Trabajo Fin de Grado

Joseph Campbell’s “hero’s journey” and its applicability to Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

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Abstract

The purpose of the present paper is to define the concept of hero and the stages of the adventure described in Campbell’s work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) in order to consider its applicability to the fourteenth century English romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

This essay will also include several considerations on the validity of Campbell’s Model in different manifestations of popular culture.

Key words: Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, The Hero’s Journey, Archetypes, Hero.

El propósito de este documento es definir el concepto de héroe y las etapas de la aventura descritas en el trabajo de Campbell, *El Héroe de las Mil Caras* (1949) y aplicarlo al romance inglés del siglo catorce *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Este ensayo también incluye varias consideraciones sobre la validez del modelo de Campbell en diferentes manifestaciones de cultura popular.

Palabras clave: Joseph Campbell, *El Héroe de las Mil Caras Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, El viaje del héroes, Arquetipos, héroes.
1. Introduction

Since the dawn of humankind, human beings have always been looking for their way to succeeding in history: A way to survive when they were not too much different from predators. Truly fascinating is how they had to provide for a family, to take control over the things that terrified them and find a way to create a stable society. From the very beginning, the earliest tribal societies have been ruled by a council of elders, a gifted warlord or a Druid endowed with special skills, predictive powers, proven value, strategic wisdom, knowledge of herbal medicine, etc. Populations regard those distinguished members as guides for matters that they might not understand. “When a person becomes a model for other people’s lives, he has moved into the sphere of being mythologized” (Campbell & Moyers, 1988: 15). The acceptation and attribution of admiring virtues to an entity give hope. During the ages, not only divine symbols but, the human imagination also has provided men with the necessary hope to make progress or to fight for a cause.

The purpose of this TFG\(^1\) is to present Campbell’s hero’s journey (described in his work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*\(^2\)) and its applicability to the fourteenth English romance *SGGK*\(^3\). I will also intend to convey the possible match between Campbell’s model and a character that despite belonging to the 14\(^{th}\) century, even today arouses interest in both students and scholars.

This theory reinforces the importance of the hero as a collectively inherited model of social virtues; many heroes’ morals and behavior archetypes are considered still as relevant. The figure of the hero is something that grows up with us, as part of our society (and of the profitable popular culture). It is present in books, films, comics, video games, clothes and even in cartoons. As we change our likes, we contribute creating a tendency, and this is present with the models we chose to follow. If Sir Gawain’s adventures were written today, they would hardly get a great reception if he were not in a TV series or played by a handsome actor, with surprising stunts, some CGIs, and soft sex. In summary, the hero is an element that 1. Is present in our society (and you can choose one according to your likes or independently

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\(^1\) This end of bachelor degree project will be referred to as TFG.
\(^2\) *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* will appear by its initials when it refers to the book (*HWTF*).
\(^3\) *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* will appear by its initials when it refers to the romance (*SGGK*).
of your age) and 2. It catalyzes elements and behaviors that a given audience like or consider appropriate.

Joseph Campbell published *HWTF* in 1949. This book presents the theory of how, despite the existence of so many different cultures, their tales share common features: how the hero endures all quests and how the narration often has a cyclic form with differentiated stages. What makes this journey such an arduous duty? Where is the border between an ordinary person and a legendary figure? One acceptable answer could be the succession of significant achievements that the subject realizes and how the hero accomplishes his quest.

Through this research, I also intend to hint at how archetypes can be a cohesive element; I want to manifest how a structure harmonizes with genres from different periods. It is used seven centuries later with a few modifications and is still successful (and not only in commercial terms). Campbell’s theory has enlightened new generations. His work can be a useful didactic resource as well as a basis for future writers. From the biggest Hollywood’s productions to the shortest tale, there is a reason to start with an adventure; a story that (either original or adapted) makes us escape from all what is fixed and encourages us to trespass this threshold that terrifies us. The content changes but the essences remain in the form of structure and archetypes. The chassis is as old as humankind tales are but the imagination continually adds new protagonists that have to walk the same steps again and again.

To conclude, I have to emphasize that my most personal enthusiasm will not be avoided during this TFG, every character mentioned has taught me something. I am aware how lucky am I to have had access to different resources during my childhood that approached me to those legends and somehow they aided me to configure the basis of the theory that I am going to develop on the following pages. I grew up among Jules Verne’s collection of books and *Star Wars*’ video tapes: Part of my summer evenings are still in the *Nautilus* and *in a galaxy far far away*. So it is my pleasure to deepen into these symbols, which even after decades still have our interest and attention.

The layout of this TFG will be the following: methodology, Joseph Campbell’s biography and background, the importance of archetypes, a brief description of *SGGK* and finally the contrastive analysis: the comparison between the romance and the relevant pattern will be illustrated. Finally, a conclusion will be given as well as some appropriate assessments.
concerning the hero’s evolution, its modern features and its impact on the media and cinema in particular.

2. Methodology

This TFG chiefly consists of a documented analysis focused on the narrative cyclic pattern defined in Campbell’s work\(^4\). To explain the stages of this, I will use a literary character that I have studied during my degree: Sir Gawain in \(SGGK\). The heroic deeds of this knight\(^5\) narrated in this fourteenth century romance deal mostly with the pattern described by Campbell. The research will show to what extent \(SGGK\)’s parts adjust or differ from the hero’s journey, as described by the said author.

The analysis has pursued an inductive methodology since firstly the pattern elements selected will be defined and explained, taking into account different interpretations; then the examples will support the previous explanation. Examples will play a vital role in this TFG. As I have already stated, the structure developed in \(HWTF\) will be the basis of this research paper. To reinforce the thesis and to compare the stages of the hero's journey, quotations will be provided when necessary. For the sake of clarity, I will include the relevant lines both in Middle and Modern English. Only a few relevant diagrams will be present in the TFG plus an appendix of pictures.

Different points of view will be taken into account in the analysis and conclusion. Printed editions and web resources will back up the defense of my thesis as well. The parts such as the relevance of archetypal criticism, the profusion of archetypes in epic and adventure narrative, the justification, the most important aspects of \(SGGK\), will help the reader to create a previous perspective about the following parts of this TFG.

\(^4\) See figures 1 on page 15 (and in the appendix): The hero’s journey simplified pattern by Campbell.
\(^5\) Despite Campbell held an M.A. in Medieval Literature and his works show a wide number of remarkable characters from many locations and periods, Sir Gawain is not mentioned in \(The\ Hero\ with\ a\ Thousand\ Faces\). Nevertheless some appreciations about Gawain’s fear of death in \(SGGK\) can be found in \(The\ Power\ of\ the\ Myth\).
3. Joseph Campbell

Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) was an American author and scholar best known for his work in the field of comparative mythology and folklore. He was born in New York City in 1904, in the bosom of an Irish Catholic family. His interest in mythology and folktales began at an early age. Campbell graduated from Canterbury School in New Milford, Connecticut in 1921, where he received his B.A. Later he transferred to Columbia University, where he excelled while specializing in medieval literature. After earning a B.A. from Columbia (1925), and receiving an M.A. (1927) for his work in Arthurian Studies, Campbell received a fellowship from Columbia to study in Europe. He spent a year in Paris and after that in Munich, where he studied how Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung used myth in psychology.

During the Great Depression, Campbell spent several years in Woodstock, where he initiated a rigorous independent study. During this interval, he settled the basis for his later investigation. After that gap in which Campbell focused mainly on readings about the classical period, Campbell became professor at Sarah Lawrence College (1934-1972). He married a former student. During those years, he dedicated part of his research to translate ancient works from India.

He retired from Sarah Lawrence College in 1972, to focus on writing. He was discovered by a new generation, especially when George Lucas based much of his screenplay for *Star Wars* (1977) in Campbell’s works. In 1987, Joseph Campbell died at his Honolulu home from some medical complications.

