries, for example, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Holland, Denmark, and Norway. Although Arthur enjoys a popular reputation as a great king, the way in which various writers describe him tends to vary. Some portray the king as a villain, who fails to be an ideal king, while others prefer to portray the positive picture of this ruler. That is why in the medieval and modern literature there are many different depictions of King Arthur. (Kennedy 2002: 14)

This thesis is divided into three main chapters. The first of them is devoted to the character of King Arthur, and the description of this person in the literature. There, the basic and the most important literary works are mentioned.

The second part pays more attention to the character of Sir Gawain, one of the knights from the Arthurian court, who is considered to be one of the greatest heroes in the Arthurian legends. He is said to be the nephew of King Arthur, and became the youngest of the Knights of the Round Table. Besides his relationship with the king, he is one of the Arthur's closest companions and an active participant in many adventures which they encounter. Sir Gawain is a protagonist, or a main hero in the earlier Arthurian legends, and is often included in later stories of the fifteenth century only as a secondary character. (*A Character Analysis*)

The third chapter in this work is devoted to five selected literary works. The first three, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, represent the most important medieval literary works of the Arthurian legends. The last two selections are later works, including Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, an important work of

Victorian Romantic poetry, and Mary Stewart's *The Wicked Day*, a contemporary novel. (Alexander 2000: 66,262)

The last chapter has been divided into five sub-chapters. The thesis compares the writers' various approaches to Gawain's personality, from several points of view. The five sub-chapters include the themes of Gawain's origin, his character and relationship to women, his attitude to adventures, and finally, his position at the Round Table.

In addition to the above mentioned books, which are used as primary source material, the comparisons of these various authors has been worked out by use of printed and electronic secondary source material. The resulting comparisons provide information about the development of the writers' various conceptions of Sir Gawain in literature from the Middle Ages to the present day.

2. The Origin and the Development of the Arthurian Cycle

Arthur is probably the best-known character from all medieval literature. Most readers are familiar with some of the stories about him: he pulls the sword from the stone and is proclaimed king, and with the help of Merlin he establishes the Round Table, which becomes associated with the ideals of chivalry.

(Kennedy 2002: 13)

Arthur was a legendary king of the Britons in ancient times and remains a major hero of Arthurian legends. He expelled foreigners from Britain, brought peace to the country and established his kingdom based on justice, law and morality. He governed from his castle, Camelot, and founded the order which is known as the Knights of the Round Table. The “Knights“ were known as men of courage, honor and courtesy, who protected ladies and fought for the king. (*Arthur*) They were charged with upholding the duties given to them by King Arthur himself:

‘God make you a good man and fail not of beauty. The Round Table was founded in patience, humility, and meekness. Thou art never to do outrageousness, nor murder, and always flee treason, by no means to be cruel, and always to do ladies, damosels, and gentle women succour. Also to take no battles in a wrongful quarrel for no law nor for no world’s goods.’ (*The Knights of the Round Table*)

These duties explain a mercy which must be given to anybody who asks for it, the necessity to keep one’s word, the duty to defend the right, and not to fail in honouring charity and truth. The description of the knights’ duties are finished with following words:

‘Do not slay, nor slay not, anything that will in any way dishonour the fair name of Christian knighthood for only by stainless and honourable lives and not by prowess and courage shall the final goal be reached. Therefore be a good knight and so I pray God so ye may be, and if ye be of prowess and worthiness then ye shall be a Knight of the Round Table.’
(*The Knights of the Round Table*)

The above mentioned Round Table was a meeting place for Arthur's knights, where they gathered to tell of their deeds, before setting out on other adventures. The table itself, in the shape of a circle, ensured that all who sat around it were equal in status.

The Round Table was first introduced into the Arthurian legend in 1155, when Wace, an Anglo-Norman author from Jersey, wrote his *Roman de Brut* in French. In *Roman de Brut*, Wace claims that Arthur devised the idea of the Round Table to prevent quarrels between his barons over the question of precedence.

(The Round Table)

Another writer Layamon, wrote about a quarrel between Arthur's lords, which was settled by a Cornish carpenter, who, upon hearing of the problem, created a portable table which could seat many men. *(The Round Table)*

According to these writers, the origins of the table may date back to the Celtic times. The *Vulgate Cycle* says that the Round Table was devised and created by Merlin during the reign of Arthur's Father, Uther Pendragon. Merlin used the Table of the Last Supper as a model for the Round Table. The *Queste del Saint Graal* says that Merlin made the table round. Arthur received the Round Table, along with 100 knights, as a wedding gift from the father of his wife, Guinevere. Since the Round Table was able to seat 150 knights, Arthur requested the assistance of Merlin in choosing the last fifty knights. Each seat had the name of each knight magically written on the back of the seat, in gold letters. One seat remained unoccupied until the Grail knight appeared. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as the Holy Grail became more firmly rooted in the Arthurian legends, there was only one vacant seat, upon which no other knight could sit. It was reserved for the true Grail knight. Anyone else who sat on it would be killed. *(The Round Table)*

King Edward III asked for the revival of the Round Table as an order of chivalry and at his command the large wooden table in the Great Hall at Wichester may have been built. Most likely dating from the thirteenth century, this oak table measures 18 feet across, is nearly 3 inches thick, and weights nearly 125 tons.

(The Round Table [2])

King Arthur is the central figure of the Arthurian legends. He is said to be the son of king Uther Pendragon and the lady Igraine of Cornwall. After Arthur was born, the magician Merlin gave him to a man named Hector to be raised with

Hector's son, Kay. Arthur grew up as a commoner, but then he alone succeeded in the test to choose Uther's successor by drawing a sword from a stone. Because of his humble origins, Arthur had to overcome the strong opposition of British nobles in his royal claim, but was finally crowned King and received a great sword, Excalibur, to help him in his task. (*Arthur*)

Arthur defeated his British enemies and began a series of wars, conquests and invasions. After this, Britain experienced a long period of peace and security. Arthur then met and married the lady Guinevere, but she fell in love with Lancelot, who belonged to the group of Arthur's favourite knights. This relationship divided Arthur's kingdom of Camelot. Their love affair was discovered and in accordance with Arthur's justice system, Guinevere was condemned to death. Lancelot rescues her, but this act initiated a war between his forces and those of Arthur and the knight Gawain. (*Arthur*)

During this conflict with Lancelot Arthur learned that the Romans wanted to attack him. He fought and defeated them but at the same time Mordred tried to seize the throne. Arthur killed him, but was deadly injured in the battle. Before his death he ordered Excalibur to be thrown into the lake, so that the sword would not fall into the wrong hands. Versions of the legend differ about Arthur's fate thereafter. Some say that he died and was buried, others tell of a boat, which took him away to the island of Avalon. But many legends promise that Arthur will return, when Britain needs him. (*Arthur*)

Many historians try to discover whether Arthur is a historical figure or not. The historical background was established by the Tudors, because they traced their lineage back to Arthur and used that connection as a justification for their reign. Modern scholars assume that he was an actual person but not a king with a group of knights. He is thought to have been a warrior, who participated in battles during the German invasions. If there is a historical basis for the character, it is clear that he would have gained fame as a warrior battling the Germanic invaders of the late fifth and early sixth centuries. (Alexander 2000: 39) Since there is no persuading evidence for or against Arthur's historicity, the debate will continue. However, it is impossible to deny the

influence of the figure of Arthur on literature, art, music, and society from the Middle Ages to the present. (*Historical Arthur*)

The stories of King Arthur first appeared in Wales. The Celtic people left their country for France in the sixth century to escape from the Anglo-Saxon tribes, and for this reason, the Arthurian legends became known in other countries. There are some differences between the stories that came to existence in Britain and the ones that originated in France. The main difference is in the use of fairy tale elements coming from the Celtic tradition. They appeared in the Irish tales in the ninth and tenth centuries, but were later put down in the twelfth century. These fairy tale elements are rarely included in the island variety of the Arthurian legends. On the contrary, in the French legends they became a powerful feature.

(Kennedy 2002:14)

In the Middle Ages, most people in England believed in a hero named Arthur. Legends about him had been passed down orally for centuries, particularly among the defeated British, who had fond and exaggerated memories of his triumphs. The elegy *Gododdin*, written at the beginning of the seventh century, includes a brief reference to Arthur, mentioning a man who “was not Arthur“.(Kennedy 2002:15) If this reference is not a later interpolation, it indicates that by the early seventh century Arthur had become a figure to whom other heroes could be compared and was so well known that no explanation of his identity was necessary. Occurrences of his name are found in several *Welsh Triads* - summaries of groups of three stories told by Welsh bards. Arthur’s appearance as a character in early Welsh works such as *The Spoils of Annwfn* and *Gulhwch and Olwen* indicates his reputation as a robust and vigorous, yet far from courtly leader, to whom many warriors were attracted. (Kennedy 2002:15)

In chronicles, Arthur was first mentioned by name in *Historia Brittonum* (*History of the Britons*), written by the Welsh historian Nennius in the ninth century. Although in his words he made a heap of all he found and in the process he accumulated much that is pure fantasy, he gave a unique reference to the resistance of Arthur against the Saxons at the close of the fifth century. (Sayles 1966: 5) Nennius mentioned Arthur’s twelve battles (Gransden 1974: 5) and described the defeat of the Britons by the Anglo-Saxons and believed that one day the Britons would be victorious under Arthur. (Gransden 1974: 11)

Another reference to the Battle of Badon appears in the entry under the year 518 in the *Annales Cambriae* (*Annals of Wales*, 950), a work that also refers to the Battle of Camlann in 539 where Arthur was killed. (Kennedy 2002: 15)

Gildas mentioned Arthur as the last of the Romans who figured as a great warrior and leader of the Britons. He did not doubt the historicity of Arthur, despite his uncommon Roman name.(Sayles 1966: 17) Sayles believes the origin of Arthur as such:

Sepulchral inscriptions found in Wales, written in Celtic runes with accompanying Latin transliterations suggest that Arthur's notable contribution to success was his remembrance and recognition of the signal part played by cavalry in the campaigns of the late Empire: he organized and led a force of mounted soldiery ready for service anywhere and with its aids struck terror into the Saxon foot-soldiers and defeated them in battles in every part of the country until his noteworthy victory at Mount Badon, dated variously between 490-516. On this basis was built the great Arthurian legend which converted the military commander into a king and his cavalry into knights.
(Sayles 1966: 18)

Henry of Huntingdon, author of *Historia Anglorum* (*History of the English*) was another writer who mentioned Arthur. Huntingdon incorporated into this book the Arthurian material from the chronicle attributed to Nennius.

(Kennedy 2002: 15) He was interested in the nation's mythical ancestors and he gave an account of King Arthur's battles. (Gransden 1974: 201) Henry of Huntingdon's work indicates a significant change in Arthur's rank, for he is described as a leader of soldiers and kings of Britain. This change was based upon a popular conception of Arthur as king that developed some time before Henry had written his chronicle. Evidence for this can be found in the Welsh *Culwch and Olwen* (about 1100), where Arthur is "sovereign prince of the island". (Kennedy 2002: 15). Moreover, a manuscript of English origin, found at the Bibliothèque Municipale of Reims, includes a list of Anglo-Saxon kings and lists the name Arthur at the head of the list.(Kennedy 2002: 15)

Arthur's full life history, however, appeared 300 years later in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* (probably 1136, *History of the Kings of Britain*) written by a Welsh writer named Geoffrey of Monmouth. (Sayles 1966: 369)

Sayles explains this chronicle as such:

He created a readable story of adventure disguised as a genuine history, it was medieval equivalent of a best seller and formed basis of the great cycle of Arthurian romances. (Sayles 1966: 369)

Monmouth, the first man to write an elaborate Arthurian legend, gives a long account of King Arthur and his exploits. (Gransden 1974: 203). According to Monmouth Arthur became a king at the age of fifteen, defeated his enemies in Britain and Scotland, and married Guinevere, a lady of noble Roman lineage. He also mentions Arthur's knights Gawain and Mordred. Geoffrey says that after conquering Ireland and Iceland, Arthur began to attract knights from distant lands and became so powerful that he was able to conquer Norway and Denmark. He also mentions Arthur's final battle with his nephew Mordred, after which he is taken to Avalon so his wounds could be healed. (Kennedy 2002: 16) Yet a number of essential elements that make up the Arthurian world, do not appear in this work. The heroes, Lancelot and Perceval are not mentioned in Geoffrey's work, and there is also no reference of Camelot, the Holy Grail, or the Round Table. What Geoffrey presents is the basic story of the rise and fall of King Arthur, with the destruction of his kingdom resulting from the treachery of Mordred. (Kennedy 2002: 16)

Geoffrey's *Historia* was one of the most influential books written in England during the Middle Ages. It circulated throughout England and the European Continent, and it firmly established the conception of Arthur as a great king and conqueror. Much of the work's importance is due not only to its circulation as an independent work, but also to its influence on later chroniclers in England. The best known of these later works are Wace and Layamon. (Kennedy 2002:16)

The narrations of King Arthur were introduced into European literature mostly by French poets. The English literature met them through the French model. In spite of this, Arthurian narrations never became traditional motives of the French literary works, but in the British literature. (Kennedy 2002: 20)

French writer Chrétien de Troyes, a court poet, composed romances about the Arthurian motives in the late twelfth century, but was primarily interested in Arthur's knights rather than the king himself. The *Vulgate Cycle*, a series of tales written by Chrétien between 1215 to 1235, devotes thousands of pages to the Arthurian story. But Arthur does not appear here as a powerful king of a specified country and a glorious

fighter and leader, who was successful in many battles. It is possible to learn that he was a king, yet the details of his acts and his country are not to be found. The *Vulgate Cycle* explained that the best knights of the country meet at the Round Table. From there they set out on expeditions full of adventure, danger and fairy tale events. Chrétien mentions only some of them. In some romances Chrétien was influenced by the conception of Arthur found in the chronicles as a vigorous, heroic king, in other romances he presents Arthur as a weak king, who is unable to protect his wife or the honor of the court, and who cannot even stay awake at the table. (Kennedy 2002: 23)

In English, one of the most important Arthurian achievements is *Le Morte D'Arthur (The Death of Arthur)*, 1469-1470, written by Sir Thomas Malory. Quite unknown, Malory was a knight living in the 14th century. He took as a base for his collection historical tales about the ruler and the commander, and in this setting he included many romantic stories. (Vinaver 1975: 5) Malory's collection is divided into 12 books, which draw together the full Arthurian story from a variety of sources. Malory describes Arthur as an English king, rather than a British king. The conception of him as a King of England is due to the interest of the Norman rulers of England, especially Henry II. They were interested in Arthur for various reasons. Stories about him had not only circulated in France, but also, according to the chronicles, Arthur had established a great civilization on the island, which the Normans ruled. They also wanted to keep Arthur from being associated with the Welsh, because he could become a symbol of nationalism that could help stir a Welsh rebellion. (Kennedy 2002: 20)

Malory's portrait of Arthur, based on the works of different English and French authors, was selective in avoiding some episodes that give a negative portrait of Arthur. Caxton wrote the preface to *Le Morte D'Arthur* that was intended to help to sell the book. It reveals much about the status of the legend of King Arthur in England at the end of the Middle Ages. Caxton justified the need for the book on the basis that many of the Arthurian stories were not available in English.

