

Wondering and wandering in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and in the film *TGK*

almost a **PARONOMASIA**= Similar words, and similar meaning: both refer to not knowing what to do in a given situation, whether how to interpret a strange sight or where to go in unknown surroundings: the hero **lacks control over his environment**. Both are relevant to the poem and, in a ≠ way, to the film.

How Gawain's quest, through and thanks to wondering and wandering, takes him to a new clarity of mind and soul.

I. Wonders and wandering, expected elements of an Arthurian romance, receive an unusual treatment in both poem and film

A. The wandering (errant) knight

The pattern of an Arthurian adventure that takes a knight away from Camelot

- Camelot as a stable point of reference
- A challenge, an adventure taken up by one of the knights
- He will deal with the adventure, and then come back to Camelot.
- But getting to the site of the adventure is an adventure in itself: fights, castles containing marvels or adventures.

➡ In the poem

- A typical errant knight:
 - Gawain as the brave, loyal knight: takes up the challenge in the name of Arthur
 - The knight's departure: all his friends shed tears on his departure, sparks fly from his horse's hooves: **heroism**.
 - **A long journey** in search of **a distant goal**, followed by an encounter with a dangerous foe.
- But the heroic fights on the way are downplayed.
- The adventure is a partial failure.

➡ In the film

- An anti-hero
 - Departure: **solitude** of the knight in the film, only accompanied by children, viewed from the front.
 - **Un-heroic adventures** on the way

- The damsel in distress, the hospitable castle, the formidable enemy: but a **very human, unheroic Gawain** to face these situations

In both works **the wandering knight** as expected in a romance or a medieval story is **subtly or completely modified** to serve a different purpose than the mere telling of a story of adventure.

B. Wondering in a world of wonders

1. Wonders, expected elements of a medieval romance

- What is a wonder? Sthg **extraordinary, outside the ordinary course of reality**.
- Something which sets the knights wondering: cf. their attitude in front of the GK.

2. Wondering in the poem

- Wonder at the **GK's appearance**, at the **Beheading Game**, at his surviving beheading.
- The apparition of the castle. He should keep wondering in the castle, but he does not, he feels on familiar ground.
- Wonder at **the Lady's beauty**, at her attitude.
- **Shock** (not wonder) at the Green Chapel when he learns the truth.
- **No wonder about the giants** etc. that he has to fight, those are normal foes for an errant knight.

3. Gawain wondering in the film

- **A clueless character** who wonders at everything he sees outside the familiar world of Camelot: the battlefield, Winifred, the giants, the Lady...
- A second Perceval wondering about the world he is discovering.

II. Wandering and wondering as lack of control

A. The wandering knight in an unknown and threatening envrnmt he does not control

Losing sight of known landmarks, he finds himself in a world where he no longer has any reference points.

- In the **film**, the human figure is quite small in the immense landscape
- Logres vs Wales and the Wirral (poem, not in the translation).
- Gawain **asking for his way**, in the poem (nobody can tell him where the chapel is), in the film (they trick and attack him)
- The **unfamiliar landscape: tangled vegetation of the forest** in the poem, hiding the castle (?) / wide expanses of the film.
- The **unfamiliar weather** (especially poem).

Man is at home in a city, in a civilized place. The **outside world is threatening.**

B. Gawain has lost his bearings in the unusual surroundings into which he has wandered

1. Gawain does not control his adventure.

- A degree of lack of control is normal in a romance: the knight encounters marvels, strange customs. But this is an extreme case.
- Gawain does not know where he is going (in the poem only).
- The adventure is not a fight but allowing himself to be killed without defending himself.
- He is **tricked into the game** of the Exchange of Winnings, which he does not control either.
- In the poem, the **real test** is not at the Green Chapel but **in the bedroom scenes**, and he has not been warned of it.

2. Wondering in strange situations should not lead to moral uncertainty. His compass should be the qualities embodied by the pentangle.

- Gawain doesn't know how to behave in some situations (especially in the film, also moments of doubt when tempted by the Lady + when he accepts the girdle)
- They are not easy to reconcile together in unexpected situations (courtesy to the Lady and loyalty to the Lord, loyalty to both Lady and Lord...)
- He loses sight of them (cf. the oxymora, lilly layne = when accept the girdle and to conceal this fact from Bertilac, etc.)
- In a world of wonders, the errant knight is **out of his depth** and this is normal.
- **Following the chivalric code enables Gawain to be somewhat in control:** he defeats the various foes, he knows what to answer the Lady.
- Other knights have more uncontrollable trials to face: in a given castle, one should not ask a given question; in another castle, one *should* ask a given question (Perceval).

The puppet show= **Gawain as a puppet for Morgan in both poem and film** = **Morgan : puppeteer**

C. An experience shared with the audience

Wondering, perhaps also wandering, for the reader of the medieval text+ for the viewer of the film on a medieval subject

- Wandering into a new world alongside the errant knight

- Wondering about the strange events narrated
- Wondering about one's possible attitude in the same situation

A normal part of the reading/film experience, or a bit more here?

The reader as puppet for the author who leads him astray

III. A learning experience

A. Letting go as the first step towards a new understanding of reality.

Before you can learn something new, you need to let go of previous certainties.

- Gawain's failure to launch in the film: he has everything to learn and he needs to leave the protecting world of Camelot in order to become a man= an extreme case.
- In the poem also, **learning can only happen away from familiar landmarks.**
- Gawain in the poem **needs to let go of his certainties about his perfection.**

B. Education through wandering and wondering.

- Extreme situations, only possible through taking Gawain away from the places and people he knows.
- **Each encounter is a test**, that highlights Gawain's virtues (in the poem, up to the third bedroom scene) or his shortcomings (in the film, up to the third blow).
- **Learning through one's failures** (the green girdle in the poem, all Gawain's misdemeanours in the film) **and uncertainty.**

C. A story of initiation about the nature of man

- In the poem: **man is fallible** and **certainties are an illusion**, a dangerous illusion that keeps man away from God.
- In the film: how to grow into a man