It was the publication of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* in 1949 what established Joseph Campbell as the most preeminent comparative mythologist of the Twentieth century. His lasting eminence owes much to his gifts as a public speaker; probably the most memorable contribution to Campbell’s career was made by way of television through the series *The Power of Myth* with Bill Moyers. These series were the beginning of the popularization of myths in popular culture. Campbell was awarded several prizes including several honorary doctorates. His activities in the field of research include seminars along the world. Campbell still stimulates debates among myth and folklore scholars. He defined a path that is followed continuously by those who analyze and create new stories.
Joseph Campbell represents a model of a man of letters himself. As a student of philology, he is an author who skillfully combines his passion for ancient myths and the history of tribal civilizations, showing a great eloquence on television broadcasts. His laudable determination explains the magnitude of his legacy that undoubtedly will be a reference for further generations.\footnote{Biography extracted from HWTF (2008:415-416) and The Power of the Myth, and Joseph Campbell Foundation in the internet.}

4. The Relevance of Archetypes

Archetypes\footnote{Carl Jung was the creator of the concept “Jungian Archetype”. This can be defined as elements (like the mother or the evil) that are concretized in basic images and repeated again and again. Those images depend on history, culture and personal context.} are elements reproduced through time with none or few modifications; they are present in the majority of epic narrations\footnote{Not only epic narrations match with Campbell’s pattern. Other literary genres, like tales, also might share some stages.}. Campbell’s works guide the reader in order to understand how common features, such as thoughts, duty, honor, etc. typically converge on a single character. The sum of a set of characteristics distinguishes an ordinary personage from a historical figure\footnote{See appendix figures 2 and 3: 2.Saint George as the archetypal model of hero: The knight that rescues the princess in distress killing the dragon. 3. Sigurd: Legendary hero of Norse mythology and main protagonist in ballads and sagas.}.

What are archetypes? They are elementary ideas […] All over the world and at different times of human history, these archetypes, or elementary ideas, have appeared in different costumes. The differences in the costumes are the results of environment and historical conditions. (Campbell & Moyers, 1988: 51-52).

This TFG has as one core element: HWTF, where we identify a representative structuralism since it builds on the steps in a narrative work. To detect and differentiate the steps on the hero’s journey, Campbell firstly researched among the first myths and folk stories about the origins, looking for different versions of the same achievement (archetypes in various world regions). He studied Sanskrit to have access to Indian stories; he had a first-hand experience with the very first manuscripts of the humankind. Campbell wanted to discover by himself the original didactic approaches of the myths and start linking recurring concepts (like universal patterns of behaviors): “They come from every culture but with timeless themes” (Campbell & Moyers, 1988: 11)
Campbell was careful when he chose the examples to support his work. The archetypes are closely linked to mythology; they share purposes as the explanation of spiritual goals and abstract concepts that are not easily understood. Myths and epic feats can be traced in every single text; as Cristopher Wrigley claims “The structure of Sir Gawain is the structure of a very ancient myth” (1988: 128)

In this TFG, several archetypes will be cited showing their relevance to SGGK. The reader might be familiarized with some archetypal elements. Sagas, poems, and epic novels usually have a profusion of archetypical elements, but some are more popular than others. This might be due to how the author adapts some narrative elements to the values on its context and how well the audiences receive it. “The relations between the various items of the story may be the ones of parallelism, apposition, inversion, equivalence, and so on; and as long as this structure of internal relations remains intact, the individual units are replaceable” (Eagleton, 1983: 96)

Archetypes are also present in biographies and chronicles. These written sources built around real characters or historical events were also carefully designed to exalt and praise admirable feats performed by the central protagonist. The reasons why one human being becomes an acclaimed hero are also repeated not only in the primal civilizations but along history till nowadays. Both fictional characters and real ones share deeds. In the book *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, we read about archetypes of transformation and redemption:

The quest: The hero (savior, deliverer) undertakes some long journey during which he or she must perform impossible tasks […] Initiation: The hero undergoes a series of excruciating ordeals […] The sacrificial scapegoat: The hero… must die to atone for the people’s sins and restore the land to fruitfulness (Guerin et al, 1994: 154)

Up to now I have described the path of the hero and its archetypical nature. Campbell went beyond this, introducing a more accurate research: A pattern consolidated by years of study of documented legacy. Campbell’s structure supports and simplifies the plot of all kinds of traditions\(^\text{10}\), and I would also say that he defines the core to create an absorbing story since it adds different reasons to intrigue the reader.

\(^{10}\) Campbell’s *Hero’s Journey* was criticized by some detractors and stigmatized as ethnocentric deconstruction of world’s cultures.
5. **Sir Gawain and the Green Knight**

Sir Gawain is a prominent character from the Arthurian legends that contributed to foster notions of British nationalism. “The poem becomes a celebration of Christian knightly virtue. As such, it honors the House of Arthur, of which Gawain is a member, and the Britain which counted Arthur as its tutelary national hero” (Stone, 1974: 15). *SGGK* remains an anonymous poem, which was composed in Middle English sometime in the second half of the fourteenth century.

From a general perspective, *SGGK* could be placed right between the first mythological heroes and their modern counterparts. Sir Gawain’s values, skills, story, and his courtesy are noteworthy for all generations. He is not a mere warrior, but a king’s knight. The medieval ritual of being knighted\(^{11}\) involves an elaborate list of duties and honors.

Whatever the circumstances, and whoever he deals with, Gawain is always courteous, a term of complex meaning which includes most of the virtues recognized by medieval aristocratic Christian society as we see it in the poem. The courteous man is noble, religious, decent, graceful, eloquent, compassionate, humble, grave; he is capable of both love and chastity. (Stone, 1974: 19-20)

The choice of this character is not random at all, as it was mentioned at the beginning of this TFG; *SGGK* has been part of my syllabus. It is not difficult to become familiarized with the character\(^ {12}\) or the story, furthermore, in the story we find: 1\(^{st}\) A hero proving his value on behalf of the King; and 2\(^{nd}\): A story that turns into a quest with different passages: “A cyclical sense of history as well as of the cycles of seasons of the year, the generations of humankind, and of individual lives runs through *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*” (Greenblatt, 2006: 184)\(^ {13}\)

The second and most important point in the choice of Sir Gawain is his nature: Sir Gawain is not the son of the divine, he has not supernatural skills, and he is not immortal, so his charisma resides in his virtuosity as human. All the tasks he must face will be without any magical support; furthermore, even the magical beings and the spells that are present in the

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\(^{11}\) See appendix , figure 4: Edmund Blair’s *Accolade*

\(^{12}\) Gawain is a medieval knight from a Western European country. Possibly his portrait and archetypal feats will be similar to others European warriors.

\(^{13}\) The *Norton Anthology of English Literature* describes Sir Gawain’s story as cyclical as well as Campbell does with his patterns. There is a hint that the comparison between the primary resources will mostly match.
poem, remain in the same dimension: Wizards, dragons, monsters, witches will have overwhelming skills but not omnipotence. They are under universal-unbreakable rules such as gravity, time, and space. The reader might sympathize quickly with a human hero, whose extraordinary skills can be reached and his saga could become a symbol, instead of a demigod whose sphere always would be more abstract and out of humanity’s reach.

The third point deals with the weight that the image of the knight has in all cultures. Even when these characters are not equally described or they do not share the same values, they were the symbols of the past. Some of them like The Cid, Richard I Lionheart, Charlemagne, Gediminas, or Vlad Tepes\(^\text{14}\) among others, were European kings, rulers, and leaders depicted as knights/warriors; many of them helped to draft the borders that we know nowadays. All the historical documentation that we have about the great past that they started depicts them dressed in armor, wielding a sword. Some of them were real humans that inspired novels and literature through the greatness of their actions. The role of ruler, explorer, conqueror or man of arms implies particular actions that in literature are embellished with precise narration techniques and magnification. Primal and medieval adventures take elements of fiction, but other factors and items modify the archetype: The heroic knight does not only rescue the damsel in distress but proves his honor, skills, and loyalty. The times change and so does literature and the characters. New morals and standards are expected from an acclaimed symbol, whether he or she belongs to a fictional or real world, they have to be models for a society avid for stories and action.

\textit{SGGK} is a poem that is classified according to what we call the matter of Britain. It is the last of four poems that survives in one single manuscript, the \textit{Cotton Nero A.x}. It also includes three religious narrative poems that share some features:

None of the poems has a title in the manuscript, but it is generally assumed that they share a common author if not a common subject, theme, or line of development. Pearl, Cleanness (Or purity), Patience and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight are also central to what has been seen as an ‘alliterative revival’ which took place in the literature produced in northern ad north-western England from c.1350 (Sanders, 2004: 42)

The poem is one of the most famous Arthurian stories. The plot combines some folk myths such as the beheading game. “The theme of the beheading match occurs first in a

\(^{14}\) In order of appearance these are historical characters from Castilla, Britain, France, Lithuania and Romania.
Middle Irish prose narrative called *Fled Bricrend*, `Bricriu’s Feast’; the earliest manuscript dates from about 1100, but the story is evidently much older” (Tolkien & Gordon, 1967: XV). The posterior consequences are related to the importance of the communal values of the chivalric world. One of those values is described by Burrow, and might be interpreted as the importance of sacrifice in the quest.