(Kennedy 2002 :31)

The belief that Arthur had ruled a kingdom, which dominated much of Europe, gave the Arthurian legend a great deal of political significance in England, not found in other countries of Europe where the legends were popular. The Arthurian chronicles were used to justify the conquest of Ireland in 1171 by Henry II, the control of Wales by

Edward I, and they served to legitimize dominion over Scotland, claimed by Edward I and later kings. Scottish chroniclers, writing between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries, wrote in response to English claims over Scotland, that Arthur had not been a legitimate king and that the true heirs to the British throne had been Mordred and Gawain, the Scottish sons of Arthur's sister Anna, and her husband, King Loth of Lothian. (Kennedy 2002: 20)

In his writing Malory used two different techniques. The stories were reproduced with minor modifications and made to be self-contained by simply detaching them from their context. *Lancelot and Elaine* and *The Knight of the Cart* are examples of this relatively easy process. Some parts in the French prose are used as an introduction for more expanded versions. Malory's stories stand by themselves. (Vinaver 1975: 10)

The second technique is more elaborate. It consists of building a continuous narrative based on various fragments scattered throughout the French cycle. For example, *The Noble Tale of Sir Lancelot* consists of three such fragments. By carefully selecting them and bringing them together Malory gives his tale a perfect continuity and coherence that the components themselves never possessed. In his later writings, such as *The Poisoned Apple*, his use of this technique shows an even greater skill. In the French romance, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, from which the fragments were borrowed, they occurred in the form of episodes interwoven with each other in such a way that one series of episodes, *The Poisoned Apple*, was split into four fragments, other episodes were even split into eight fragments. Malory selected the pattern and tells the story from the beginning to end without any interruption. Sometimes he adds short connecting passages so as to avoid a break between sections, which were separate in the original stories. This way of writing was considered to be very modern and readable at this time. (Vinaver 1975: 11).

According to Vinaver, Malory is seen as a short-story writer who is a master of his medium and prefers to work on a relatively small scale. He is fascinated by the mere progress of adventure and dialogue, and does not seek to raise the issue of conflicting loyalties upon which the fortune of Arthur's kingdom breaks in his romance. (Vinaver 1975: 12)

In a preface to Boulenger's adaptation of Arthurian romances Bédier wrote that Malory was only a translator and an adaptor, but without him, neither poetry, nor thought, nor art would be exactly what they are in England today. (Vinaver 1975:14)

Also according to Vinaver, Malory's style was intended to please the mind. It is possible to observe in his prose the emergence of a rhythm which raises the language to a new level of expressiveness. For the complex symmetry of a carefully planned period, as a general rule Malory substituted a succession of abruptly divided clauses, some of them strikingly brief and compact, and all modeled on the natural cadence of living speech. Each pause is clearly marked, not for its rhetorical value, but to give a rest to the voice in a speech charged with feeling. (Vinaver 1975:15)

According to Allan Knee, Malory attempted to unify in a single work the various strains of Arthurian legends which had circulated throughout the Middle Ages. The book, filled with exaggerated feats of arms and brutal combat, remains one of the most popular pieces of chivalric literature. (Knee 1967: 9)

Arthurian theme again became popular 300 years later, when an English poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson, wrote *Idylls of the King*, 1859-1885, a series of poems on Arthurian subjects. Tennyson spent over forty years developing his plans for this work. He created an account of Arthur as a warrior, statesman, and the uniting force of the Round Table. Throughout *Idylls of the King*, Tennyson's Arthur represents an ideal and practical ruler, who tends to the needs of his kingdom. He understands that it is more important for the majority of people to take care of their duties in the world, rather than to pursue a misplaced idealism represented by the Grail Quest, which means only evasion of responsibility. According to some readers, this Arthur is too naive and his treatment of Guinevere is imperceptive, yet Tennyson intended Arthur to be a king who set the standards by which others in the book and even those in Tennyson's society should be judged. (Kennedy 2002: 34)

The main source for Tennyson's stories of Arthur and his knights was Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. *The Idylls of the King* represents the rise and fall of a civilization. It implies that after 2,000 years of Christianity, Western civilization may have been going through a cycle in which it needed to confront the possibilities of a renewed future or an apocalyptic extinction. The first book, *The Coming of Arthur*, introduces the basic myth of a springtime hero transforming a wasteland and inspiring

faith and hope in the high values of civilized life among his devoted followers. Succeeding books move through summer and autumn and culminate in the bleak wintry scene of Arthur's last battle, in which his order perishes in a civil war, when the leader of his enemy becomes his own nephew, Sir Mordred.

(*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 2019)

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Arthur and his knights were still used as the topic for many works. Mark Twain, in his book *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, 1889, took this topic in a humorous style. In this book, an American travels back in time to the period of King Arthur and Twain describes the contrast between the modern and medieval worlds. (*Arthur*) This book is the only modern Arthurian work written by an author who is considered a major writer in the traditional literature. Twain's book was originally intended to be a reaction against Tennyson, in the form of a satire. Twain used the Arthurian story to comment on modern society. His portrait of Arthur is generally positive, displaying Arthur as a humane and courageous king, who cares for his people. (Kennedy 2002: 35)

Most authors, however, take the legend in a serious way and retell the basic stories as historical fiction or adapt them to emphasize particular themes. (*Literary Treatment*)

The English writer T.H.White, in his book *The Once and Future King*, 1938 – 1958, which is considered to be the best known of the modern Arthurian novels, describes Arthur as a king torn between his personal love for Lancelot and Guinevere and having strong sense of justice and law. However, Arthur changes in the course of the book. In the first part he is a boy, Merlin's student, not overly bright but eager to learn. Arthur, Lancelot, and Gawain later represent White's belief that the experiences of childhood determine one's character as an adult. In the closing pages Arthur realizes that actions of any sort in one generation have incalculable consequences on other generations.(Kennedy 2002: 37)

A number of twentieth-century works have portrayed Arthur as a Romano-British king of chieftain; a portrayal that reflects the modern interest in the Arthur of history rather than the Arthur of medieval romance. In Rosemary Sutcliff's *Sword and Sunset*,1963, Arthur is a fifth-century king who cares for others and is too kind to destroy his enemies. (Kennedy 2002: 37)

In her book *The Mists of Avalon*, 1982, American writer Marion Zimmer Bradley explores the Arthurian world from the female character's point of view.

(Literary Treatment) Bradley emphasizes the women who influence Arthur's actions, while portraying him as a king who is too weak to rule. (Kennedy 2002: 38)

One of the latest literary works is Mary Stewart's novel *The Wicked Day*, published in 1984. The writer was inspired by Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* and Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. The book takes the reader to medieval Britain, when King Arthur finds himself at the top of his power.

(Kennedy 2002: 38)

Numerous other writers have updated the story of Arthur to the present days or have adapted it as science fiction, fantasy, or even murder mystery. Many modern authors make the characters more complex and more human than earlier writers did, even emphasizing Arthur's flaws. Yet the majority of those authors have retained the notion of a King Arthur who, despite his imperfections, remains a noble and larger-than-life figure. *(Literary Treatment)*

3. Sir Gawain in the Literature

Sir Gawain is a figure who wears many faces in the Arthurian tradition, and is considered to belong to the very earliest stages of Arthurian tradition. According to the tale, he was King Arthur's nephew and one of the greatest Knights of the Round Table. He appears in many literary works. In *Eric and Enide*, he was the first good knight - Erec and Lancelot being second and third in prowess, when they were seated around the table. Gawain was seen as a ruler. (*Gawain*)

In the Welsh legend of *Culhwch and Olwen*, from the twelfth century, Gawain was known as Gwalchmei or the "Hawk of May". Gwalchmei appeared not only as a hero and a nephew of Arthur, but also as the son of the goddess Gwyar. Gwalchmei appeared to be a solar god. In every legend and myth the hawk symbolised the sun, which is appropriate, since the hawk is a bird of prey that only hunts during the day. The name of his brother, Gwalhaved, means "Hawk of Summer." (*Gawain*[2])

Gwalchmei has also been compared with the great Irish hero, Cu Chulainn, who was the son of the solar god Lugh. In the tale of *Culhwch and Olwen*, Gwalchmei was the hero who never returned without fulfilling his quest, Gwalchmei was also the best walker and rider. This Gwalchmei was the precursor of the hero Gawain. (*Gawain*)

Gawain was a prominent character in all five romances of Chrétien de Troyes, but his role was secondary to the chief hero of each of the romance. His first major role was in Chrétien's last work, *Conte du Graal* (*The Story of the Grail* or *Perceval*) from 1180. (*Gawain*)

Gawain was also a prominent hero of some romances in the *Vulgate Cycle* (1225-1237), especially in the Vulgate's *Merlin*, but his role was overshadowed by Lancelot. In the *Queste del Saint Graal* he fails in the quest for the Holy Grail. The final Vulgate text tells of the fight between the two friends, Gawain and Lancelot, when the latter killed Gawain's brothers as he was rescuing Queen Guinevere from execution. (*Gawain*[2])

The German author, Heinrich von dem Türlin, had written a tale *Diu Krône* (*The Crown*) in the early thirteenth century. (*Gawain*)

The *Rise of Sir Gawain* was an anonymous Latin romance, written in the middle of the thirteenth century. The story begins with the birth of Gawain, and tells of

his upbringing in Italy, never knowing his real name, until he proves himself to his uncle in Britannia, King Arthur, as a knight of great prowess. (*Gawain*)

One of the most important books mentioning Sir Gawain is *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, written by an unknown author. (*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 81) *The Norton Anthology* gives the following review of this piece of work:

Sir Gawain is one of the latest and certainly the best of the Middle English romances, yet its greatness lies in the fact that, without ever ceasing to be a romance, a fiction full of the most exquisite comic touches, it is something much larger, one of the really significant literary achievements of the Middle Ages. (*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 81)

Written in the late fourteenth century, *Sir Gawain* is made up of two stories, one set inside the other. It is thought by many to be the finest literary work of the Middle Ages, rivaling anything written by the anonymous poet's more famous contemporary, Geoffrey Chaucer. In the first episode at King Arthur's castle, no one knows what is going on. The Green Knight is a sort of creature that had never before been seen by men. Throughout the poem, Sir Gawain is marked by an absolute courtliness. He is always courageous, honorable, devoted, loyal, and gracious toward all men and women. (Tolkien 1967: 14)

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is the last of four poems in manuscript *Cotton Nero*, held by the British Museum. The history of the manuscript remains obscure. The earliest record of this manuscript is found in the catalogue of the library of Henry Savile Bank in Yorkshire (1568 – 1617). However, how it came to be there and how Sir Robert Cotton acquired it is unknown. The poem does not have any title in the manuscript, and the name by which it is now known was given to it by modern editors. (Tolkien 1967: 11)

Nothing is known about the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* except that he probably wrote the three religious poems, *Pearl*, *Patience*, and *Purity*, which are preserved in the manuscript as *Sir Gawain*. The dialect of *Sir Gawain* reveals that the document's origins lay in provincial England, to the northwest of the country, so the author of *Sir Gawain* would likely have been a representative of a cultural centre remote from the royal court of London. Almost nothing is known about these cultural centres other than the fact that their works demonstrate a high level of culture. The poet of *Sir*

Gawain was a most sophisticated and urbane writer, although his language was probably very difficult for Londoners in his own time, and his alliterative measures would have been considered barbaric by a London audience. Although it is impossible to date the poem with any accuracy, its author must have been an almost exact contemporary of Chaucer. (*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 181).

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight stands first among medieval English romances and high among romances at large due to the strength of its plot. Even the greatest Arthurian stories from French and English writers, such as Chrétien's *Yvain* or the prose *Perlesvaus* present adventures which are often very loosely connected with each other or with the main theme. There are two adventures in this poem. The first tells of the Green Knight's challenge and the ensuing beheading match, the second describes the temptation of Gawain by the lady at the castle of Bertilak de Hautdesert. The result of the beheading match, and with it the life of Gawain, depends on Gawain's behaviour in the castle, although Gawain does not know it. Both stories create a unity, which in the end, is ascribed to the malignity of Morgan le Fay. (Tolkien 1967: 15)

The motif of the Green Knight's decapitation originates in very ancient folklore, most likely from a vegetation myth in which the beheading would have been a ritual death that insured the return of spring to the earth and the growth of the crops. (*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 181) But this primitive theme had been entirely rationalized by the late medieval poets, who saw in Gawain's inherited plot an opportunity to study how successfully Gawain, a man wholly dedicated to Christian ideals, maintains those ideals when he is subjected to unusual pressures. The poem is a rare combination: at once a comedy, even a satire, of manners and a profoundly Christian view of character and its destiny. (*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 181) The court of King Arthur is presented as the place, where ideal of chivalry has reached its zenith, where all is courtesy and martial prowess in the defense of right. The praise bestowed by the poet upon the court may seem excessive, and indeed the sequel suggests that the author intentionally made it so. For when the court is invaded by the Green Knight, an arrogant and monstrous creature, the situation suddenly seems to become slightly unreal, as if the Green Knight insulting implies that reputation of the court was founded more on fiction than on fact, as if the poets that celebrated court had been working harder to enhance its glory than the knights themselves. In any case, the court is to receive a

testing, which is naturally entrusted to the most courteous and valiant knight of the Round Table. In this most English of Arthurian romances, Gawain has not been replaced as one of the best knights by the continental-born Lancelot. (*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 181)

Sir Gawain belongs to the so-called Alliterative Revival; a sudden emergence of a body of poems in the alliterative meter of Old English verse. According to *The Norton Anthology*, the tradition must have continued almost without interruption, yet only a handful of alliterative poems survived as testimony from the eleventh century until the later revival at the end of the fourteenth century.

(Tolkien 1967: 15)

The figure of Gawain, or a person with a similar name or character, and the theme of the beheading match appears in other works as well. The first one is said to be a Middle Irish narrative called *Fled Bricrend*, the earliest manuscript of this narrative dates from about 1100, but the story is much older. In this prose, the heroes of Ulster compete, and among the competitions there are two distinct episodes in which each of them faces the challenge of beheading a superhumanly strong opponent on condition that he shall submit to a return blow the next day. In the first account the incident occurs away from the king's court. Only one man called Cuchulainn takes up the challenge. He promises to come back the next day and receive the blow, and his opponent, after three strokes of the axe which do not harm him, declares him a champion. (Tolkien 1967: 15)

The second account takes place in the royal court. Three of the heroes behead the challenger, but fail to appear on the next day to receive their return blow. Then Cuchulainn accepts the challenge, and keeps his word. He receives one stroke with the back of the axe, and is declared champion. In both versions the challenger can change his shape, and when his head is cut off, he picks it up and goes away without replacing it back on his shoulders. (Tolkien 1967: 16)

Other stories in which this extraordinary challenge appears are romances associated with Arthur. Most of them are written in French and date back to the thirteenth century. (*Literary Treatment*)

One of them is *Le Livre de Caradoc*, which is part of the anonymous first continuation of the *Perceval*, which Chrétien de Troyes left unfinished. The long version of this text is close to Gawain. There are a few main points of agreement. According to

Tolkien, Arthur and Guenevere are at the table ready to feast, but Arthur, according to his custom, waits for a marvel before beginning it. The challenger rides into the hall on horseback and first addresses Arthur, but Caradoc undertakes the adventure. The period between the blows is a year. In the prose version of this story, known from the text printed in Paris in 1530, *Perceual le Galloys*, the challenger is dressed in green satin. (Tolkien 1967: 16)

There are also some differences from Gawain. The feast is not at Christmas but at Pentecost, and it takes place at Cardiol, not at Camelot. The challenger is an urbane knight, who is singing as he enters with his sword. He courteously greets Arthur and replaces his head on his shoulders. The hero does not need to make a journey, because the return blow takes place at Arthur's court. (Tolkien 1967: 16)

Another prose, the French *Perlesvaus*, includes a similar episode, where the main hero is not Gawain but Lancelot. In a waste city, a young knight with an axe proposes an exchange of blows and Lancelot beheads him. The young knight's body disappears, but a year later Lancelot keeps his promise to return and is met by the knight's brother. Lancelot shrinks from the first blow, and is reproached. While he prepares himself for the next blow, a lady appeals for his life and the knight drops the axe and prizes his fidelity. (Tolkien 1967: 17)

La Mule sans Frein, by Paien de Maisières, describes an episode in which Gawain is challenged by a strange man to a beheading match in a strange castle. When Gawain keeps his promise to receive his return blow the next day, the challenger lifts his axe, but does not strike him. (Tolkien 1967: 17)

Diu Crône, a German poem written by Heinrich von dem Türlin, contains another version of the same story. Instead of a boor, it is an enchanter named Gansguoter who challenges Gawain to a beheading match. The enchanter replaces his head, and at the return meeting the next day he aims two blows at Gawain without striking him. (Tolkien 1967: 17)

Hunbaut is another French romance which features Gawain as its hero, and a villain who challenges him to a beheading match. It differs from other versions in that the return blow never takes place. Gawain holds his opponent back from his severed head so that he cannot pick it up, and the villain then dies. (Tolkien 1967: 17)

According to Tolkien all these variants of the beheading theme are derived from an Irish story like the one found in *Fled Bricrend*, in which there is a test of courage and honour. (Tolkien 1967: 17)

R. S. Loomis has described in his book, *Wales and the Arthurian Legend*, that something like an analogue appears together with other features resembling aspects of Gawain in the story of Pwyll and Arawn in the *Mabinogion*. According to Loomis, the story seems to be Celtic in origin. Tolkien however, opposes this and holds that the resemblance is distant, because the lady makes no approach and nothing is said of a test of Gawain. (Tolkien 1967: 18)

Another work describing a similar story is *Lanzelet*, a verse translation from Anglo-Norman by the Swiss, Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, in the late twelfth century. It contains an episode in which three knights in bed are tempted by their host's daughter. Two of them reject her, but Lancelot willingly accepts her. The main difference from the situation in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is that the girl behaves not as the agent of the host but rather against his wishes. In the morning the host angrily challenges Lancelot to a singular duel in which they are to throw knives at each other in turn, and the host is killed. (Tolkien 1967: 18)

In another French romance, *Yder*, a queen, carrying out her husband's instructions, tests Yder's virtue by making outspoken advances towards him in the hall, where he has fallen asleep. To the amusement and satisfaction of the courtiers who are present, Yder emphasizes his rejection of the queen by knocking her down with a kick in the stomach. Apart from its remarkable crudity, this tale differs essentially from *Gawain* in that Yder has been warned by the king that he is to be tested in this way, and the incident takes place in public. (Tolkien 1967: 18)

In the prose romance of *Lancelot del Lac*, the hero faces various sexual temptations. Most resembling *Gawain* is an episode in which Morgain la Fée, having attempted without success to win Lancelot from his devotion to Guenever, sends her maid to seduce him while he is in bed. Despite repeated passionate appeals, the maid also fails. (Tolkien 1967: 18)

Temptation, in some ways similar, appears in both *Hunbaut* and *Le Chevalier à l'Épée*. In both stories, Gawain is concerned, and the host plays the role of instigator. In

these stories, however, the sense of the incident is quite different from the temptation scenes in *Gawain*. (Tolkien 1967: 19)

A similar theme appears in the English romance *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*, a romance of two versions. It was discovered in the *Percy Folio* manuscript, which was written about 1650. The story concludes with a beheading match when the Carl, a hideous giant, tells Gawain to cut off his head, and when he does, the Carl is freed from a spell and restored to the form of a man. In this work, the hero is ordered to bed with his host's wife, but when he is prevented from having intercourse with her, the host's daughter is sent to him instead. (Tolkien 1967: 19)

Another text from the same manuscript is the tale *The Turk and Gawain*. The surviving copy dates from 1650, but the language and spelling of the text suggest that it was composed around 1500. The pages of the manuscript have been mutilated, so that about half of each page, and therefore half of the poem is missing. That is why the summaries of this text are somewhat speculative of the lost sections. (*Texts*)

Like many other romances about Gawain, *The Turk and Gawain* begins with the narration about a dwarf, a Turk, who comes to Arthur's court with a challenge to anyone who will "give a buffet and take another." The incident of the buffet itself has been lost from the manuscript, causing its exact nature to remain unknown, but evidently Gawain gives the buffet. (Tolkien 1967: 19) He then goes away with the dwarf, who makes extraordinary demands on Gawain's courtesy and endurance, dragging him through a series of preternatural encounters. Gawain performs deeds of exceptional ferociousness when, after various adventures the Turk asks him to cut off his head. Like the Carl, the dwarf is thereby restored to a knightly shape. (*Texts*)

All these versions depend on a special development of the beheading theme, in which the notion of an apparently desperate return blow as a test of courage and honour has been replaced by that of a mere technique of disenchantment. (Tolkien 1967: 19)

Yet another English text about Gawain is the *Ballad of The Green Knight*, which is a contaminated version of *Gawain* itself. (Tolkien 1967: 19) This text is said to be "the most subtle, learned, and enjoyable of poems about this chivalric hero, as well as one of the great narrative achievements in the English language." (Tolkien 1967: 19)

The date of its composition was probably in the late fourteenth century. As in many of the other Gawain romances, the king's nephew stands out in his role as the court representative in dealing with a mystery. The strange Green Knight from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has been modified in this version of the tale. The multiple temptations, hunts, and exchanges of blows, which form *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, are reduced to single event in this version. The Green Knight, who could possibly be Sir Bredbeddle, is brought to Arthur's court, where he joins the fellowship. Gawain's knightly role is to reveal and destroy the mystery of Sir Bredbeddle, the dangerous love of his wife, and the magic of her mother. (*Texts*)

According to Tolkien, it is not sure whether the English poet, author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, found the combined plot in a French romance that is now lost, or whether he devised the combination himself. Tolkien also states that the author knew French romances, because of the language and the story. However, his use of French terms and even idioms does not mean that he took them from a particular model. There are other features of Gawain which have no analogues in any of the romances, especially the colour of the Green Chapel. The greenness of the Knight and his holly "bob", are drawn from popular belief in a "green man". (Tolkien 1967: 20)

The forms found in French romances and *Sir Gawain* are different. Tolkien says that it is characteristic of authors writing French verse romances to tell their stories in a plain, spare style, sometimes with the use of brief descriptions, often with subtly developed dialogue, but seldom will the atmosphere be enriched with material, which expands far beyond the demands of the tale. On the contrary the Gawain's poet describes luxuries of dress and entertainment, and the excitement and expertise of the hunts. In his eye for colour, light, and movement, his ear for the delicate nuances of cultivated talk, and above all his warm and quick appreciation of minds and motives, the poet utterly transcends anything that is known that could have served him as a source. Though an ancient tale of magic is the mainspring of his plot, magic concerns him not as a theme but as a device. It is understanding of man, not the supernatural, that gives his poem its power. (Tolkien 1967: 21)

The *Awntyrs of Arthur* comes from the end of the fifteenth century. It survived in four separate medieval manuscripts, none of which are based on the other copies. (*Texts*) The tale starts with Arthur and his companions going off to hunt. The adventure

begins when a ghost, a gothic fantasy creature, appears before Gawain and Guinevere. The ghost turns out to be Guenevere's mother, who is suffering for the hidden sins she committed during her life. She cautions Gawain and Guenevere, that as representatives of the Round Table, the conduct of knights and ladies must conform to Christianity. When the hunt finishes, Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table are seated at dinner, when strange knight enters, accuses Arthur and Gawain of holding lands that belong to him, and demands an honorable combat. The challenge falls to Sir Gawain, who proves his courage and skill in it, but neither of the knights can gain a victory. Arthur finally finishes the fight and solves the disputation by assigning other lands to Gawain. Although the two warriors are enemies, they show a sense of respect for the rules. In the end they become companions at the Round Table. (*Texts*)

Although the stories describing appeal and the beheading match prevail, there are a few tales describing knight Gawain from a completely different point of view. One of them is *The Wedding of Gawain and Dame Ragnell* from the late fifteenth century. In this tale, Gawain appears in a positive light when he marries an extremely ugly lady to save the king's life. (*Texts*)

In the latter books dealing with the Arthurian motives for example Malory's *LeMorte D'Arthur*, Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, or in the modern versions written by Mary Stewart or T.H.White, Sir Gawain does not appear as a main hero, but he plays an important role. This is the reason why these books provide more information about Gawain than some of the modern "Gawain's texts" which were written in the 19th or 20th century. From these it is necessary to mention Robert Buchanan's *Gawayne's Revenge*, from 1859, George Augustus Simcox's *Gawayne and the Lady of Avalon*, published in 1869, and *Gawain and Manjorie*, written by Oscar Fay Adams in 1906. (*Texts*)

All the above mentioned literary works represent a part of the total amount of books mentioning Sir Gawain, as only the most important stories have been chosen. This thesis will further concentrate on five of them: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King*, and Stewart's *The Wicked Day*. The first were chosen because they represent very important works with the Arthurian subject in the medieval literature. Tennyson's collection of poems appeared after a long break in the

Arthurian cycle and Mary Stewart's novel is used as an example of modern adaptation of the topic. All these books show a development in the conception of Sir Gawain, symbolized in changes of his character and behaviour.

I will now concentrate on comparing the descriptions of Sir Gawain in these books from the point of view of his origin, character, relationship to women, his attitude to the adventures, and his position at the Round Table. It is necessary to mention the plot of the two poems, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, for the understanding of following part of this paper.

The *Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* depicts Arthur hunting in the forest with his men. At one moment he became separated and found himself in an unknown part of the forest. Suddenly a strange being, Sir Gromer Somer, approaches to him and complains that Arthur wrongfully gave his land to Sir Gawain, and the king will die for it unless he finds the answer to the question of what every woman desires most. Sir Gawain then decides to help his king and they set out on a journey to ask women what they desire most and soon they have a huge book of answers. Shortly before the king must meet Sir Gromer Somer, he rides through the forest again and comes to an extremely ugly woman. She knows about his problem and offers a correct answer in return for a wedding with Sir Gawain. King Arthur is horrified, he cannot promise her anything without Gawain's consent, but Gawain agrees without hesitation and the king receives the correct answer. The king's life is saved and Gawain gets married. After the wedding feast the couple are led to their chamber, and Gawain tries to avoid any contact with the lady until she asks him for a kiss. He bravely agrees and suddenly he finds the most beautiful lady in his arms. Her ugly appearance was due to a spell which would last until the best knight in the world had courage to marry her and to kiss her. Now Gawain has the right to choose whether he wishes to have his lady beautiful at night or during the day. Gawain, being very clever and noble, suggests his wife to decide which she wants. When she shows that he is able to give his wife the freedom to decide for herself, Gawain is rewarded by a lasting beauty of his wife. (*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*)

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight describes a challenge to the knights at the Arthur's court. The Green Knight, a green giant with a huge axe, offers to take a blow

from the axe, in exchange for a blow in a year's time. Gawain volunteers to save the honour of his uncle, King Arthur. Beheaded by Gawain the Green Knight reminds him to come next year to the Green Chapel for a return blow. In a year's time, Gawain sets out on a journey and arrives at a castle. Gawain, who has a reputation as a gentleman, especially with the ladies, is welcomed to the castle by its lord. The host proposes that while he hunts in the mornings, Gawain should sleep to recover his strength, and in the evenings they will exchange their winnings. Every morning the host's wife appears in Gawain's room trying to seduce the knight. Gawain declines, but he is obliged to take a kiss and the next day two kisses. These he gives to the lord in exchange for the deer and a boar hunted by the lord. The third day Gawain receives three kisses and also a girdle, which he conceals, and gives the lord only the kisses. On a New Year's morning Gawain comes to the Green Chapel, the Green Knight appears and threatens Gawain with a huge blow. Instead he gives Gawain a slight cut on the neck. Then the Green Knight reveals that he is the lord of the castle, and that he and his wife have been testing Gawain. The cut on Gawain's neck is a punishment for concealing the girdle. (*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 237)

4. Comparing Interpretations of Sir Gawain

4.1. Sir Gawain's Origin

Gawain is generally considered to be the son of King Loth of Orkney, and a nephew of Arthur on his mother side. (*Gawain*[3]) The compared literary works agree on this fact, except for *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, which does not mention any member of the family or any family bonds. The name of Gawain's mother is not clear. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* do not mention her at all, Malory and Stewart write about Morgause, Arthur's sister, and Tennyson mentions the name Bellicent. Although the literary works differ in the naming of Gawain's mother, according to other mentioned family relationships, it is very probable that Morgause and Bellicent are one person. Tennyson writes: "Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent" (Tennyson 1967:23) and Malory mentions her in the opening chapter of his book, when he says that "King Lot of Lothian and of Orkney then wedded Margawse that was Gawain's mother." (Malory 1903: 4) Mary Stewart accepted Malory's idea and wrote about Morgause, a widow after King Lot, who rules over magics and is the mother of five boys – Mordred, Gawain, Gaheris, Gareth and Agravain. All three books mention her father, who is Uther Pendragon. Some books speak about Pendragon as a father of two children, Arthur and Anna, and is why Gawain's mother is often simply mentioned as Anna. (*Gawain*)

According to the literary works Gawain had brothers. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* mentions only one brother, Agravain, but Malory speaks of four brothers, Agravain, Gareth, Gaheris, and Mordred, Gawain's step brother. Mary Stewart mentions these same names in her novel, *The Wicked Day*.