Sir Gawain is a poem about a test, or rather a series of tests. One could say that every story inevitably tests its hero in some sense – brings out some quality in him or at least requires him to exercise some mental or physical faculty… We must feel that the hero is subjected to difficulties contrived in such a way as to try him out (Burrow, 1965:160)

During the quest, Gawain’s chivalry, loyalty and attitudes will have to be proved. The poem is divided into four fits that narrate the following events:

**Fit I** (ll. 1 – 490): The story takes place on Camelot’s court. On New Year’s Day, a mysterious rider armored and all in green breaks into the celebration. This massive figure disrupts the festival atmosphere, and peace is menaced: The beauty, the way of life and the morals. The being carries an ax that threatens death. The challenge implies to Sir Gawain, the young nephew of King Arthur, to accept the consequences of the game: In a year and a day he must find the Green Knight and to receive the hit back. “The hero, Arthur’s nephew, responds to a tall, strange, singing a knight’s challenge to a beheading game with a year’s interval and receives a harmless return blow when the stranger returns to court” (Miller & Chance,1986:72)

**Fit II** (ll. 491 – 1125): Ten months later, Gawain rides Gringolet and goes north looking for the Green Chapel. Close to the date of his appointment, he is invited by the lord of a nearby castle. The Lord proposes Gawain to rest. During his stay, he is entertained and sexually tempted by the lord’s wife. At the end of each day, they feast and exchange their gifts.

**Fit III** (ll. 1126 – 1997): Lord Bertilak continues hunting: deer, boar, and fox are the preys. During the time spent at the castle, the host’s wife in three visits attempts his chastity, but Gawain remains pure and does not yield to it. He only takes her girdle due to the protective powers and conceals it.
Fit IV (ll. 1998 – 2531): At the Green Chapel, the Green Knight is awaiting him. Sir Gawain receives three feinted blows, just nicking his neck with the third stroke. The Green Knight reveals his identity and explains him why he did not take his head. His behavior saved his life; just the girdle can be considered a failure since Gawain did not report him about it. Finally, Gawain returns to Camelot where, after hearing his story, his peers consider his actions as honorable, and he is worthy of the Round Table.

6. Campbell’s pattern in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Once, Joseph Campbell was asked by Bill Moyers to explain the primary purpose and the reason of the name *HWTF* and the thesis developed in its pages. He answered:

Because there is a certain typical hero sequence of actions which can be detected in stories from all over the world and from many periods of history. Essentially, it might even be said there is but one archetypal mythic hero whose life has been replicated in many lands by many, many people. A legendary hero is usually the founder of something – the founder of a new age, the founder of a new religion, the founder of a new city, the founder of a new way of life. In order to found something new, one has to leave the old and go in quest of the seed idea, a germinal idea that will have the potentiality of bringing forth that new thing. (Campbell & Moyers, 1988: 136)

After reading *SGGK*, we might conclude that a division consisting of introduction, development, climax, and conclusion is too poor, especially in a romance replete with symbolism and dualism. Campbell defined the hero’s journey as a cyclic pattern\(^{15}\) consisting on seventeen stages. The steps described by Campbell sometimes are just a guideline since many differences are accepted (e.g. the stages can be present in a different order to that described by the author). Campbell was aware of that possibility:

Many tales isolates and greatly enlarge upon one or two of the typical elements of the full cycle (test motif, flight motif, abduction of the bride) others string a number of independent cycles into become fused. Or a single element can reduplicate itself and reappear under many changes (Campbell, 2008: 212)

\(^{15}\) Campbell’s Hero’s Journey is the only pattern considered in this TFG. Later developments were published remaking the original model: David Adams Leeming in 1981, Cristopher Vogler in 1985 and 2007 (He reduced to 12 stages as a Disney studio memo) and Phil Coisenau in 1990.
Although the pattern is a priori easy to understand, some stages might require a few clarifications. Stages like “The Belly of the Wale” or “Sacred Marriage” require interpretation since they have symbolic names or are ambiguous. Not all the characters have been swallowed by a whale or have had a sacred marriage with a divinity, it can be metaphorical, for example, it would depend on what we consider for sacred or if a marriage is under the same social conventions.

Another point to take into account is that the stages can be adapted: the author or director has the last word in the creation and extension of the work. Many narrations start in media res, embed some parts and omit or extend others. In the analysis, we are going to focus on SGGK; nevertheless, if other works are relevant, they will be related to the heroic stages described by Campbell.

The steps that every hero has to get over, with divine boost or without it, with previous preparation or without it, are marked by the progressive difficulty and intrigue that is found in their way. This path begins to be discovered once the hero accepts his fate and his role in the quest. Everything starts with the call to adventure. Commonly, a problem is the motive of our feat: from brawls between goods, beasts that devastate a community or damsels in distress, there are many classic startings for a story.

The character that will become the legend is usually convinced by someone to take part in an adventure. Those characters, who invite the hero to be enrolled, seem to be concerned and aware of the real meaning of experience, perhaps due to they experienced it time ago.

The beginner navigates in deep and turbulent waters. Once his destiny gives the impression of being unavoidable, the hero is forced to go beyond his limits (physical and psychological) and trespass a frontier that was never trespassed before. To overcome the inherent fear of the unknown is the first step in a different world where even survival can be a hard task to accomplish. Usually, the adventure is the pursuit of a single task, but during the development of the story, there is a considerable avalanche of horrors. The simplicity turns into an ordeal which demands the hero’s efforts and possibly the requirement of more than one heroic performance.

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16 Many heroes were swallowed by a monster but most probably the stage name is from the Biblical episode of the prophet Jonah who was swallowed by a whale and spent three days and three nights in its belly.
After possible drawbacks or painful defeats, the experience achieved will lead our hero to face his real destiny: The final Armageddon, the mother of all battles where only one can be victorious. Sometimes this last trial may be something less aggressive: A revelation, a rescue or just a return.

Finally, the hero, one way or another, comes back to his origins. He spreads the vital knowledge learned during his or her experience and fixes what was broken. There is a vast number of endings, but here I will focus on the most plausible ones.

The parts considered for the contrastive analysis have been organized according to *HWTF* chapters and the cycle above. Some stages (following a criterion of extension and relevance) will be embedded or presented within the same section. The classification of *SGGK*’s parts will be developed as follows: *Call to Adventure, Refusal to Call, Supernatural Aid, Crossing of the Threshold and The Road of Trials, The Belly of the Whale, The Meeting with the Goddess and Woman as a the Temptress, Atonement with the Father, Apotheosis and Ultimate Boon, Refusal of the Return, Magic Flight* and a final part composed by *Crossing of Return Threshold, Master of two Worlds and Freedom to Live.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Hero With a Thousand Faces’ stage described:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sir Gawain and The Green Knight</strong></th>
<th><strong>Comment</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Call to Adventure</td>
<td>(ll. 37 - 129) (ll. 232 - 416)</td>
<td>Introduction: Camelot is feasting. The Green Knight provocations disturb the peace. The beheading game is proposed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Refusal of the Call</td>
<td>(ll. 487 - 490) (ll. 534 - 535)</td>
<td>Gawain does not respond immediately to the call. The Knight code impedes a clear denial. Sir Gawain just expresses some negative feelings about the fateful destiny.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Supernatural Aid</td>
<td>(ll. 567 - 667) (ll. 1846 - 1875)</td>
<td>The armor and the shield belong to the normal world and Lady’s gift is obtained in the magic world. The presence of the Virgin Mary as protective divinity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Crossing the Threshold + 5. Road of Trials</td>
<td>(ll. 670 - 712) (ll. 713 - 739)</td>
<td>Gawain has to cope with solitude in Wirral forest. He is hungry and cold. Some monsters marked the first steps into the magical world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The Belly Of the Whale</td>
<td>(ll. 835 - 1079)</td>
<td>His first failure is the procrastination in his mission. Bertilak’s Castle seems to be a rest place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Meeting with the Goddess + 8. Woman as the Temptress</td>
<td>(ll. 1178 - 1319) (ll. 1476 - 1557) (ll. 1758 - 1796)</td>
<td>The role of the evil goddess is played by Morgan le Fay: She is the architect of the sophistry. The Virgin Mary is the protective goddess and the Lady of the Castle is the temptress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Atonement with the Father</td>
<td>(l. 86) (ll. 279 - 282) (ll. 2393 - 2394)</td>
<td>Bertilak is an authoritative paternal figure, especially when he takes care of Gawain and forgives him; Gawain on the other hand has to kill the child inside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Refusal Return</td>
<td>(ll. 2400 - 2412)</td>
<td>Bertilak’s return proposal is dismissed. Gawain belongs to Camelot and he returns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Rescue from Without</td>
<td>(ll. 1768 - 1769) (ll. 737-739)</td>
<td>The Virgin Mary’s divine intervention saves Gawain in the worst moment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hero’s Journey Stages applied to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

**DEPARTURE**

**The Call to Adventure**

According to Campbell, the world is divided into two parts: The ‘world’ that we already know (The first half of the sphere). There, all is charming, under control and marked by our daily routine. Your house, your castle, Camelot as well is in this ‘world’. The character is used to the current situation, maybe because he has grown up among the walls of the castle or due to the long time that has passed from the last struggle in which his participation was required. A dull environment marked by the absence of any news is often present. A character swamped in monotony, losing interest in honor codes and chivalry, just spending time on ordinary activities\(^\text{17}\). Eating and recalling a distant past, in the case of the ones that already have a warrior status, or just cultivating fields or praising for a better situation. Then we have the second half of the sphere: The unknown and uncharted area where all the nightmares originated. Only a few legends crossed that line and survived the dark realm.