4.2. Sir Gawain's Character

Sir Gawain is one of the greatest heroes in the Arthurian stories. No other knight has appeared in more tales. (*Gawain's Internal and External Quests*) Many writers took inspiration from myths to create their own stories and used pieces of Gawain's personality to create a character for different purposes.

In medieval stories like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, Gawain plays a significant role. These Arthurian literary

works describe the person of Sir Gawain as a noble hero, having a chivalrous and virtuous character. Not only these stories, but many of the early narrations made him the perfect or ideal knight. Gawain was the first knight to symbolize the paragon of courage and chivalry. (*Gawain*)

The most interesting aspect of Sir Gawain's character is his morality and the purity of his actions. It is not clearly visible in what he does, but rather how and why he does it. At times in different stories he seems to show great moral strength and charisma, great courtesy and virtue, in which the meaning of his true nature can be perceived by a closer examination of his actions. (*Character analysis*)

The first Arthurian legends depict Gawain as a warrior rather than a womanizing knight like the others from Arthur's court. (*Gawain*[2]) The most popular and important medieval poem dealing with the Gawain motif is *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which concentrates more on Gawain's battle with the Green Knight than the adventure with Bercilak's wife. She makes three offers during Gawain's visit to her husband's castle to get Gawain into sexual involvement with her. Although he knows that he will face a certain death, he refuses her and declines any sexual involvement with her. Gawain's character remains faithful to his warrior image by rushing into battle with the Green Knight rather than prolonging his stay at Bercilak's castle. (*Gawain*[2]) This is an excellent example of Sir Gawain's moral strength as he courteously refuses her instead of taking advantage of the situation.

Gawain's character in the poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a favourite topic of many literary critics. Clark defines him as such:

In the earliest Arthurian stories, Sir Gawain was the greatest of the Knights of the Round Table. He was famed for his prowess at arms and, above all, for his courtesy. Here Gawain is the perfect knight: he is so recognized by the various characters in the story and, for all his modesty, implicitly in his view himself. To the others his greatest qualities are his knightly courtesy and his success in battle. To Gawain these are important, but he seems to set an even higher value on his courage and integrity, the two central pillars of his manhood. The story is concerned with the conflict between his conception of himself and the reality. He is not quite so brave or so honorable as he thought he was, but he is still very brave, very honorable. He cannot quite see this, but the reader can.
(*Other views of Sir Gawain*)

Marie Borroff also mentions Sir Gawain:

We are placed on the side of mortality itself, and thus, with the Green Knight, forgive Gawain for his single act of cowardice: what he did was done not out of sensual lust but for love of life. In the context of his affectionate sympathy, Gawain's own violent anger at the revelation of his fault must itself be viewed with amusement, as part of his human fallibility.
(*Other views of Sir Gawain*)

Dorothy Everett states:

Gawain is, naturally, more fully drawn than any other character. Not only do we observe him ourselves, we are told how he impressed other people in the story and how he himself thought and felt. We see him behaving, as all expect him to do, with exquisite courtesy; but we also see what is not apparent to the other characters, such behavior does not always come easily to him. All the time that he is parrying the lady's advances, we are aware that he feels himself to be a knife-edge between discourtesy and compliance.
(*Other views of Sir Gawain*)

Spearing explains Gawain as such

When he resumes his quest for the Green Chapel and leaves the luxurious castle behind there is room once more for heroism in his behavior, and indeed he shows heroism of a particularly touching kind-not the kind that shows no fear, but the kind that overcomes a fear to which all the senses are sharpened. He proudly turns aside the suggestion of his guide that he should go back to the Camelot, and nobody would know that he had not faced the Green Knight.
(*Other views of Sir Gawain*)

It is necessary to agree with the above mentioned literary critics that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* describes these characteristic features of Gawain's personality: his loyalty, found in his willingness to help the king and to protect his honour when it is offended by a sudden attack by the Green Knight. Gawain's bravery and resolve is accompanied with modesty; the side of his personality, which is not found in other Gawain texts. At the beginning, when the Green Knights comes to King Arthur and challenges the court to a beheading game, Gawain reacts in this way:

'I beseech, before all here,
That this melee may be mine.'
'Would you grant me the grace,' said Gawain to the knight,
'To be gone from this bench and stand by you there,
If I without discourtesy might quit this board,
And if my liege lady misliked it not,
I would come to your counsel before your court noble.'

For I find it not fit, as in faith it is known,
When such a boon is begged before all these knights,
Though you be tempted thereto, to take it on yourself
While so bold men about upon benches sit,
That no host under heaven is hardier of will,
Nor better brothers-in-arms where battle is joined;
I am the weakest, well I know, and of wit feeblest;
And the loss of my life would be least of any;'
(*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 191)

Although Gawain is usually considered to be the chivalrous and brave knight, he does not think positively about himself. He may be afraid that the only reason why he is one of Arthur's knights is that he is the king's nephew. It is possible to think that he accepts the challenge as an act of selflessness and not because of pride. This, combined with the fact that none of the other knights are willing to take the challenge, causes Gawain to be seen as the greatest of all knights.
(*A Character Analysis*)

The poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, however, shows more than just Gawain's bravery. When it is his time to leave, all other knights regret it, yet Gawain shows that he is not afraid of his destiny by stressing that a man should face his destiny, rather than run from it. None of the knights admits to have behaved cowardly when they were unable to endure the test themselves. The author describes the departure in this way:

Then the first and foremost came forth in throng:
Yvain and Eric and others of note,
Sir Dodinal le Sauvage, the Duke of Clarence,
Lionel and Lancelot and Lucan the good,
Sir Bors and Sir Bedivere, big men both,
And many manly knights more, with Mador de la Porte.
All this courtly company comes to the king
To counsel their comrade, with care in their hearts;
There was much secret sorrow suffered that day
That one so good as Gawain must go in such wise
To bear a bitter blow, and his bright sword lay by.
He said, 'Why should I tarry?' And smiled with tranquil eye;
'In destinies sad or merry, true men can but try.'
(*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 196)

According to the last words, Gawain shows that he is not afraid of his future. So far Gawain is seen as a symbol of the perfect knight, as he is the only knight who volunteers to fight the Green Knight. Gawain leaves the court to fulfill his obligation as a brave and noble knight, while the others stay in the safety of the court telling stories about somebody else's noble deeds. (*Gawain*[2])

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight underlines the change of the Gawain hero. According to Wendy E. Wolk, he began his life in the first literary works as a Celtic warrior god of the sun and lightning, becoming the epitome of courtesy and knightly virtue, before later becoming a hot headed lecher. She follows that the character, known today as Sir Gawain, had its earliest incarnations well before Arthur set foot onto the battlefields at Camlan, and nearly a millenium before the first signs of Lancelot. He was first known as Cuchulian, a Celtic god of the sun. She also mentions that Gawain's association with the sun also appeared in Malory's *Le Morte D' Arthur*, and that the sun connection stayed with Gawain in form of his blond hair colour. (Wolk) Malory mentions this Gawain's character in one of the fights:

They bruised their helms and their haubecks, and wounded either other. But Sir Gawain from it passed nine of the clock waxed ever stronger and stronger, for then it came to the hour of, and thrice his was increased. All this espied Sir Marhaus and had a great wonder how his strenght increased, and so they wounded other passing sore. And then when it was past noon, and when it drew toward evensong Sir Gawain's strength feebled, and waxed passing faint that unnethes he might dure any longer.
(Malory 1903: 129)

Wolk further states that Cuchulian was the first known hero of the beheading game, which is the tale that made Gawain the most famous. The changing of Gawain from a superhero into a normal human being with some weak characteristic features is shown in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* when he has to undergo three moral tests. His fear is revealed when he fails the last moral test by lying to the Bercilak about the girdle he received as a gift from Bercilak's wife. By lying, Garwain breaks his promise to exchange everything that he receives during the day with his host. (Wolk) The anonymous writer described this event in this way:

He [Gawain] comes to meet the man amid all the folk,
And greets him good-humoredly, and gaily he says,

‘I shall follow forthwith the form of our pledge
That we framed to good effect amid fresh-filled cups.’
He clasps him accordingly and kisses him thrice,
As amiably and as earnestly as ever he could.
(*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 225)

Gawain’s host then responds:

‘By heaven,’ said the host, ‘you have had some luck
Since you took up this trade, if the terms were good.’
‘Never trouble about the terms,’ he returned at once,
‘Since all that I owe here is openly paid.’
‘Mary!’ said the other man, ‘mine is much less,
For I have hunted all day, and nought have I got
But this foul fox pelt, the fiend take the goods!
Which but poorly repays such precious things
That you have cordially conferred, such kisses three so good.’
(*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 226)

This situation is the flaw in Gawain’s personality which makes him a believable character. Any normal person, no matter how honest, would do what he has done for fear of his life. This fact makes Gawain very real and human. When he says to his host: “Never trouble about the terms / Since all that I owe here is openly paid,” it is the lie which comes from the pressure Gawain is under since he is now trapped.

(*A Character Analysis*) Under this superficial bravery, there may hide a big fear of a simple but horrible death. Sir Gawain conceals the truth of the girdle by forgetfulness, which seems to be unintentional. As Gawain understands the inevitable coming danger, the most noble knight fails to portray his gallant qualities and his attitude changes when he encounters death. He therefore retreats to dishonesty. Later in the story, the Green Knight punishes Sir Gawain for his flaw of dreading death. (*A Character Analysis*) Now it is possible to see that Gawain is a human being with instincts, emotions, and fears, which causes him to lie.

Nowhere in the Gawain poems is the development of Gawain’s personality so evident as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Throughout the poem, Gawain’s personality is visible by his own words and actions, as the others hold him higher than he really is. He is honest, brave, and loyal, until the stress of the seemingly inevitable loss of his life becomes too great to bear. This is the key as to why this character is so believable. The flaw is enough for him to be human, but not so much as to distort his

character to such a point where his actions and personality no longer coincide with one another. Because Gawain's character is so believable, this poem becomes more powerful. (*A Character Analysis*)

Another typical feature of Gawain's character is his loyalty to King Arthur. Although it is mentioned in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, this feature is revealed very much in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*. When Arthur's life appeared to be in the danger and he returns to the court with "his heart so heavy," (*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*: 4),) out of all his knights, only Sir Gawain asked the king about the reason for his sorrow and tried to help him. From a series of dialogues between Arthur and Gawain, for example: "I am not the man who would dishonor you./ Neither in the evening nor the morning," (*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*: 4), it is possible to see the great relationship based on Gawain's loyalty. From the following verses it is visible that Arthur is aware of his nephew's respect, love, and loyalty, and his relationship with his relative is quite similar. When the king learns that his life can be saved if Sir Gawain marries "the ugliest creature that a man ever saw," (*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*: 5) he reacts in the following way:

'Alas!' Arthur said, 'woe is me
That I should cause Gawain to marry you,
For he will hate saying no.
I've never seen such an ugly woman
Anywhere on this earth.
I don't know what to do!'
(*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*:7)

Yet Gawain does not hesitate to help his king. Being faithful to Arthur, his response to the marriage, and thus to the only solution that will save the king, is such:

'I would wed her, I swear by the cross.
Otherwise, I wouldn't be your friend.
You are my honoured king
And have done me good many times.
Therefore, I hesitate not
To save your life, my lord. It is my duty.
Otherwise, I would be a false coward.'

(*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*:8)

In comparison with *Sir Gawain and the Green knight* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, The Gawain of Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* represents only a minor character compared to others such as Galahad or Lancelot. According to Wendy E. Wolk, the *Vulgate Cycle*, and other later French works were a major source of influence on Sir Thomas Malory, and his work became the most influential for later writers of the Arthurian legends. She mentions for example, that T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* is almost identical to the Malory's book, having only some small exceptions, such as the contemporary language that is used. That is why it is possible to say that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* established the most common portrayals of Gawain.

When the first medieval stories began introducing Gawain in a positive profile, *Le Morte D'Arthur* described a different type of knight Gawain. The book is divided into several books, each of them consisting of several narrations which make up one unit. Unlike *Sir Gawain and the Green knight*, and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, Gawain is not a significant hero and is not even mentioned in all the stories. In *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Gawain is for the first time surrounded by his family consisting of four brothers, and his family loyalty is often the reason that drives him to action rather than duty or chivalry. When Lancelot, Gawain's close friend, saves Queen Guinevere from her punishment for adulterous behavior, Gawain behaves as a knight when commenting on it:

....'for full well wist I that Sir Lancelot would rescue her, other else he would die in that field; and to say the truth he had not been a man of worship had he not rescued the queen that day, insomuch she should have been burnt for his sake. And as in that, said Gawain, he hath done but knightly, and as I would have done myself and I had stand in like case.' (Malory 1969: 474)

Even though Gawain attempts to maintain knightly behavior, when he learns about the death of his brothers he changes into a person whose main goal is to avenge the death of his brother and restore his family's honour.

Malory's Gawain does not show the level of courtesy as the Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*. He is

shown as an ambitious knight, who longs for fame so much that he envies the other Knights of the Round Table. Malory mentions this sign of Gawain's character during the dubbing ceremony:

Merlin took king Pellinore by hand, and in the one hand next two sieges and the siege Perilous he said, in open audience.'This is your place and best ye are worthy to sit therein of any that is here.'There sat Sir Gawain in great envy. (Malory 1903: 84)

Although Gawain plays a minor role in *Le Morte D'Arthur* compared to the role of Lancelot, they both play a significant role at Arthur's Court. Lancelot was given qualities such as the courtesy and chivalry that Gawain owned in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*. In Malory's work, Gawain does not possess any manners or ethics. He is neither courteous nor romantic and commits several unchivalrous acts. By refusing to show mercy on a knight who begged for it, Gawain disregards the knightly oath to give mercy to everybody who asks for it. Gawain is punished for it by killing an innocent lady, which then spoils Gawain's good reputation. Malory presents this accident with the following words:

'I will make amends,' said the knight, 'unto my power.' Sir Gawain no mercy have, but unliced his helm to have stricken off his head. Right so came his lady out of a chamber and fell over him, and so he smote off her head by misadventure. 'Alas,' said Gatheris, 'that is faulty and shamefully done, that shame shall never from you, also ye should give mercy unto them that ask mercy, for a knight without mercy is without worship.' (Malory 1903: 88)

In *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Gawain is described as a frivolous knight, who often acts without thinking. His acts are criticized by many persons appearing in this book. The most fitting criticism of Gawain is provided by a hermit, whom the knight meets in the quest of the Sangrail:

'When you were first made knight you should have taken you to knightly deeds and virtuous living, and ye have done the contrary, for ye have lived mischievously many winters; and Sir Galahad is a maid, and sinner never, and that is the cause he shall achieve where he goeth that ye nor none such shall not attain, nor none in your fellowship, for ye have used the most untriest life that ever I heard knight live.' (Malory 1969: 266)

A similarity of the two works, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Le Morte D'Arthur*, is the picture of Gawain as a great warrior. In the first poem he encounters the Green Knight and focuses on the battle with him. In Malory's book as well, he is depicted in several battles and proves himself as one of the best knights in Arthur's court

The love between King Arthur and Gawain, shown in the *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, can be also found in some parts of Malory's book, although it is not so considerable as in the poem. The following extract describing the scene when Arthur learns about Gawain's severe injury in the battle is the most convincing evidence of the close relationship between these two men:

When Sir Arthur wist that Sir Gawain was laid so low, he went unto him; and there the king made sorrow out of measure, and took Sir Gawain in his arms, and thrice he there swooned. And then when he awaked, he said, 'Alas, Sir Gawain, my sister's son, here now thou liest, the man in the world that I loved most; and now is my joy gone, for now, my nephew Sir Gawain, I will discover me unto your person: in Sir Lancelot and you I most had my joy, and mine affiance, and now have I lost my joy of you both; wherefore all mine earthly joy is gone from me.' (Malory 1969: 508)

Alfred Lord Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King*, written three hundred years after Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, consists of a reworking of the medieval works.. The writer himself pointed to the fact that he was especially influenced by Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. (Gilbert 2002: 232) Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King* consists of loosely connected idylls, bound together by the theme of the effect of evil and sin on virtue and hope. One of the most popular books of poetry ever printed in its time, the *Idylls* were published over a number of years as separate pieces, the first works appearing in 1859 and the last in 1885. They were not written in sequence, and only later were they collected into a single unified work. (Knee 1967: 9)

Sir Gawain does not appear in all of these stories. Where it is possible to learn anything about him in these works, he usually does not appear as a main hero. It is possible to see another shift in the development and change of Gawain's character. From the early medieval super human being , as described by Wendy E. Wolk, the brave and courteous knight mentioned in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, becomes a little morally spoiled person in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, but still remains loyal to his king, acting as an excellent warrior, who

follows, with only few exceptions, the code of chivalry established by King Arthur. Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King* can be considered as another step in Gawain's transformation. Gawain is not mentioned very much in many of the stories, usually having only a few verses devoted to him. For example, in *The Holy Grail* or *The Passing of Arthur*, it is possible to learn that Gawain was "a reckless and irreverent knight" (Tennyson 1967: 111) Another example tells us that "light was Gawain in life, and light in death is Gawain for the ghost is as the man" (Tennyson 1967: 145) Nowhere in the verses is there any comment about his brave deeds or knightly skills. There are only very few verses in the work describing the good character of Gawain's personality. At the beginning of the poem *Pelleas and Ettarre*, Gawain is described as a noble man trying to punish injustice. Tennyson shows this in the following way:

Gawain passing by,
Bound upon solitary adventure, saw
Low down beneath the shadow of those towers
A villainy, three to one: and thro' his heart
The fire of honour and noble deeds
Flash'd and he call'd, 'I strike upon thy side –
The caitiffs!' 'Nay,' said Pelleas, 'but forbear;
He needs no aid who doth his lady's wil.'
(Tennyson 1967: 120)

The tale of *Lancelot and Elaine* deals with the sense of sin and suffering. Elaine the lily maid of Astolat, the embodiment of purity and virtue, dies over her love for Lancelot. Gawain is described here as a man of two faces. Outwardly, he is polite and handsome, one of the best knights, but his other side shows that he is not always faithful to his words.

Gawain is not the only hero who is seen from a negative point of view. *The Idylls of the King* does not concentrate on the glorification of the Arthur's kingdom, but rather its decline, which is caused by the violations of the bonds of marriage and friendship. (Knee 1967: 11) Gilbert suggests that "the second half of *The Idylls of the King* is one long record of licentiousness: the faithless depravity of Gawain and Ettarre, the crass sensuality of Tristram and Isolt, and the open adultery of Lancelot and Guinevere. (Gilbert 2002: 248).

In *The Idylls of the King*, Gawain is introduced as a man without any moral scruples. In *Pelleas and Ettarre*, a story which appears in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Tennyson describes the introduction of a strong but innocent knight into a world of deception, despair, and betrayal. Pelleas, who wins the tournament prize for his loved Ettare, is then cruelly rejected by her. It is from the frivolous Gawain that the devoted young man realizes that all knights are not honorable and all ladies are not pure. (Knee 1967: 12) Gawain's character in Malory's version does not seem to be so spoiled, because the writer adds some positive points of view. Also, in other parts of the book it is possible to find evidence that Gawain really deserves to be a member of the Round Table. Gawain's loyalty to the king, which is underlined in medieval poems like *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, is not to be found in this book.

One of the most modern books with the Arthurian motif, Mary Stewart's *The Wicked Day*, describes Gawain from a completely different point of view. The writer was inspired by the medieval *Le Morte D'Arthur*, and so it is possible to find similar stories in both works. Stewart, like Malory, introduces Gawain together with his brothers. The main difference between the two books is the main hero of the story. The stories of Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* do not stress any distinctive person, but rather use the membership of the Round Table as the unifying element. Stewart's *The Wicked Day* concentrates on Gawain's stepbrother Mordred, which means that Gawain, like in *Le Morte D'Arthur*, appears as a secondary figure.

The novel, *The Wicked Day*, describes Gawain from his early childhood. As a young boy he is portrayed as a clever, cautious and sensitive boy, who, being the oldest of the Orkney clan and a heir of the throne, deserves the respect of his brothers. While growing up, Gawain's character undergoes a large transformation. Unlike Malory's Gawain, who appears rational, warrior-like, and disinterested in women, Stewart portrays an irrational, uncouth, and obsessive knight. (*Sir Gawain in the Modern Legends*) The writer describes a childhood argument, which leads to a fight between Mordred and Gawain's brothers. During the fight, Gawain remains in bed rather than joining the fight. This approach, emphasizing Gawain's disinterest in the fight, is not characteristic of Gawain in other books. In the medieval stories, like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, or Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Gawain

is always portrayed as a brave warrior and good knight. From these literary works, it appears as though Mordred bears Gawain's positive attributes.

4.3. Gawain and Women

Women are very prevalent in King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table because they are usually very powerful in many different ways. Some women are powerful due to their mystic power, still others are powerful in the way that they use their beauty and sexuality to get the knights to do great things for them. A knight's chivalry is very often about falling in love with women who then give the knights a reason to fight. Women play an important role in some of the stories dealing with Gawain.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight introduces three women who control and influence the knight's life. The first of them the Virgin Mary, who represents spiritual love, obedience, chastity, and life. The second is Bertilak's wife, who plays the traditional female archetype of courtly love, disobedience, lust, and death. The last of these women is Morgan, who acts as the instigator of the plot and turns Bertilak green and orders him to walk and talk with a severed head. (Arkin 1995) These women appear to wield great power, however, the poet never intends to present a world where women are powerful. According to Arkin, these women constitute a metaphor for other anti-social forces and dangers outside the control of feudalism. (Arkin 1995)

Gawain's faith in Virgin Mary is shown by him wearing her symbol; a pentangle painted on his shield, which symbolizes the five senses, five fingers, the five wounds of Christ, and the five joys of Mary. (Arkin 1995) Virgin Mary accompanies him on his journey to the Green Chapel, where Gawain turns to her with the words:

'I beseech of Thee, Lord,
And Mary, thou mildest mother so dear,
Some harborage where haply I might hear mass
And Thy matins tomorrow-meekly I ask it,
And thereto proffer and pray my pater and ave and creed.'
(*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 200)

Lady Bertilak is seen in the Biblical role of temptress. According to Arkin the Lady becomes the ambivalent mirror in which the knight pictures his own potential for moral achievement or moral failure. Gawain is very attracted by her and finds her very hard to resist. She constantly makes moves and hints towards sexual activity with Sir

Gawain. (Arkin 1995) All these events were planned by the Green Knight and so she becomes the most important part of his plan. The tempting of the Lady and Gawain's effort to keep his moral rules is hidden in the hunting scenes. The reasons as to why such a talented author spent time on such lines is searched for by many critics. Howard explains it as such:

All the hunted animals convey connotations of evil, and this is doubtless the reason why the author of the poem seems so involved in the outcome of the hunts and never tires of triumphantly describing the final slaying of the pursued animals. (Howard)

Shaw opposes this theory and claims that the animals themselves are never described as evil nor is there any implication of evil animals in the poem. Another critic, Savage, classifies the animals as either "beast of venery" or "beast of chase". Beasts of venery include the male and female red deer, wild boar, or the wolf. Beasts of chase are the male or female deer, and the fox. He says that at the time Sir Gawain was written the fox had a reputation for cunning and duplicity. The deer was thought to be honorable but elusive, ready to escape before fighting. These animals are hunted in order by Bercilak, while Gawain is pursued by the Lady. Savage sees a symbolism between the hunted animals and the temptations of Gawain in the castle. On the first day, the Lord returns from his hunt with a deer; the shy creature. On this first day inside the castle, Gawain is first tempted by the Lady. Their first encounter is described as such:

And as he slips into slumber, slyly there comes
A little din at his door, and the latch lifted,
And he holds up his heavy head out of the clothes;
A corner of the curtain he caught back a little
And waited there warily, to see what befell.
Lo! It was the lady, loveliest to behold,
That drew the door behind her deftly and still
And was bound for his bed-abashed was the knight,
And laid his head low again in likeness of sleep;
(*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 210)

The correlation between the deer and Gawain is apparent. He acts just like the deer. He tries to avoid the confrontation with the Lady. He does not want to offend her, but also does not want to be seduced by her. Any promiscuous behavior would be considered an insult to the lord of the castle and would go against his chivalrous code.

Gawain, coy like the deer, thinks it would be better to pretend to sleep than face the Lady. (Shaw)

On the second day, the Lord hunts a boar, which proves to be a more difficult kill than the deer. The story mentions it in the following way:

He [boar] hurts the hounds, and they
Most dolefully yowl and yell.
Men then with mighty bows moved in to shoot,
Aimed at him with their arrows and often hit,
But the points had no power to pierce through his hide,
And the barbs were brushed aside by his bristly brow;
Though the shank of the shaft shivered in pieces,
The head hopped away, wheresoever it struck.
But when their stubborn strokes had stung him at last,
Then, foaming in his frenzy, fiercely he charges,
Hies at them headlong that hindered his flight,
And many feared for their lives, and fell back a little.
(*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 215)

On this day Gawain becomes more forward to the lady:

She [lady] comes to the curtain and coyly peeps in;
Gawain thought it good to greet her at once,
And she richly repays him with her ready words,
Settles softly at his side, and suddenly she laughs,
And with a gracious glance, she begins on him.
(*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 216)

The Lady tries to taunt him by questioning his courtly demeanor. At first Gawain tries to be gentle, but she keeps pushing him and bites back. So the correlation between the hunted animal and Gawain is ascertained once again. The Lord is hunting “beast of venery“ (Shaw) or nobility, and Gawain is noble in his tests with the Lady.

On the third day the Lord is out hunting a fox, the beast of vermin. (Shaw) The poet points out within the poem that “the fox is a thief, wily, and a shrew“ (Burrow) The fox has been deliberately singled out among the other animals. The fox, true to its cunning nature, becomes difficult to track. The fox led the hunters on a chase that lasting through the afternoon, and while this was happening, the Lady appears to Gawain again. (Shaw) . Since her previous attempts to seduce Gawain were unsuccessful, she now takes drastic measures to seduce him:

[lady] was awake with the dawn, and went to his chamber

In a fair flowing mantle that fell to the earth,
All edged and embellished with ermines fine;
No hood on her head, but heavy with gems
Were her fillet and the fret that confined her tresses;
Her face and her fair throat freely displayed;
(*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 221)

She then begins kissing Gawain, who once again successfully rebuffs her sexual advances, but she insists of giving him a gift. The first gift offered is a gold ring, which Gawain refuses twice. Then she says she will give him her girdle, which he should accept since it has magical properties. Gawain considers the probability of dying when he faces the Green Knight, and decides to accept it for protection. The Lady tells him to conceal it from her husband and Gawain agrees. He accepted the girdel out of fear of his life, and in hiding it, fails in his bargain with Bercilak. Unwittingly, Gawain has already been caught by his hunter. After the lady's long and pressing pursuit, Gawain suddenly comes face-to-face with the prospect of the Green Knight's axe, and while trying to escape, he falls victim at last to the lady. The deceitful fox is being hunted in the woods and there is a deceitful fox within the castle. (Shaw) Bercilak is still hunting the fox after Gawain accepts the girdel. The fox, in an attempt to avoid the danger from the lord and hunters, attempts to reverse direction, but this shift carries him into the jaws of his enemies. (Savage). Therefore the reader can see the foreshadowing of Gawain running into Bercilak's trap. In his attempt to divert from the harm of the Green Knight, he will run right into the hands of Bercilak. The trickery of both the fox and Gawain leads them to their downfall. (Shaw)

The viewpoints are also indicative of the association between the hunt and the temptation. One moment the story is narrated from the viewpoint of the hunter and at other times from the viewpoint of the hunted. Another thing which is common for Gawain and the fox is the fact that both try to avoid the blow, but must submit to it in the end. (Shaw)

The poet also makes use of other patterns in this work. The pattern set at the end of the day was for Bercilak to return from hunting and summon Gawain and the household in order to exchange their winnings. (Shaw) For the first two hunts, Bercilak needs to call for Gawain, but after the third hunt this is no longer necessary, as Gawain is already waiting for him.