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder (x): fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won (y): the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man (z) (Campbell, 2008: 23)

In agreement with *THWF*, a possible starting is a blunder that brings consequences. It could be an unfortunate encounter, the product of a prophecy that forecasts the rise of the chosen one, or it can also be similar to the beginning of some modern films: an all or nothing thrilling situation that leads to the unavoidable involvement of the character. Many times, those beginnings are ironic since anything is anticipated. The next quote is a paradigmatic call to adventure:

“...But I have no time to blow smoke-rings this morning. I am looking for someone to share in an adventure that I am arranging, and it is very difficult to find anyone.”

“I should think so - in these parts! We are plain quiet folk and have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! [...]” (Tolkien, 1975: 16)

We can read how an adventure is directly proposed. In this case, it is not a command or a compulsory recruitment. We have someone else seeking for a partner (and herald or

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\(^{17}\) See appendix, figure 5: The Hobbit (Jackson: 2012) A great example of ordinary character drawn into adventure.
mysterious figure), and then the call to adventure comes from somebody who probably is more experienced in this kind of enterprises. Other considerable calls to adventure are implicit in the circumstances in which something from beyond the 'ordinary world' trespasses the line and brings on chaos. Then there is no time to answer, and we are in front an unavoidable situation.18

Till here we draw that a blunder, situation or person requires presence and help. None or few details are given in advance, but the notion of adventure awakens the interest, especially irresistible fascination and inner thoughts of fear, especially the idea of separation. The real and wild world, the one mentioned in epic songs, where the action takes place, and the brave ones are forged, is ahead. When the call cannot be denied, then the expedition starts.

At the beginning of the poem, Sir Gawain, is just one more in King Arthur’s court, no particular attention is given to him. The kingdom, Camelot, is the dreamed place, the mecca of justice, where everything is festive and dull. The absence of action has become routine:

Rekenly of þe Rounde Table alle þo rich breþer,
With rych reuel ory3t and rechles merþes.19 (ll. 39-40)
Members rightly reckoned of the Round Table,
In splendid celebration, seemly and carefree

As we read, the situation is far away from a battlefield, threat or any action. These conditions might be truly vapid for a young man of arms. Jill Mann writes: “This has led some critics to see Arthur’s court as sunk in lethargy and decadence, content to rest on their laurels, and readier to pass the time in party games than in earning their reputation as fighting men” (Mann, 1994:108)

The court is celebrating New Year’s Day, but the joy is interrupted by a mysterious hulk. The presence of this rider evolves enigmatic senses. The dominant peculiarity is the color of its skin, clothes, and horse.

Wel gay watz þis gone gered in grene,
And þe here of his hed of his hors swete. (ll. 179-180)

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18 This notion of beginning is present in the most recent films since this way the time of narration can be reduced.
19 Middle English lines from SGGK will be from Tolkien & Gordon (1967). The translation is by Stone (1974). Other versions have been checked, but not used (Borroff, 1967).
Yes, garbed all in green was the gallant rider,
And the hair of his head was the same hue as his horse,

The green color symbolizes all that is strange and by extension from unknown origin. Feelings of menace and tension could be the reader’s natural reaction since these moments represent an intrusion of something completely alien to the ordinary world.

The immediate and obvious effect is to establish him as a supernatural creature of some kind. According to medieval tradition, the colour green was particularly favoured by such creatures. It was the colour of fairies, the colour of the dead and the colour of the devil (Burrow, 1965: 14)

The call to adventure comes from the Green Knight’s challenge: The beheading game\textsuperscript{20}. This game consists of giving a killer blow, beheading the opponent, and taking it back in one year and a day. The game is proposed to King Arthur:

\begin{quote}
Bot if þou be so bold as alle burnez tellen,
þou wyl grant me godly þe gomen þat I ask
bi ry3t.’ (ll. 272-274)
But if you are as bold as brave men affirm,
You will gladly grant me the good sport I demand
By right.’
\end{quote}

There are no doubts concerning the Green Knight’s provocative behavior. His intrusion disturbs everybody in Camelot.

\begin{quote}
Where is now your sourquydrye and your conqueres, (311)
Your gryndellayk and your greme, and your grete wordes? (312)
Has your pride disappeared? Your prowess gone?
Your victories, your valour, your vaunts, where are they?
\end{quote}

Greatness is personified in just one man that cannot deny the ‘game’. As an aftermath, this turns into a serious issue that must be solved by the court knights. It is mandatory to keep the peace in the kingdom, to deliver justice and to demonstrate loyalty at all costs, even when this meant to put one’s lives at risk. Sir Gawain, Arthur’s nephew, accepts the game in the place of the king. “Sir Gawain epitomizes this first blooming of Arthurian Chivalry and the reputation of court rests upon his shoulders” (Greenblatt, 2006:183)

\textsuperscript{20} See appendix, figure 6: The Beheading game
Gawain, who seemed an extra among the dinner guests, makes a show of courage and presents himself volunteer:

Gawan, þat sate bi þe quene,
To þe kyng he can enclyne:
'I beseche now with sa3ez sene
Þis melly mot be myne. (ll. 339-342)
Then Gawain at Guinevere’s side
Bowed and spoke his design:
‘Before all, King, confide
This fight to me. May it bee mine,’

Ne better bodyes on bent þer baret is rered.
I am þe wakkest, I wot, and of wyt feblest,
And lest lur of my lyf, quo laytes þe soþe – (ll. 253-355)
There being no braver knights when battle is joined.
I am the weakest, the most wanting in wisdom, I know,
And my life, if lost, would be least missed truly.

He accepts to play the game in order to save the court from dishonor and (probably) Arthur’s life too. “He has given his word, and the ‘renoun of þe Rounde Table’ depends upon his keeping it even in the face of what seems certain death” (Burrow 1965: 25-26). Such exhibition of willpower represents to enroll in an ordeal. All the eyes will be on him, if he dies, then it will be a worthy effort, but he will have fulfilled the oaths he has taken.

Refusal of the call

After the euphoria for the participation in the travel, doubts soon will be present. The turmoil could cause indecision in the character. On one hand, all that is familiar will be left behind; somehow it represents an appreciable commodity, rules, and the feeling that they will not see these things again. The homesickness and fear to the unknown mysteries catch our protagonist in a maelstrom of indecision, specifically when he must think about what his decisions will imply. Would he be ready to accomplish this task? To ponder the pros and the cons is something natural. People dread death and the possibility of end up in a grave. Due to
Sir Gawain’s knight status, refusal or deny is not contemplated, but he experiments fear and uncertainty.

Now þenk wel, Sir Gawan,
For woþe þat þou ne wonde
Þis auenture for to frayn
Þat þou hatz tan on honde. (ll 486-490)
Now Gawain give a thought,
Lest peril make you pause
In seeking out the sport
That you have claimed as yours.

Þen þenkkez Gawan ful sone
Of his anious uyage. (ll. 534-535)
And Gawain considered soon
The fell he must fare

The unfavorable odds of the beheading game do not give too many hopes to our hero. This game implies some conditions; the Green Knight remains alive even after Gawain’s blow, so it means that the agreement involves the despair of Gawain. “Unlike Beowulf’s fights, and like a game, Gawain’s adventure is governed by specially agreed rules” (Burrow, 1965:21)

Despite the fact that there are no implicit references to denial, there are some hints to an unusual and gloomy mood. This point simply implies humanity and common sense; he is young and quite inexperienced, so there are many similarities with other characters²¹. He is doubtful about the accomplishment of the duty, but not about if he will be able to do it or not. “Not all who hesitate are lost” (Campbell, 1965: 53) He is not a proven battle commander, but the current situation indicates that if he returns triumphantly, finally his achievement will be widely recognized, the bards will sing songs in Camelot’s streets ant the most significant reward: ovation and the king’s approval.

²¹ In modern narrations and films the possibility to abandon the mission is often not contemplated. This is a parallelism with some horror movies and adventure movies in which the mankind is at risk.
The next quotation from *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977). It is film that firmly follows Campbell’s hero’s journey, shows how the protagonist, Luke, a farmer from a remote planet, demonstrates a strong opposition to any adventure despite the dull routine in which he is trapped (Like Gawain in Camelot) and the lack of hope:

Luke Skywalker: Look, I can't get involved. I've got work to do. It's not that I like the Empire; I hate it, but there's nothing I can do about it right now... It's all such a long way from here. (*Star Wars*, 1977)

**Supernatural Aid**

The most courageous ones that accept the upcoming adversity have to be prepared if they want to survive once they get into the heart of darkness and the mysterious ways that the adventure offers to those intrepid souls. As a climber prepares the expedition, the hero, not only might be talented (if not, then he could be trained by a helper or mentor) in the use of abilities that will be required, but a tool or artifact will help or will be useful to a certain point of the story. Nowadays, some action movies seem to have reduced the relevance of the aid to an unusual profusion of firearms, but if we focused on the ancient literature we should differentiate into two possible kinds of aid.

Magic or supernatural powers are bestowed by the superior entity (usually a god) to accomplish the task. In this group, we could say that we have the archetype of ‘*The chosen one*’ or somebody touched by the divine. Ordinary people cannot control those powers: Wizards, witches, demigods, fairies, ghouls, vampires, the undead, immortal beings and many other monsters of the deep have those kinds of skills. They are exceptional in force, size, life, and the rules of nature cannot be applied. Some of the mentioned fantastic creatures have the ability to transfer the power, like the werewolf’s curse. It is common that the divine aid makes the receiver harder to be killed. In this group, we should also include traditional tools, objects with particular or supposed magic features and different gadgets of weapons. Swords like King Arthur’s Excalibur, Gandalf’s Glamdring, medicines like potions, armors that

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22 See appendix, figure 7: Luke Skywalker. The force is strong in this young hero.

23 *The Chosen one*: This archetype is present on many popular narrations and films. To be the *Chosen One* means to deal with a compulsory mission, often with the aid of some kind of unnoticed powers. This archetype is usually presented with another archetype ‘*The Prophecy*’: Then herohood is predestined, rather than simply achieved.

24 See appendix, figure 8: Excalibur: the sword in the stone. The power of Excalibur is associated with the sovereignty of Great Britain.
belonged to somebody extraordinary, special bullets, jewels like the Sorcerer’s Stone, rings, lamps, books of enchantments\textsuperscript{25}, etc. The enumeration of artifacts could be a never-ending list. The archetypes manifest that some elements will be more recurrent than others, but mostly all provide the owner with characteristics and power that he never had before.

On the other hand, we have ‘standard aid’. This kind of help is not abstract, and it is easily identifiable. In this second type, swords are not made of special steel nor do shine when foes are close, and they do not spread terror\textsuperscript{26}. In other words, it is not stuck in the stone, nor the hero needs to take it from a dragon’s cavern, but only to buy it from the blacksmith. It is well known that a Knight used to wear heavy armor\textsuperscript{27} “a medieval knight was in origin a soldier rich enough to possess a horse and to be able to equip himself with the armour and weapons appropriate to a mounted warrior” (Sanders, 2004: 38)

In this second classification, I might include weapons, military armament, vehicles, clothes, etc. The ‘standard aid’ becomes truly representative when the gifted character uses that kind of tools cunningly (like the use of Ariadne threat in the Myth of Theseus and the Minotaur or Indiana Jones’s whip). Nevertheless, even a conventional instrument can be iconic and famous as any kind of magic. This is the kind of aid predominant on SGGK. Our volunteer needs equipment to venture into the unknown world. He must find the Green Chapel where the Green Knight will return the blow. While he is being armed, particular attention is paid to the symbols on his shield\textsuperscript{28}: The Virgin Mary and her Child depicted in the inner side, and a golden Pentangle on a field of red on the front side.

\begin{quote}
At þis cause þe knyȝt comlyche hade
In þe inore half of his schelde hir ymage depaynted,
Þat quen he blusched þerto his belde neuer payred. (ll. 648-650)
\end{quote}

Accordingly the courteous knight had that queen’s image

\begin{quote}
Etched on the inside of his armoured shield,
So that when he beheld her, his heart did not fail.
\end{quote}

The shield’s pentangle points refer to the qualities wherein he far excelled other knights. Those are Gawain’s distinguishing mark; he has never failed at displaying those virtues:

\textsuperscript{25} See appendix, figure 9: The Book of the Dead from the Mummy (Sommers, 1999)
\textsuperscript{26} See for example: Valyrian steel swords like Longclaw in Game of Thrones, Sting in The Hobbit, and Deimos’ sword in Greek mythology.
\textsuperscript{27} See appendix, figure 10 and 11: 10 Sir Gawain and Gringolet. 11. The Green Knight.
\textsuperscript{28} See appendix, figure 12: Gawain’s shield
The pentangle is by no means a one sided symbol as it is loaded with ancient connotations. The other references to his armament are his sword and spear, but not many details are given. A horse named Gringolet is also mentioned, completing his battle kit. We notice that Gawain’s equipment belongs to the normal world, but is exclusive. His shield is genuine. He is not going to swing a flaming sword or a magic amulet. His youth, strength, determination and skillful use of his resources will be his best chance to reach his destiny in time.

Nevertheless, the pentangle is by no means a one sided symbol as it is loaded with ancient connotations. The other references to his armament are his sword and spear, but not many details are given. A horse named Gringolet is also mentioned, completing his battle kit. We notice that Gawain’s equipment belongs to the normal world, but is exclusive. His shield is genuine. He is not going to swing a flaming sword or a magic amulet. His youth, strength, determination and skillful use of his resources will be his best chance to reach his destiny in time.

Now grayþed is Gawan gay,
And la3t his launce ry3t þore,
And gef hem alle goud day,
He wende for euermore. (ll. 666-669)

Now Gawain was ready and gay;
His spear he promptly caught
And gave them all good day
For ever, as he thought

INITIATION
The Crossing of the First Threshold and the Road of Trials

The hero’s first steps lead him to a zone of magnified power. This action is a prolog to the next trials. Many things will seem an illusion, but they are part of a dangerous environment, in other words, he becomes the prey in a savage world. “The youth leaves the fun and fellowship of Camelot behind him and goes alone into the winter wilderness to keep a bizarre compact which must, it seems, cost his life” (Wrigley, 1988:128)
At this point, we find the first deviation from Campbell’s pattern: The figure of the helper is, from now, absent. Neither a squire nor guide accompanies him or gives any advice. According to Campbell’s pattern, a helper should be introduced before the hero ventures into the unknown world. Somehow he has a guardian: the Virgin Mary to whom he is devoted; his faith in her goodness is his main moral support\(^{29}\). He must defy his destiny alone. This solitude hints at a high probability of disaster; however, Sir Gawain faces every hostile creature he finds at Wirral forest being victorious in all events without any assistance. He is not on a battlefield in which strategy and the number of soldiers win wars; this is a fight for surveillance in which his aims to remain alive are the truly decisive factor. The romance adds action, as miraculous tests take part in the narration:

> Sumwhyle wyth wodwos, þat woned in þe knarrez,
> Boþe wyth bullez and berez, and borez oþerquyle,
> And etayneþ, þat hym aneled of þe he3e felle;
> Nade he ben du3ty and dry3e, and Dry3tyn had serued,
> Douteles he hade ben ded and dreped ful ofte. (ll. 721-725)

He had death-struggles with dragons. Did battle with wolves,
Warred with wild men who dwelt among the crags,
Battled with bulls and bears and boars at other times,
And ogres that panted after him on the high fells.
Had not been doughty in endurance and dutiful to God,
Doubtless he would have been done to death time and again.

It might seem that the struggles that take place in the forest are not deeply detailed. Those battles are initial ‘tests’. Gawain is not armored just to ride Gringolet, find the Green Chapel and kneel to wait for his fate. This way, it would be too simple. To fulfill the oath made to the Green Knight implies unexpected setbacks.

**The Belly of the Whale**

The dreadful regions of the unknown are not just a succession of monsters of the deep. Those environments discourage those who walk along these paths, especially when the victory seems out of any chance. Campbell explains this stage in the following way: “The

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\(^{29}\) Olivares Merino has fully developed this issue (1998:313-327)
Hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died” (Campbell, 2008: 74)

Jonah30, Finn McCool, and Herakles among others, were swallowed by a sea monster31. It did not mean their death; as much as they were close to it, and then finally survived. In the case of Jonah, the whale was sent by God, opposite to Finn McCool and Herakles whale monster which was a beast from the magic realm. The whale is a representative colossal beast from the depths of the ocean that represents an unimaginable power that with all the odds will defeat, kill or severely injure the character. In other words, this is the first serious setbacks that hinder the hero. In the case of SGGK, the quest is not endangered by any King Monster. Similar to Ulysses in Circe’s castle32 this part could match with Gawain’s stay at Hautdesert Castle: Gawain (despite not being injured or attacked) is close to death. Furthermore the date of the meeting is at hand and Gawain seems to be forgetful about it. The reason why the stay can be considered a failure is mainly that Gawain’s pause in the mission triggered another set of trials.