Another interesting thing about this story is that Gawain is introduced with a description of his clothes: “He wore a robe of blue that reached even to the ground, and a surcoat richly furred, that became him well“. (*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 225) The color of blue is traditionally the symbol of faithfulness, occurring here and nowhere else in the poem. (Shaw)

When Gawain accepts the girdle he exchanges one symbol for another, he gives up the symbol associated with the Virgin Mary and accepts the symbol of guilt and cowardice. (Arkin 1995)

The last of the three ladies, Morgan le Faye, is introduced at the end of the narration. She is revealed by Bercilak, when he speaks about his true identity:

’Bercilak de Hautdesert this barony I hold,
Through the might of Morgan le Faye, that lodges at my house,
By subtleties of science and sorcerers’ arts,
The mistress of Merlin, she has caught many a man,
With that wizard, that knows well each one of your knights and you.
Morgan the Goddess, she, so styled by title true;
None holds so high degree that her arts cannot subdue.
She gided me in this guise to your glorious hall,
To assay, if such it were, the surfeit of pride
That is rumored of the retinue of the Round Table.’
(*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 237)

The reason why it is possible for lady Bercilak to manipulate Sir Gawain is due to the nature of his character. He is perceived by the others to be very courteous and well mannered. The writer then shows this to be false when two ladies enter the room. The first lady is old and ugly and Gawain courteously bows to her. The second is a beautiful young woman whom he takes in his arms and gives a kiss. This is not the right way to greet royalty and therefor suggests that Sir Gawain is not all that he appears to be. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* belongs to those Arthurian narrations where women and their influence on Sir Gawain is most significant. (Arkin 1995)

In *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, Gawain meets a type of a woman completely different from the women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. To save King Arthur, he marries an ugly woman, the anonymous writer described her with such words:

She was the ugliest creature
That a man ever saw.
King Arthur surely marveled.
Her face was red, her nose running,
Her mouth wide, her teeth all yellow.
Her eyes were bleary, as large as balls,
Her mouth just as large.
Her teeth hung out of her lips,
Her cheeks were as broad as a woman's hips.
Her back was as curved as a lute.
Her neck was long and also thick.
Her hair clotted in a heap.
In the shoulders she was a yard across.
Her breasts would have been a load for a horse.
Like a barrel was she made.
(*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell: 5*)

The fact that Dame Ragnell picked Gawain out of all the other knights to be her husband, provides the evidence that Gawain was the best knight. When Gawain's future wife comes to the court, all of the ladies were sorry for him:

'Alas!' said Dame Guinevere.
And all the ladies of her chamber said the same.
They all wept for Sir Gawain.
(*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell: 12*)

This lamentation is sign of Gawain's desirability among the women. Dame Ragnell is aware of her ugliness and when she sees Gawain for the first time she reacts in this way:

'For your sake, I wish
I were a good looking woman,
Since you are such a good man.'
(*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell: 12*)

In spite of his wife's ugliness, Gawain remains as courteous to her as he is to the other women. After the knight marries Dame Ragnell, she asks him:

'Show me a little courtesy in bed.
You cannot rightfully deny me that.
Indeed, Sir Gawain,' the lady said,
'If I were beautiful,

You would act a bit differently.
But you take no heed of marriage.
Still, for Arthur's sake, kiss me at least.'
(*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*:13)

Gawain responded to these words: "I will do more than kiss, I swear God ."
(*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*:13) This evidence of Gawain's courtesy is rewarded with Ragnell's transformation into a beautiful woman. She informs Gawain that she may appear as such by day or by night, and asks him to choose. Gawain decides to allow Ragnell to choose, since it is her body. By letting her decide, he is rewarded with the woman's constant beauty. Gawain appears happy in his marriage with Dame Ragnell even though in many of the Arthurian stories he traditionally ignores women and pursues battles. This new interaction with women transforms Gawain from the loyal warrior in Arthur's court to a love struck man who is devastated when Ragnell dies. Upon her death, Gawain was left in grief, and although he married again, he never loved another woman as much as he loved Dame Ragnell. This exhibits Gawain's sentimental evolution from a man obsessed with war to a man driven by his heart. (*Sir Gawain in the Transition*)

Thomas Malory described Gawain's attitude toward women in a completely different way. He returned to the approach which appeared in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Malory presents Gawain not as a womanizer, but rather underlines the knight's qualities and his fighting skills. There are only a few stories in the book, in which Gawain comes into contact with women. The first of them influences his later life the most. During Arthur's wedding, Gawain goes on an adventure, during which he accidentally kills a lady. This act caused much anger towards the king and his court because such behavior is irreconcilable with the knightly moral code. And there by ordinance of the queen there was set a court of ladies and they:

Judged him [Gawain] for ever while he lived to be with all ladies, and to fight for their quarrels; and that ever he should be courteous, and never to refuse mercy to him that asketh mercy. Thus was Gawain sworn upon the Four Evangelists that he should never be against lady nor gentlewoman, but if he fought for a lady and his adversary fought for another.
(Malory 1903: 90)

Sir Thomas Malory did not mention anywhere in his book any woman important for Gawain's life. The knight sets out on adventures, he meets beautiful

women, but they do not influence him at all. He is always courteous to them, protects their rights but is never involved in a relationship with them. It is not possible to find any fatal love in *Le Morte D'Arthur* as it is described in the poem, *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*. There is no lady in the role of temptress like the Lady Bercilak or any intriguing women as described in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The only exception may be considered the lady Ettard, a beautiful woman, who was so proud that:

She had scorn of him [King Pelleas] and said she would never love him though he would die for her; wherefore all ladies and gentlewomen had scorn of her that she was so proud, for there were fairer than she.
(Malory 1975: 44)

King Pelleas is described as “the best knight in world“ (Malory 1903: 43). Sir Gawain promised to help Pelleas, because according to him, it is humbling for every knight to uphold such behaviour, and he considered this help to be his knightly duty. However, when Gawain appears in the presence of the beautiful lady he completely changes his attitude and abandons his promise to help King Pelleas, forgetting all moral rules. The lady Ettard charms Sir Gawain just as Lady Bercilak does in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Yet, different from the poem, Gawain does not try to resist her, but takes on the role of a man of intrigue, who, by means of an invented story about killing King Pelleas and his own unhappy love, becomes sexually involved with her. This act is described by the writer as such:

Sir Gawain said that he loved a lady and by no mean she would love him. 'She is to blame,' said Ettard, 'and she will not love you, for ye that be so well-born a man and such a man of prowess, there is no lady in this world too good for you.'
'Will ye,' said Gawain, 'promise me to do what that ye may do, by the faith of your body, to get me the love of my lady?'
'Yea, sir, and that I promise you by my faith.'
'Now,' said Sir Gawain, 'it is yourself that I love so well, therefore hold your promise.'
(Malory 1903: 46)

Malory tries to excuse this immoral behaviour of Sir Gawain by stressing the fact that “it was in the month of May“ (Malory 1903: 46), so that the reader may get the impression that Gawain was influenced more by his natural feelings rather than by his

imperfectness - May is generally considered to be the month of love. This act spoils Gawain's chivalrous reputation and he is called by King Pelleas to be the most perfidious knight in the world. In his relationship with the Lady Ettard, Gawain does not only betray Sir Pelleas, but also Lady Ettard, who refuses him as being uncourteous. It seems that by her last words to Sir Gawain, Lady Ettard foretells a lonely future for Garwain, in which he will not have any more relationships with women:

'Sir Gawain, ye have betrayed Sir Pelleas and me, for you told me you had slain him, and now I know well it is not so: he is on live. But had he been so uncourteous unto you as ye have been to him, ye had been a dead knight. But ye have deceived me that all ladies and damsels may beware by you and me.'

(Malory 1903: 48)

Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* presents a varying attitude of Gawain towards women. According to Elliot L. Gilbert, the most ambitious Tennyson work is disquieting evidence of the growing domestication and even feminization of the age. (Gilbert 2002:229) Gilbert explains her point as such:

The book, proceeding seasonally as it does from spring in *The Coming of Arthur* to winter in *The Passing of Arthur*, is certainly about the decline of a community from an original ideal state, about the corruption and nihilism that overtake a once whole and healthy social order. Just as surely, an important agency of this decline is identified by the story as human sexuality and, in particular, female passion.

(Gilbert 2002: 232)

In this approach to the Arthurian motif, a change in the behaviour of Sir Gawain can be seen. From the knight and warrior known from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, who either refuses women completely, or tries to avoid and resist them; or from a man obsessed with loving his wife, as described in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, Gawain is transformed into a man for whom women and pleasure are more important than his courteous character or his loyalty to the king. Instead of searching for the Holy Grail, he gives in to the passion of women and is not even ashamed to tell Arthur about it. Tennyson describes such a scene in which Gawain tells Arthur of his lusts:

'I [Gawain] communed with a saintly man,

Who made me sure the Quest was not for me;
For I was much awearied of the Quest:
But found a silk pavilion in a field,
And merry maidens in it; and then this gale
Tore my pavilion from the tenting-pin,
And blew my merry maidens all about
With all discomfort; yea, and but for this,
My twelvemonth and a day were pleasant to me'.
(Tennyson 1967: 108)

Although Gawain's character in the *Idylls of the King* is a little spoiled, he still maintains some morals in his relationships with women. The tale of *Lancelot and Elaine* talks about Gawain's courtesy to women. He is even higher praised than Lancelot: "Gawain who bad a thousand farewells to me, / Lancelot, who coldly went, nor bad me one." (Tennyson 1967: 87)

From the poem *Pelleas and Ettarre*, we learn that he loves women, when King Pelleas asks him, "Art thou not he whom men call lighth-of-love?" (Tennyson 1967: 122) Gawain agrees, but points out that it is not his fault, "for women are so light". (Tennyson 1967: 122) In the same poem, Gawain describes his attitude to women. He admits he enjoys relationships with them, and is willing to lose a part of his freedom for them, but he would hate being humbled by them. Gawain says:

'Why, let my lady bind me if she will,
And let my lady beat me if she will:
But an she send her delegate to thrall
These fightings hands of mine – Christ kill me then
But I will slice him handless by the wrist,
And let my lady sear the stump for him.'
(Tennyson 1967: 121)

Like Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, the literary work *Idylls of the King* does not provide any key woman characters in Gawain's life. Even the affair with Lady Ettare in the poem *Pelleas and Ettarre*, which is the most detailed mentioning of a relationship between Gawain and a woman, does not mean much in the knight's life. It is only an episode which underlines the moral corruption of the society. As compared with Malory's work, Gawain does not need to invent an intriguing story to win the favour of Lady Ettare, his behaviour is not justified by a "month of love". This story only stresses Gawain's reputation of being a man, who is "light-of-love".

(Tennyson 1967: 122)

Mary Stewart's novel, *The Wicked Day*, provides a completely different picture of Gawain as a lover. He does not seem to be interested in women at all. The reason is not the same as in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, where he concentrates more on his reputation as a warrior than a lover. The novel contains only a few references of Gawain and women, but they do not play an important part in his life. On the contrary to *Le Morte D'Arthur* and *Idylls of the King*, there is a lady playing a key role in Gawain's life. Gawain shows a strong relationship with his mother, which is not a natural love between a mother and her son, but rather a relationship characterized by a son's perversity. Gawain's true feelings toward his mother become apparent when she is killed by Gawain's brother: "Gawain, whose anger had in it a large measure of pure sexual jealousy" (Stewart 1984: 234) By this sentence Gawain does not only exhibit uncharacteristic emotions, now he reveals a sexual desire for his mother. Suddenly, the man uninterested in women, but lusts for his own mother.

(*Sir Gawain in the Modern Legends*)

4.4. Gawain's Adventures and Quests

Literary heroes in Middle English romances often go on great quests, which can function as both internal and external tests. The heroes often face many obstacles and problems before they reach their final test. (*Sir Gawain in the Transition*)

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Gawain's quest is to find the Green Chapel and participate in a duel with the Green Knight. His quest is complicated by bad weather and many other obstacles:

Now with serpents he wars, now with savage wolves,
Now with wild men of the woods, that watched from the rocks,
Both with bulls and with bears, and with boars beside,
And giants that came gibbering from the jagged steeps.
Had he not borne himself bravely, and been on God's side,
He had met with many mishaps and mortal harms.

(*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 199)

These obstacles described here emphasize the obstacles which are complicating Gawain's internal quest. His internal quest in this literary work is to prove to be a courteous knight and a loyal man. (*Sir Gawain in the Transition*) These two kinds

of quest are interwoven in the all poem. Although Gawain's external quest starts when he leaves Arthur's court, his internal quest begins when Bercilak proposes him a game saying "Whatever I win in the woods I will give you at eve, / And all you have earned you must offer to me;" (*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 208)

This game challenges Gawain's morals by testing his duty as a courteous knight to do as a lady wishes, even though this violates his loyalty to Bercilak. Gawain is tested for three days as the lady of the house attempts to seduce him while her husband is in the woods hunting. Although Gawain passes the first two moral tests, he fails to be loyal in the third seduction scene, appearing that during these three days Gawain concentrates more on his internal rather than external quest. However, with the culmination of the story, the relationship between the two tests is made clear. Gawain finds the Green Chapel and the Green Knight, which successfully completes his external quest. Gawain views his internal quest as a failure. He fails to be a courteous and loyal knight, but this reveals him to be human.

The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell describes another type of quest. While in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain sets out alone on his quest, in this poem he follows his king. The only purpose of this quest is to find an answer to the question of "what women desire most" (*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*: 4), in order to save the king's life. In comparison with *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain does not have to face any obstacles, and the task seems to be rather easy for him as he gives his king encouragement:

'Yea, sir, be of good cheer,'
Said Gawain. 'Let your horse be made ready
To ride into a foreign country.'
(*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*: 5)

The reader learns about Gawain's quest only from a few verses:

The king rode one way, Gawain the other.
And they inquired both men and women
What it is women desire most.
(*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*: 5)

At first, the quest of Gawain and Arthur seems to be a failure, but finally it turns out to be a success, when through the completing of the quest, Gawain wins a beautiful wife and learns the rule of proper behavior towards women, which is simply that “women desire sovereignty“.