He sayde, '3e ar welcum to welde as yow lykez
Pat here is; al is yowre awen, to haue at yowre wylle
and welde.' (ll. 835- 837)
‘You are welcome to dwell here as you wish,’ he said
‘Treat everything as your own, and have what you please
In this place.’

Gawain is within the walls of a castle again, where everybody is feasting and in a good mood (just like Camelot Court was described at the very beginning of the romance). Gawain is praised and well attended, but far from his real objective: The meeting at the Green Chapel.

Þe grene chapayle vpon grounde greue yow no more;
Bot 3e schal be in yowre bed, burne, at þyn ese, (ll.1070-1071)
Give yourself no more grief for the Green Chapel’s whereabout,
For you may lie back in your bed, brave man, at ease

The happy atmosphere described, the comfortable bed, the attentions received are opposite to the idea of a hard and long quest. Other possible interpretations for this part are...
present both in literature and films when the helper or protagonist’s friend dies. The death of a character reminds that they crossed the line. The danger can come from unexpected places or persons (even the friends with which they started the adventure). In the case of SGGK, the warm welcome is the beginning of a subjacent plot: The lady’s temptation. The idea of “belly” also hints at the concept of an enclosed space that works as a cage for the hero, the helper or anyone who make a mistake. This idea is present in two classic films: Aliens, (Cameron: 1986) and Jurassic Park (Spielberg: 1993). In Aliens, despite all the forces deployed, colonial marines with advanced weapons over the colony they want to inspect, the aliens\(^{33}\) (elements from the non-natural world) entrap them in the corridors and easily slaughter a significant part of the team, letting the survivors shocked, hopeless and blockaded in the planet. The second example, Jurassic Park, also plays with the idea of false safety; in this case, the visitors are stuck in the futuristic resort in which the technology cannot keep them safe. If Gawain was entrapped by a host and his wife, Dr. Alan Grant\(^{34}\) by a safety system and dinosaurs, and Ripley by a cunning hive of aliens. The Belly of the Wale is one of the hardest stages and usually a turning point in the narration. From this stage, the hero possible could change his mind or eventually prove how resolute he is. This is the case in SGGK: inadvertedly, by rejecting the advances of the Lady, the knight is saving his life.

**The Meeting with the Goddess**

Many times a familiar structure can be noticed in a work. If the quest is related to maturity and the main character is young, the reader probably wonders about his family. Frequently the hero has had a hard childhood, especially when he is a self-made hero. Nevertheless familiar bounds are created through the story, more frequently with female and powerful characters: “The idea of the Goddess is related to the fact that you are born from your mother, and your father may be unknown to you or the father may have died” (Campbell & Moyers, 1988: 166)

The previous lines reinforce Campbell’s theory about the link of Mother (goddess) and Son (hero). Many gender studies remark how the woman’s role is consequently reduced to a

\(^{33}\) See appendix, figure 14: The aliens ambushed the colonial marines, a modern version of the belly of the whale

\(^{34}\) See appendix, figure 15: Dr Alan Grant trapped in what was supposed to be the safest zoo in the world.
secondary position in a world dominated by masculinity; in the following lines we can read an example:

The reiterative pattern of appearance of male heroes in folk tales, mythology or popular culture what has perpetuated traditional values as ascribed to manhood. In all of them, we find a similar heroic quest pattern which implies a brave, powerful, virtuous and, on the whole, superior male figure (Carrasco, 2006: 62)

Despite some critics that claim The Hero’s Journey is not for heroines, Campbell is aware of the vital role that, secondary or not, the female characters have in literature and history. “Then heroes are not all men? – Oh, no. The male usually has the more conspicuous role, just because of the conditions of life” (Campbell & Moyers, 1988: 125). Campbell also defends mothers as benign symbols that give birth to children, raise them and help them. Often the role of the woman is endowed with supernatural powers (especially when the encounter takes place in the magic world in an intriguing encounter) In SGGK, Guinevere had a minor appearance in Camelot’s events, but she has no further relevance in the romance. The reader will discover the true identity of the goddess through his rival’s revelations: Morgan le Fay. She is in disguise (due to her abilities as shapeshifter) as Lady Bertilak’s crone that accompanies her. The woman with the most relevant role in the romance turns out to be the core part in the design of the real test:

The least understood aspect in Gawain and the Green Knight is undoubtedly the role of Morgan. At present we have the rather curious and unsatisfactory statement of Gawain and the Green Knight that the motivation for sending Bercilak to Camelot in his fearsome guise was to frighten Guinevere, whom Morgan hated even more than she hated Arthur (Matthews, 1990: 86)

Opposite to Campbell’s theories of the woman as a helper or protective figure, Morgan le Fay is not a fairy, but a sinister evildoer, the contraposition of the fragile and naïve Guinevere. About Morgan and Guinevere John Matthews writes; “These two are, in effect, rather like the so called dark and light aspects of the Goddess, primal

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35 One of the main debates about The Hero’s Journey is if it’s a male-biased misogynistic structure. An interesting web article by Nicole Franklin, The Hero’s Journey vs. The Heroine’s Journey: Rewriting Privilege illustrates some differences with certain female characters that get involved into an adventure.

36 See appendix, figure 16: Galadriel as protective sorceress in the magical world. The goddess in The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring (Jackson: 2001)

37 Morgan le Fay is another recurrent character present in the romances: An enchantress with supernatural powers.

38 The crone with shapeshifter abilities is also present in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales: The Wife of Bath’s Tale

39 See appendix, figure 17: Morgan le Fay
archetypes well attested in myth cycles from almost every corner of the world”
(Matthews, 1990: 88)

Bertilak’s refers to Morgan as a Goddess (l. 2452) in his final disclosures and explains the reasons of the plot, while he remarks the dangers of pride:

'Bertilak de Hautdesert I hat in þis londe.
Þur3 my3t of Morgne la Faye, þat in my hous lenges,
And koynyse of clergye, bi craftes wel lerned,
Pe maystrés of Merlyn mony hatz taken -- (ll. 2245- 2248)
Bertilak of the High Desert I am called here in this land.
Through the might of Morgan the Fay, who remains in my house,
Through the wiles of her witchcraft, a lore well learned –
Many of the magical arts of Merlin she acquired

The Woman as the Temptress

Not all the secondary female characters are linked to a divine entity. The marvelous woman can awaken the passion of the brave knight-warrior and doom him to failure. This TFG is not blaming women or defining them as rogue seductresses, but the dimension of the consequences. The prime example might be the desire between Helen of Sparta and Paris of Troy; their romance was the spark that provoked Troy’s war outbreak. Love can move mountains, cause envy, wars, etc. (Even can be a Call of Adventure) beauty can be a lure, especially for the young and not so experienced men.

SGGK’s road of trials has two dimensions: psychological and physical. The physical part of the quest has already been passed; it dealt with all the monsters already defeated at Wirral’s forest. On the other hand the psychological dimension deals with the attempts of seduction carried on by Lady Bertilak. Gawain has to decide how to overcome this difficulty. He is far from home; in a court that praises him (so he cannot disappoint their expectations) he is hosted and has to be courteous. “He is a knight of King Arthur’s court, and to betray his host is the last thing such a knight can stop to, so Gawain sternly resists” (Campbell & Moyers, 1988: 152)
The Lady is exquisite and superb. She is unparalleled to any other woman he had seen before. She certainly has good qualities and her presence is a light in Gawain’s dark march to death. Attention is drawn to her in the following lines:

Þenne lyst þe lady to loke on þe kny3t,
Þenne com ho of hir closet with mony cler burdez.
Ho watz þe fayrest in felle, of flesche and of lyre,
And of compas and colour and costes, of alle oþer,
And wener þen Wenore, as þe wy3e þo3t. (ll. 941-945)

Then the lady had a longing to look on the knight;
With her bevy of beauties she abandoned her pew.
Most beautiful of body and bright of complexion,
Most winsome in ways of all women alive,
She seemed to Sir Gawain, excelling Guinevere.

Later in the romance, the lady makes three attempts in which the sexual overtones are gradually explicit. The bedroom in which Gawain rests is now a place of temptation:

“The lady is very beautiful. She sits on the hero’s bed, kisses him and announces her eagerness to be seduced with at least as much frankness as the manners of her class allow. How can he not be stirred by desire? The lady herself appears to be puzzled and says that he cannot really be Gawain” (Wrigley, 1988: 125)

Gawain’s youth and distressing situation are factors to take into account. The reader might consider that his death is close, so why not making a break in his knightly duties and agree to the lady’s demands? Wrigley writes: “It is implied that, whether through celestial aid or a sense of obligation to his host, Gawain was able to restrain his passion, but it can no longer be said that he did not feel any” (Wrigley, 1988: 126) However, this battle cannot be won by the sword. Gawain, who is armed only with verbal skills, politely dismisses Lady Bertilak’s insinuations when the situation gets sour; he wants to avoid any offense. His reputation is on trial.

Nevertheless, he is a devoted server of the Virgin Mary (her image is on the inside of Gawain’s shield). The Virgin Mary provides moral strength to him in hard times. She is the real amulet in moments of unresolved tension.

Gret perile bitwene hem stod,
Nif Maré of hir kny3t mynne. (ll. 1768-1769)
And peril would have impended
Had Mary not minded her knight.

He finally manages to control the situation and respect the lady’s honor. He kisses her in a faultless way and later, in the last meeting, she gives him a girdle that is supposed to save his life (now the woman has a helping role).

For quat gone so is gorde with þis grene lace,
While he hit hade hemely halched aboute,
Þer is no hapel vnder heuen tohewe hym þat my3t,
For he my3t not be slayn for sly3t vpon erþe.’ (ll. 1851-1854)
For the man that binds is body with this belt of green,
As long as he laps it closely about him,
No hero under heaven can hack him to pieces,
For he cannot be killed by any cunning on earth.

Gawain cautiously hides the girdle and does not report it to Bertilak. This secrecy is not entirely faultless since Gawain each time that he kissed the lady he also kissed Lord Bertilak (as a proof of honesty). To keep this secret will have later consequences that will be explained in the final apotheosis.

Atonement with the Father

The reader can recognize the symbolic father just pointing the literary foil, the other masculine presence that competes in the narration. In this case: Lord Bertilak and his transfigured alter-ego, The Green Knight. He is the character that embodies the father. The stage of Atonement with the Father is recognizable in the brief Green knight’s first imposing dialogue in Lord Bertilak’s kind hospitality as well as in the final conversation with Gawain.

If there is a father, logically there must be a son or daughter and is not other than Sir Gawain. The obedient and loyal Knight: Used as cannon fodder in an apparently non-return quest and tested by treacherous methods. Manhood is the destiny of all men, but in this case, is a hard goal to reach. Campbell research on myths usually coincides with the evolution of the hero concerning maturity. During the journey, the protagonist has to kill the boy and let the adult take the decisions. The experience gained also has the basis in the natural growth of the protagonist:
It’s usually a cycle, a going and returning. But the structure and something of the spiritual sense of this adventure can be seen already anticipated in the puberty or initiation rituals of early tribal societies, through which a child is compelled to give up its childhood and become an adult (Campbell & Moyers, 1988: 123-124)

At first view, the court feasting is described in line 86 as a childlike party, and it has the basis of the innocent behavior and apparent lack of any responsibility in Camelot. When the Green Knight (later revealed as Lord Bertilak) enters the scene, his authoritative tone has no equal and any of the knights answer to his cutting remarks despite their status of protectors of the moral and the kingdom. The gallant Camelot Knights got teased by an intruder with no consequences:

    Hit arn aboute on þis bench bot berdleze chylder.
    If I were hasped in armes on a he3e stede,
    Here is no mon me to mach, for my3tez so wayke. (ll. 280-282)
    On this bench only beardless boys are sitting.
    If I were hasped in armour on a high steed,
    No man among you could match me, your might being meagre.

Usually, the main villain’s gender is male, even in monsters (Smaug the Dragon, Imhotep the Mummy and the majority of classic monsters40). And on really iconic cases, this male figure is at the same time father and the main villain. The bad fathers are between the hero and the final goal or are just turned into sinister entities at evil service (See Darth Vader in Star Wars the Original Trilogy41 and Saturn42, who, according to the myth he devoured his sons). In other cases, the simplest presence of the father involves a restrictive figure that just opposes to protagonist aims or pushes him into the background. An example can be seen in Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade43 (1989) on this case the father, who works with his son, comprehends the role of mentor, cautious father, and some funny tags.

40 We understand as classical monsters those who share a series both of books and films and belong to popular culture: e.g. The Wolf Man, Dracula, Mr. Hide, Frankenstein, the Grey Alien, etc. Despite being mainly classified as male we cannot leave out other defined female monsters as the mermaids, the harpies and primal deities as Gaia. But the most popular are undoubtedly the male ones.
41 Darth Vader is the symbol par excellence in the pop culture of the father. He is the main antagonist in Star Wars: The Original Trilogy (1977-1983)
42 See appendix, figure 18: Saturn Devouring his Son.
43 See appendix, figure 19: Indiana Jones and his father.
In the form of giant, The Green Knight represents a commanding figure, the father as an ogre or an enemy that has to be surpassed. If the father is a brilliant man of arms, then the son has to beat him in a duel and so on. In SGGK, Lord Bertilak is turning out to be an excellent host towards Sir Gawain so Sir Gawain must improve his position and react honorably (This reinforces the image of good son) On the other hand, Lord Bertilak as a father bestows forgiveness and absolution according to his judgment. In the Christian traditions, God the father also gives those gifts and takes cares of all the humankind to which is also referred as his sons. The following lines establish how after the meeting, Bertilak manifests a psychological relation of superiority towards Gawain:

I halde þe polysed of þat ply3t, and pured as clene
As þou hadez neuer forfeeted syþen þou watz fyrst borne; (ll. 2393- 2394)
You are absolved of your sin and as stainless now
As if you had never fallen in fault since first you were born

**Apotheosis and Ultimate boon**

If all roads lead to Rome, the entire hero’s journeys lead to a climax situation previous the last confrontation (not necessarily a battle or duel, it can be a revelation, the restoring of something broke, etc.). The apotheosis can be understood both as the climax and the glorification of the hero (now as a perfect candidate to be victorious). In this stage, the reader will wonder if all the aid received and all the experience gained along will be worthy. The hero finally reaches the last evil bastion, the deeps of the magical underworld and a seeming last point of no return. Prometheus went to Mount Olympus to reach the God’s fire, Indiana Jones ventured into the Temple of Doom and Gawain one last time crossed the ultimate threshold and entered to face his fate:

‘We! Lorde,’ quoþ þe gentyle kny3t,
‘Wheþer þis be þe grene chapelle?
Here my3t aboute mydny3t
Pe dele his matynnes telle! (ll. 2185-2188)
‘Oh God, is the Chapel Green
This mound? said the noble knight
‘At such might Satan be seen
Saying matins at midnight
Hit is þe corsedest kyrk þat euer I com inne!' (line. 2196)
It is the most evil holy place I ever entered.’

The climax is reached once the encounter takes place at the Green Chapel⁴⁴. Now the reader will discover the outcome of wearing the lady’s girdle. When the Green Knight appears, he seems to make fun of the situation; he is mocks of Sir Gawain fear while Gawain request to end soon. The following lines establish the solution of the conflict:

He lyftes ly3tly his lome, and let hit doun fayre
With þe barbe of þe bitte bi þe bare nek;
Þa3 he homered heterly, hurt hym no more
Bot snyrt hym on þat on syde, þat seuered þe hyde. (ll. 2309- 2312)
Up went the axe at once and hurtled down straight
At the naked neck with its knife-like edge.
Though it swung down savagely, slight was the wound,
A mere snick on the side, so that the skin was broken.

The episode finishes with a “harmless” wound in the neck. Sir Gawain was ready to lose his head but instead of the expected result, something unexpected happened.

**The Ultimate Boon**

The accomplishment of the final duel implies a state of nirvana. The hero at this moment can be confident about his abilities. Every adversity taught something vital, and now a new vision of the world has been achieved, the first tests now could seem trivial but not the goal achieved. The wounds are now closed. Campbell believes that the hero, after all, becomes familiarized with the energy that surrounds the magic world is somehow blessed with an indestructible essence (possibly, knowledge of a divine gift) and rose among the men. “The ease with which the adventure is here accomplished signifies that the hero is a superior man, a born king” (Campbell, 2008: 148)

In SGGK the truth makes Sir Gawain to grow up in many senses. When all is said and done, he realizes how exposed to vices men are, how despite his King’s Knight status he was afraid of death, but the success of the mission and the tests now allow him to continue with

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⁴⁴ See appendix, figure 20: The Green Chappel.
the mission. “The conquest of the fear of death is the recovery of life’s joy” (Campbell & Moyers, 1988:152). Gawain is now the living proof of exemplary knight and Morgan’s sophistry has been answered somewhat by a young knight “Morgan did not seek to punish the pride of Camelot but to test it, find out whether it was well founded” (Wrigley, 1988: 114).