(*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*:10)

Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* describes more adventures and quests than the poems *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The reason is simple; the two works concentrate only on one story, and mention fewer heroes than Malory's book. *Le Morte D'Arthur* depicts the life of all Arthurian court, where adventures and quests were the most popular hobby and it was a custom for knights to set out on their adventurous journeys on festival occasions. Malory describes one of these events:

The king bad haste unto dinner. ‘Sir,’ said Sir Kay the Steward, ‘if ye go now unto your meat ye shall break your old custom of your court, for ye have not used on this day to sit at your meat or that you have seen some adventure.’ (Malory 1969: 240)

The reason of such adventures is not only the entertainment of knights and the court, the knights should prove their qualities in the fight. Sir Gawain sets out for his first quest shortly after the wedding of king Arthur and queen Guenevere. Arthur orders him to find a white stag, which appears at the wedding feast. That day is Gawain dubbed a knight and this appears to be a reason why he is chosen; he should show the court how he is able to stand the test. On his quest he proves to be a great warrior and he succeeds in the searching for the stag but he fails in the moral test as he kills an innocent lady.

Malory mentions another quest which is very popular topic in Arthurian tales; the quest for the Holy Grail. The Holy Grail is generally considered to be the cup which Christ drank from at the Last Supper and the one used by Joseph of Arimathea to catch his blood as he hung on the cross. This motif was introduced into the Arthurian legends by Robert Boron in his verse romance *Joseph d'Armathie*, probably written at the end of the twelfth century, or the beginning of the thirteenth century. In earlier sources and some later ones, the Grail is something very different. The term grail comes from the Latin word *gradale*, which means a dish brought to the table during various stages or courses

of a meal. In the works of early writers like Chrétien, such a plate is called by the name grail. In his *Parzival*, Wolfram von Eschenbach presented the grail as a stone which provides sustenance and prevents anyone who beholds it from dying within the week. In the time of Arthur, the quest for the Grail was the highest spiritual pursuit. For Crétien, Perceval is the knight who must achieve the quest for the Grail. For the French authors, as for Malory, Galahad is the chief Grail Knight, though some others also attempt this quest (The Holy Grail). Sir Gawain as well does not remain aloof in the search. On the contrary, it is Gawain who first decided to search for the Grail (Wolk):

'Now,' said Sir Gawain, 'we have been served this day of what meats and drinks we thought on; but one thing beguiled us, we might not see the Holy Grail, it was so precious covered. Wherefore I will make here avow, that tomorn, without longer abiding, I shall labour in the quest of the Sangrail, that I shall hold me out a twelvemonth and a day, or more if needed be, and never shall I return again unto the court till I have seen it more open than it hath been seen here.' (Mallory 1969: 248)

Gawain's words and decision cause a destruction of the Round Table. However worthy an enterprise the quest for the Holy Grail may be, it takes Arthur's best knights away from the court and leads many of them to their death (*Arthur*). Arthur himself spoke about Gawain's decision:

'Alas,' said King Arthur unto Sir Gawain, 'ye have night slain me with the avow and promise that ye have made; for through you ye have bereft me the fairest fellowship and the truest of knighthood that ever were seen together in any realm of the world; for when they depart from hence I am sure they all shall never meet more in this world, for they shall die in the quest.' (Malory 1969: 248)

Arthur blames Gawain for breaking up the Round Table with his pledge to search for the Grail (Wolk). Gawain is not successful in his quest, but is compromised by Galahad, who is presented in this tale as Gawain's idol, as Gawain mentions "I am not happy that I took not the way that he went, for and I may meet with him I will not depart from him lightly, for all marvellous adventures Sir Galahad achieveth." (Malory 1969: 264) The reason why Gawain suffers failure and defeat by Galahad is due to his moral impurities. Gawain must return to Arthur's court after being told by a monk that he lacks charity, abstinence and truth, and thus, is not worthy to see the Grail. Although

promiscuity was fine and common in secular tales, the rise of the Grail stories began placing more stress on Catholicism. That is why a sinner like Gawain could never succeed in this kind of quest. (Wolk)

Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* mentions the whole story of the quest for the Holy Grail in a different way. Here, Gawain is not a central hero and does not initiate the quest, which is taken over by Sir Percivale. Gawain plays a passive role and is only mentioned in the verses when other knights swear to "ride a twelvemonth and a day in quest of it" it said that "Gawain sware, and louder than the rest." (Tennyson 1967: 200) The picture of Gawain in *Idylls of the King* is quite similar to the portrayal provided by Malory, in that Gawain fails in this quest because of his moral decline.

While the two medieval poems, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, present Gawain in a way that a real hero should behave, his picture in the *Idylls* is completely opposite. In the previous stories, and very often in Malory's *La Morte D'Arthur*, he is presented with the task of traveling somewhere, and on his journey, he must fight dozens of hideous monsters, if he is in need of rest, he does not look for comfort, but sleeps in his armor. He always follows his quest and promises, if he did not, he would not have married Dame Ragnell or saved Arthur from the Green Knight's blow. (A Character analysis) In *Idylls of the King*, he appears to be completely different; he is lazy and unwilling to undergo other adventures. This is made clear from the following extract:

At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose,
With smiling face and frowning heart, a Prince
In the mid might and flourish of his May,
Gawain, surnamed The Courteous, fair and strong,
And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint
And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal
Sir Modred's brother, and the child of Lot,
Nor often loyal to his word, and now
Wroth that King's command to sally forth
In quest of whom he knew not, made him leave
The banquet, and concourse of knights and kings.
(Tennyson 1967: 69)

It is evident from these verses that Gawain prefers secular pleasures, rather than adventures. Mary Stewart does not mention any of Gawain's adventures or quests

in her novel, so it is impossible to say which attitude Gawain would take up; whether the role of a noble and brave knight, longing for any adventure, or if he would be the morally failed person presented by Tennyson.

4.5. Gawain and the Round Table

Being the nephew of King Arthur, Gawain's position at the Round Table was stable. He is one of Arthur's closest companions and is always seen as a loyal servant of his lord Arthur and his Lord God. Gawain is not a common knight who strives to remain in his king's court for mere entertainment and respect, rather he looks to protect his master. No book shows any dishonesty from Gawain toward his lord. His physical actions are always devoted to the utmost servitude to the king, his honor and his country. It is interesting to note that other characters also refer to Sir Gawain as the best knight: he is a "bold knight" (*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 244), the "noblest knight alive" (*The Norton Anthology*: 239), and the "most courteous knight" (*The Norton Anthology*: 244). Everybody, including King Arthur, the other Knights of the Round Table and the ladies of the court, seem to think there is no equal to Sir Gawain. When he leaves to fight the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, everyone in the court thinks he will not return and blame the King Arthur by saying that he should have given Gawain a nice governing position instead of sending him on a suicide mission. (*A Character Analysis*) They say:

'Ill fortune it is
That you, man, must be marred, that the most are worthy"
His equal on this earth can hardly be found;
To have dealt more discreetly had done less harm,
And have dubbed him a duke, with all due honor.
A great leader of lords he was like to become,
And better so to have been than battered to bits,
Beheaded by an elf/man, for empty pride!
(*The Norton Anthology* 1987: 198)

Although Gawain's character changes in the latter works, he is not so brave and courteous, and his morality fails, but he still remains to be a prominent person at the court. All books mention him close to Arthur, even Mary Stewart's novel, where

Gawain's place at the court is endangered by his stepbrother Mordred. In all of the mentioned works, Gawain remains loyal to his king.

Malory's book shows the relationship in the court the most clearly, the reason is that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* concentrate only on one story; Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and Stewart's *The Wicked Day* were mostly inspired by Malory so their information is almost the same.

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Malory shows Arthur as a man with love for his men, especially for Lancelot and Gawain, and according to Kennedy this bond is very tight (Kennedy 2002: 151). The mutual relationship of these three men finally leads to the destruction of the Round Table. When Lancelot kills Gawain's three brothers in a fight, Gawain demands that Lancelot be punished and declares war against Lancelot as a revenge for the death of his brothers. Although Arthur regrets this war that breaks out between him and Lancelot, Gawain insists on it. Malory describes Gawain as the major responsibility for the war against Lancelot. In his sources, Malory found instances of Gawain's hatred for Lancelot and his desire for vengeance, because Lancelot had accidentally killed his brothers: but he further emphasizes both Gawain's hatred and his ability to influence Arthur (Kennedy 2002:153). For example, when Arthur hears of Gareth's death he says:

'The death of them' [Gawain's brothers], said Arthur, 'will cause the greatest mortal war that ever was; I am sure, wist Sir Gawin that Sir Gareth were slain, I should never have rest of him till I had destroyed Sir Launcelot's kin and himself both, other else he to destroy me. And therefore, said the king, wit you well my heart was never so heavy as it is now.' (Malory 1969: 473)

Gawain pushes Arthur to resume the war against Lancelot, so Malory seems to be placing more responsibility for it upon Gawain. Malory emphasizes not only Gawain's influence upon Arthur in pursuing the war with Lancelot, but also Arthur's love for his nephew Gawain, a love that has greater importance in Malory's account than it does in any other books (Kennedy 2002: 155). Kennedy points out that Malory wished to show an especially close relationship between Gawain and Arthur and that Arthur's

love for Gawain could ultimately give his nephew an advantage over other knights. (Kennedy 2002: 151).

Arthur's favoritism towards Gawain and his consequent inability to resist Gawain's desire for vengeance, is one of the apparent weaknesses with Malory's Arthur, which could detract from his being an effective king. Kennedy states that Malory presented Arthur not only as a king dominated by his private will, instead of a concern for the common good, but also as a man, who was unable to stand apart from his personal ties, in which he shows unreasoned acquiescence to Gawain's influence (Kennedy 2002: 156).

There are some factors that should be considered in the relationship between Arthur and Gawain. In the war against Lancelot, Arthur is dominated by Gawain, and although he is unhappy about the war, he fights against Lancelot to satisfy his nephew. Malory stresses Gawain's responsibility for the destruction of the kingdom and Arthur's dilemma of choosing between his two favorite knights – his nephew and Lancelot. Kennedy says that although the king decides to honor the blood bond, his choice is not easy because he loves both men. (Kennedy 2002: 157) The tragedy results from a conflict of loyalties, and although Arthur's decision to follow the law and side with Gawain contributes to the fall of the kingdom, the decision is not essentially irresponsible. It is necessary to say that it is impossible to believe that the war could have been prevented, even if Arthur had not sided with Gawain. (Kennedy 2002: 161)

Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* does not describe this process of deciding at all, but rather concentrates mostly on the last part of the war. Mary Stewart described this process in a completely different way. She does not speak about Lancelot at all, and he is replaced by the character, Bedwyr. Even the situation at the court is a little different from Malory's work, as Mordred is the knight who benefits from his relationship with the king, Gawain plays only a secondary role, which takes up the leading position at the final part of the book. The plot of the story about the death of Gawain's brothers is similar - Bedwyr kills them, but this event does not cause the war described by Malory. Stewart only writes that they disappeared in their chambers for all day and all night. The process of influencing the king, which is demonstrated by Gawain's power to manipulate Arthur, is shown later, when Gawain pushes Arthur into the war with his stepbrother, Mordred.

Idylls of the King, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, and *The Wicked Day* describe only one part of this complicated war conflict in the same way. They all mention a dream which Arthur has before his last battle. In the dream, Gawain is dead, but warns Arthur about the coming fight, as there is a danger of Arthur's death. This scene supports the idea of very close relation between Gawain and Arthur, when in the stressed atmosphere before the battle, Arthur's favourite knight comes to warn him. All writers might have intended the dream to be a symbol of Gawain taking responsibility for his actions in causing the outbreak of the war and throwing the kingdom into confusion.

It is evident that both Tennyson and Stewart were inspired by Mallory as they also use a similar description of the event. Malory describes the dream in the following passage:

‘Much hath God given me leave, for to warn you of your death; for and ye fight as tomorn with Sir Mordred, as ye both have assigned, doubt ye not ye must be slain, and the most part of your people on both parties.’
(Malory 1969: 511)

Tennyson's description of the event tends to be a little more obscured:

‘Hollow, hollow all delight!
Hail, King! Tomorrow thou shalt pass away.
Farewell! There is an isle of rest for thee.’ (Tennyson 1967: 146)

Also in Mary Stewart's novel, Gawain appears in the king's dream, but not to warn him of his imminent death, only to recommend a fighting strategy to him.

All three books, *Idylls of the King*, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, and *The Wicked Day*, agree on great Arthur's affection to Gawain and their mutual love and loyalty towards one another. They show Gawain's ability to control and influence his king, although it causes the fall of the kingdom and the Round Table.

5. Conclusion

The thesis presents only some of the literary works dealing with the Arthurian motives that appeared from the Middle Ages to the present. It mentions the first reference of Arthur, the chronicle notes about this legendary hero, the most important Arthurian stories collection, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, various poetry dealing with this motif, and lastly, modern adaptations of this topic.

Sir Gawain is generally considered to be, together with Arthur and a few other knights, the most important character of these literary works. During the development from the medieval writings to contemporary literature, there originated many books describing Sir Gawain as the central character. Although Sir Gawain is only an imaginary hero as well as other members of the Round Table, some writers have described him as a truly believable person. The writers usually used three main ways in introducing Sir Gawain's character. They revealed to the reader, not only what the character thinks about himself, or how others think and feel about him, but how Gawain's own actions help to define his personality. (*Character analysis*). Together, these methods make a real person.

The works, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, both mention the character of Sir Gawain as a great knight, and a courteous and noble man. He has to fight with temptation and decide between his knightly obligations or his self-preservation. Sir Gawain may seem too ideal in these poems, but his failure in the test described in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, makes him a real character.

The writing, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, represents a shift in Gawain's personality. From the best knight of the Round Table, he becomes a warrior and concentrates on the fight. He does not always keep moral values, and women do not represent an important part of his life. He still looks for adventures and participates in several quests. Malory emphasizes in particular, the love between Gawain and Arthur, and he especially stresses Gawain's influence on Arthur, which ultimately leads to the destruction of the Round Table.

The Idylls of the King and *The Wicked Day* show another change of Gawain's character. From an excellent warrior and the best knight, he becomes indolent, who spends more time in the presence of women than setting out on quests.

From a courteous and brave knight, he changes into a light-minded person with no ambitions. His moral principles change so much, that instead of serving his king, Gawain prefers secular pleasures and even reveals a sexual desire for his mother. Because the writers of these two books knew the Arthurian stories through the medium of Malory, Gawain is usually presented with his cruel and cowardly character to the modern hero. (*Gawain*[3])

The books mentioned in this thesis portray the change and the development of Gawain's character. It is up to the reader to decide, which Gawain is more believable. If it is the honest, brave, always loyal and ideal knight, or a human being with many weak sides of his character.

6. Summary

V této diplomové práci se věnuji Artušovským legendám, jejich původu, historii a vývoji. Dále se zaměřuji na jednu z postav tohoto významného středověkého cyklu, na pana Gawaina. Práce je rozdělena do tří hlavních kapitol, z nichž první se zabývá vznikem Artušovských legend, jejich zachycením v literatuře od středověku po současnost; v této části se věnuji rovněž základním pojmům týkajících se artušovského cyklu. Ve druhé části práce se soustředuji na zobrazení pana Gawaina v literatuře a ve třetí kapitole se věnuji porovnání zobrazení postavy pana Gawaina v pěti vybraných literárních dílech.

V první části se čtenář může dozvědět, že král Artuš je nejznámější postavou středověké literatury; jeho hrad Camelot a Kulatý stůl, místo, kde se setkával se svými rytíři, stále patří mezi oblíbená témata nejen v britské literatuře, ale i v ostatních evropských zemích. Historikové se snaží zjistit, jedná-li se o postavu skutečnou nebo fiktivní. Většinou se shodují na tom, že pokud se tato literární postava zakládá na skutečnosti, nejedná se o krále, ale o bojovníka, který si získal slávu v bojích s Germány na přelomu pátého a šestého století.

V další části první kapitoly se můžeme se dočíst, že příběhy o králi Artušovi pocházejí z Walesu a původně se šířily ústní lidovou slovesností. První psaná zmínka o Artušovi pochází ze sedmého století a objevila se v elegii *Gododdin*. Postava Artuše se později objevuje v kronikách *Historia Brittonum*, *Historia Anglorum* a *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Vyprávění o králi Artušovi pochází často z Francie.

Nejvýznamnějším dílem zobrazujícím postavu krále Artuše a jeho rytířů je *Artušova smrt (Le Morte D'Arthur)*, pocházející z druhé poloviny 15. století. Autorem je Thomas Malory, který čerpal inspiraci z děl francouzských a anglických spisovatelů. Ve své knize se soustředil na Artušovy vlastnosti kladné, původní příběhy zobrazující některé záporné byly vynechány. Význam Maloryho knihy spočívá především ve sjednocení jednotlivých příběhů a děl týkajících se středověkých Artušovských legend. Podle literárních kritiků se stala jednou z nejpoblárnějších knih s rytířskou tematikou.

Artušovské téma se stalo opět populární v devatenáctém století, kdy anglický básník Alfred Lord Tennyson napsal sbírku *Idyly královské (Idylls of the King)*. Hlavním zdrojem Tennysonovy inspirace se stala Maloryho kniha, a proto i zde je Artuš zobrazen jako ideální panovník starající se o potřeby svého království; král, který

stanovuje principy, podle kterých by se měl každý ve společnosti chovat. *Idyly královské* (*Idylls of the King*) je rovněž kniha popisující růst a pád civilizace, způsobený lidskými vztahy.

Téma Artušových legend se stalo jedním z hlavních motivů v devatenáctém a dvacátém století. Někteří autoři se snaží o seriózní zachycení těchto příběhů, například T.H.White. Jiní, jako například Mark Twain, zobrazují toto téma humorným stylem. Navzdory různým literárním zpracováním většina autorů zobrazuje Artuše jako šlechtného a výjimečného panovníka.

Ve druhé kapitole této práce se čtenář dočte o panu Gawainovi, jedné z nejoblíbenějších postav artušovského cyklu. Podle legend byl Artušovým synovcem a jedním z nejlepších rytířů Kulatého stolu. Poprvé se objevuje jako Gwalchmei ve velšských legendách ve dvanáctém století. V mnoha příbězích vystupuje nejen jako Artušův synovec, ale rovněž jako symbol slunce; to se projevuje jeho narůstající silou během dopoledne a ubýváním sil se slábnutím slunečního svitu. Gwalchmei je považován za hrdinu, který vždy dokončí své pátrání, je nejlepším jezdcem a bojovníkem.

Gawain se stal významnou postavou romancí Chrétiena de Troyes, přestože představoval v každé z nich pouze vedlejší roli vedle hlavní postavy. Jako hlavní hrdina je zobrazen v posledním díle Chrétiena *Perceval* z počátku dvanáctého století. Postava Gawaina se objevuje i v německé literatuře na počátku třináctého století v povídce *Koruna* (*The Crown*) Heinricha von dem Türlina.

Dále zmiňuji nejvýznamnější skladbu o panu Gawainovi *Pan Gawain a Zelený rytíř* (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*) pocházející z konce čtrnáctého století. *Pan Gawain a Zelený rytíř* je jednou ze čtyř básní dochovaných v rukopise uloženém v Britském muzeu. Báseň se skládá ze dvou vzájemně propletených dobrodružství. První vypráví o výzvě Zeleného rytíře a o vzájemném souboji. Druhé se zabývá pokusem pana Gawaina; když se jej snaží svést žena pana Bercilaka – Zeleného rytíře. Ačkoliv to Gawain netuší, výsledek budoucího souboje se Zeleným rytířem závisí na Gawainově chování v domě hostitele. *Pan Gawain a Zelený rytíř* je báseň s rytířskou tematikou; obsahuje prvky komedie, milostné poezie a zároveň se zde objevují i prvky křesťanské pokory.

Postava pana Gawaina (či jiné osoby s podobným jménem nebo vlastnostmi) se objevuje i v dalších literárních dílech. Rovněž souboj, ve kterém si hlavní hrdinové vzájemně setnou hlavu, je velmi populárním námětem. Setnutí bylo považováno za rituální smrt, která zajišťovala návrat jara a dobrou úrodu.

Mezi příběhy s podobnou tematikou patří například irské vyprávění *Fled Bricrend* z počátku dvanáctého století, francouzský *Perlesvaus* nebo *Hunbaut* nebo již zmíněná *Koruna (The Crown)*. Dalším anglickým textem o panu Gawainovi je *Balada o Zeleném rytíři (Ballad of The Green Knight)* z konce čtrnáctého století. Jedná se o modifikaci básně *Pan Gawain a Zelený rytíř* a je považována za jedno z nejlepších vyprávění v anglickém jazyce.

Ačkoliv příběhy s výše zmíněným námětem převažují, existují i literární díla, která zobrazují pana Gawaina z jiného úhlu pohledu. Mezi ně patří například *Sňatek pana Gawaina a paní Ragnell (The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell)* z konce patnáctého století. Zde Gawain opět vystupuje jako hrdina, když se ožení s velmi ošklivou ženou jen proto, aby zachránil život svého krále.

V knihách Thomase Maloryho, Alfreda Lorda Tennysona, nebo Mary Stewartové, zabývajících se artušovskými motivy, Gawain nepředstavuje hlavního hrdinu, ale i zde hraje důležitou roli.

V závěrečné kapitole se tato diplomová práce věnuje podrobněji následujícím pěti vybraným dílům. Jsou jimi *Pan Gawain a Zelený rytíř (Sir Gawain and the Green Knight)*, *Sňatek pana Gawaina a paní Ragnell (The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell)*, *Artušova smrt (Le Morte D'Arthur)* Thomase Maloryho, *Idylly královské (Idylls of the King)* Alfreda Lorda Tennysona a *Smrt krále Artuše (The Wicked Day)* Mary Stewartové. První tři literární díla jsem vybrala, protože patří mezi významná středověká díla s artušovskou tematikou. Tennysonova sbírka byla vydaná po delší pauze ve vývoji Artušovských legend; román Mary Stewartové představuje jednu z nejnovějších adaptací tohoto námětu. Knihy jsem porovnávala z hlediska přístupu jednotlivých autorů k otázce původu pana Gawaina, srovnávala jsem jeho vlastnosti, postoj k ženám, k dobrodružství a na závěr jsem se zaměřila na jeho postavení u Kulatého stolu. S využitím odborné literatury a názorů kritiků jsem dospěla k následujícím závěrům:

Uvedená díla se shodují na původu postavy pana Gawaina. Ve všech dílech je Gawain představen jako synovec krále Artuše, jeho otcem je král Lot, matkou Morgause (Margawse) jindy zvaná též jako Bellicent nebo Anna. Některé z knih zmiňují Gawainovy bratry Agravaina, Garetha, Gatherise a Mordreda.

Výše zmíněná literární díla zobrazují vývoj osobnosti a vlastností pana Gawaina. *Pan Gawain a Zelený rytíř (Sir Gawain and the Green Knight)*, *Sňatek pana Gawaina a paní Ragnell (The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell)* představují Gawaina jako šlechtného, statečného a ctnostného člověka, který je ideálním rytířem. Báseň *Pan Gawain a Zelený rytíř (Sir Gawain and the Green Knight)* zobrazuje Gawaina jako bojovníka s morálními zásadami, který se spíše než o ženy zajímá o dobrodružství. Přestože je sváděn manželkou svého hostitele Bercilaka, zůstává věrný své pověsti bojovníka a vydává se na souboj se Zeleným rytířem. Báseň *Pan Gawain a Zelený rytíř* popisuje změnu, kterou pan Gawain v průběhu děje prochází. V úvodu je popsán jako ideální bezchybný hrdina. Proměna ze „superhrdiny“ v normálního člověka nastane, když se má podrobit morální zkoušce na hradě pana Bercilaka. Tím, že lže svému hostiteli, odhalí svůj strach. I když v morální zkoušce neuspěje, stává se z něho skutečná postava, neboť stejně jako on by se v ohrožení života zachoval každý člověk.

Maloryho kniha *Artušova smrt (Le Morte D'Arthur)* představuje další fázi ve vývoji Gawainova charakteru. Gawain je zde, stejně jako v předchozí básni, představen především jako skvělý bojovník, který vyhledává dobrodružství. Změna nastává v jeho morálních vlastnostech. Není zde popsán jako ideální hrdina, ale jako člověk, jednající často neeticky a bez rozmyslu a porušující rytířskou přísahu. Jeho činy jsou v knize často kritizovány.

Alfred Lord Tennyson popisuje další změnu ve vývoji Gawainovy osobnosti. Autor jej zobrazuje jako morálně zkaženého člověka, který dává přednost světským radovánkám a pohodlí u Kulatého stolu před dobrodružstvím. Stejný názor sdílí ve svém románu. i Mary Stewartová

Významný prvek v Gawainově životě znamenají ženy. Báseň *Pan Gawain a Zelený rytíř* představuje tři významné ženy – Pannu Marii, symbol cudnosti a poslušnosti, Bertilakovu manželku, symbolizující rozkoš a neposlušnost, a Morgan, intrikánku a symbol zla. Tyto ženy vládou ohromnou mocí a řídí Gawainův život.

Tento je pak nucen svést souboj především s paní Bertilak, který je v básni popsán přímo i nepřímo pomocí symboliky tří honů. *Sňatek pana Gawaina a paní Ragnell* je jediným z vybraných děl, které popisuje lásku Gawaina a zaměřuje se na jeho upřímné city k ženě. Malory a Tennyson nezdůrazňují žádnou osudovou ženu v Gawainově životě. V obou dílech jsou ženy ve vztahu k tomuto rytíři zmíněny jen okrajově. Stewartová popisuje klíčový vztah Gawaina a ženy; jedná se však o lásku, která odporuje morálním pravidlům, neboť ženou po které Gawain touží, je jeho matka.

Další část diplomové práce se věnuje Gawainově postoji k dobrodružství a questu¹. Báseň *Pan Gawain a Zelený rytíř* (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*) představuje dva questy – „vnitřní“, Gawainova snaha prokázat, že je pravým rytířem, a „vnější“, hledání Zelené kaple a souboj se Zeleným rytířem. Tyto questy jsou vzájemně propojeny. Přestože Gawain uspěje jen v questu „vnějším“, jeho hledání je úspěšné; prokáže tak totiž svou statečnost a lidskost. *Sňatek pana Gawaina a paní Ragnell* (*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*) popisuje Gawainův úspěšný quest za účelem pomoci svému králi a zachránit mu tím život.

Z vybraných literárních děl popisuje Malory nejvíce Gawainových dobrodružství. Malory a Tennyson se zaměřují zejména na hledání Svatého grálu. Gawain je v tomto questu neúspěšný kvůli svým přestupkům proti morálce. Stewartová se ve svém románu Gawainově questu nevěnuje vůbec.

Všechna vybraná díla se shodují na velmi důležité věci: Gawain je vždy zobrazen jako nejvýznamnější Artušův rytíř s velmi pevnou pozicí u Kulatého stolu. Je vždy oddaný svému králi a zároveň je schopný využít svého postavení k manipulaci s Artušem. Stewartová, Tennyson a především Malory přisuzují Gawainovi zodpovědnost za války, které vedou ke smrti samotného Gawaina i krále Artuše a způsobí zánik království a Kulatého stolu.

Tato diplomová práce poskytla přehled stěžejních děl artušovského cyklu, a zaměřila se zejména na postavu pana Gawaina a přístup některých autorů k této postavě. Přestože se jedná o fiktivního hrdinu, objevuje se v literatuře i jiných, především evropských zemí. Ve zkoumaných dílech jsem zaznamenala prvky vzájemného vlivu jednotlivých autorů, zejména Maloryho na Tennysona a

¹ Slovo „quest“ se může přeložit jako hledání, nicméně se běžně v české literatuře používá původní anglické slovo

Stewartovou. Zároveň je možno v nich pozorovat vývoj Gawainovy osobnosti, jeho postojů a morálních vlastností.

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ÚDAJE PRO KNIHOVNICKOU DATABÁZI

Název práce	Postava pana Gawaina v Artušovských legendách
Autor práce	Lenka Altmannová
Obor	Učitelství anglického jazyka
Rok obhajoby	2005
Vedoucí práce	Doc. PhDr. Bohuslav Mánek, CSc.
Anotace	Popis původu a vývoje artušovského cyklu, základní charakteristika postavy pana Gawaina ve vybraných dílech artušovského cyklu, porovnání pojetí postavy v těchto dílech.
Klíčová slova	Artušovské legendy, Gawain, literatura