Gawain, now being conscious about his flaws, buries his excess of pride and understands the importance of the humility. Only being so close to failure he notices the imperfect condition of human nature. “Gawain’s acceptance of his failure is so complete that it reconstitutes him as a hero” (Mann, 1994:115-116). Nevertheless his faults are acceptable, and Lord Bertilak, in the role of merciful father finally forgives him:

  Bot here yow lakhed a lyttel, sir, and lewté yow wonted;
  Bot þat watz for no wylyde werke, ne wowyng nauþer,
  Bot for 3e lufed your lyf; þe lasse I yow blame.’
   (ll. 2366-2368)
  But here your faith failed you, you flagged somewhat, sir,
  Yet it was not for a well-wrought thing, not for wooing either,
  But for love of your life, which is less blameworthy.’

The lessons learned could be considered moralistic, but independently of the context, the importance of humility is a value that often marks a difference among characters in a story. Weakness is another point that is essential in SGGK morals: perfection is out of reach, but one has to stand against all the odds and dominate the situations that fate presents, especially the ones in which the man’s behavior is decisive. Another point is the importance of not being deceived by women’s tricks. It is important to remark that Gawain is facing a sorceress’ plan and in the Knight’s code the wooing to a married woman is dishonorable and deserves a severe punishment. Among the first SGGK’s audiences, we find young people who live in courts so it would be positive a didactic reminder of their future duties and the behavior proper of a Knight.

The issue of love was better accepted, especially in the French courts where the works in which the protagonist was Lancelot, who become famous. The adventure might not turn out into a love story of passion and broken hearts, but in a lesson of what is a symbol of bravery, courage, and honor.

  'I halde hit hardily hole, þe harme þat I hade.
  Þou art confessed so clene, beknown of þy mysses,
RETURN

Refusal of the Return

The hero, who does not belong to the magic world, maybe is not needed anymore. After all misfortunes possibly now the magical realm is a good place to stay. Why not join the Goddess? Why should they return to an imperfect place? Many times the hero is tired and disappointed, so he prefers to follow the siren voices and get lost into the deeps. “Numerous indeed are the heroes fabled to have taken up residence forever in the blessed isle of the unaging Goddess of Immortal Being” (Campbell, 2008:167) Nevertheless, Gawain is aware of where he belongs, for him; there is only one possible destination. According to Wrigley, the climax does not end when Bertilak, gives the last stroke but when he invites Gawain to his castle one more time:

“Sir Bertilak twice pressingly invites him to return to the castle, to enjoy the further hospitality and renew his acquaintance with the lady. Gawain declines, the second time with a brusqueness that is disconcerting until one recognises that this is the crux and climax of the whole adventure” (Wrigley, 1988: 127)

Naturally, our hero, after knowing that he has been mocked will not want to revive the moments in which he was in risky situations because of the lady’s temptations.

And 3e schal in þis Nwe 3er a3ayn to my wonez,
   And we schyn reuel þe remnaunt of þis ryche fest (ll. 2400-2401)
   You shall come back to my castle this cold New Year,
   And we shall revel away the rest of this rich feast;

Presumably, due to his new mature character, he will feel uncomfortable with those childlike feast and celebrations, since he is now more concerned about evil and his duty. However Camelot is his home where his King and Queen await his return.
The Magic Flight

Once the adventure is close to the end, the hero must repair the damages that once were done. Campbell defines this stage as follows: “If the Hero in his triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage” (Campbell, 2008: 170)

Camelot awaits expectantly Gawain’s return. The report of his success will be such a great story that would reinforce the courage and the faith in the court. Despite in HWTF the solution is called elixir; Sir Gawain’s quest is a parable itself that would help other knights in moments of moral crisis and as a good advice about how treachery can be present even in female form.

But hit is no ferly þa3 a fole madde,
And þur3 wyles of wymmen be wonen to sor3e, (ll. 2414-2415)
But is no marvel for a foolish man to be maddened thus
And saddled with sorrow by sleights of women.

Now that Morgan le Fay’s plot has been uncovered, the peace must return to Camelot. There is no reason to fear the unknown monsters from beyond or other threats while the symbols of the Kingdom remain willful and unbreakable in their faith.

Rescue from Without

Gawain launches into the adventure completely alone, and the figure of the helper is not present until the Lady gives him a girdle, but she does not accompany him. His protective companion is the Virgin Mary, the good and protective goddess. His faith is the best motivation in the worst moments. He is devoted to Virgin Mary, and he prays to her when is being tempted. Reasonably without his faith maybe the story could have ended in less courteous way. Gawain feels that he has to honor the Virgin Mary through his behavior since he is well known for his devotion.

To Mary made his mone,
Pat ho hym red to ryde
And wysse hym to sum wone. (ll. 737-739)
To Mary made his moan,
And begged her be his guide
Till some shelter should be shown

The rescue in the romance is clear when Gawain, after showing an honorable behavior, leaves with a good result Hautdesert Castle and the Green Chapel, and it has its basis in Virgin Mary’s grace and protection.

This stage could be the climax in other stories in which the main protagonist is between the devil and the deep blue sea. “The hero may have to be brought back from his supernatural adventure by assistance from without” (Campbell, 2008: 178) But in this romance, the climax is between the Green Knight and Sir Gawain. The other Knights of the Round Table do not arrive in the nick of the time to save Gawain from his destiny.

**The Crossing of the Return Threshold**

If there was a long journey to achieve the goal, then could be a similar long way to return. The action does not necessarily end with the climax. The author can retake some others briefly mentioned plots and introduce them in the last moment to complicate the situation. In *SGGK* we can notice, that the magical world is still a dangerous place:

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Wylde wayez in þe worlde Wowen now rydez
On Gryngolet, þat þe grace hade geten of his lyue;
Ofte he herbered in house and ofte al þeroute,
And mony aventure in vale, and venquyst ofte,
Þat I ne tyȝt at þis tyme in tale to remene. (ll. 2479- 2483)
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Now Gawain goes riding on Gringolet
In lonely lands, his life saved by grace.
Often he stayed at a house, and often in the open,
And often overcame hazards in the valleys,
Which at this time I do not intend to tell you about.

The clamorous victory in the Green Chapel is an incentive in Gawain’s aim to return home. He is a new person, the wound in his neck is the prove of his triumph: “Their return to the village is represented by all possible symbolic devices as a resurrection or rebirth” (Wrigley, 1988: 118)
When the two kingdoms are actually one, there are no frontiers, no home to return. This idea is present through modern protagonists that have to live in an apocalyptic world such as Max\textsuperscript{45} (George Miller’s \textit{Mad Max: The Road Warrior}, 1981). They live trapped in situations in which there is no turning back. All of them live stuck in a kind of hell, sometimes ruled by machines or things from another world so for them there is no possible escape. Their options are limited since they can only choose between something bad and less bad. They are all the time surviving just accepting the situation. Another different interpretation comes from heroines like Alice (Lewis Carrol’s \textit{Alice in Wonderland}) and Dorothy (L. Frank Baum’s \textit{The Wonderful Wizard of OZ}); they are examples of “escaping heroes”. All their efforts for a single purpose: to come back home. Nevertheless, in their cases, the magical world is the result of a nightmare or is not clear the reason if the magical world ever existed at all.

\textbf{Master of the Two Worlds}

When the Hero returns, he is a catalyst between the two worlds. His involvement makes him a wise man. Now he has a story to tell, the regions of the unknown have been explored by him, and the secrets revealed. Gawain is victorious in a mission that other protectors were terrified to take. Gawain is received as a messiah once he comes back where all began:

\[ \text{Þe wakned wele in þat wone when wyst þe grete} \]
\[ Þat gode Gawayn watz commen; gayn hit hym þo3t. \]
\[ Þe kyng kyssez þe kny3t, and þe whene alce, \]
\[ And syþen mony syker kny3t þat so3t hym to haylce, \]
\[ Of his fare þat hym frayned; and ferlyly he telles, \]
\[ Biknowez alle þe costes of care þat he hade (ll. 2490-2495) \]

When the great became aware of Gawain’s arrival
There was general jubilation at the joyful news.
The King kissed the knight and the Queen likewise,
And so did many staunch noble who sought to salute him.
They all asked him about his expedition,
And he truthfully told them of his tribulations –

\textsuperscript{45} See appendix, figure 21: Mad Max in \textit{The Road Warrior}. The modern hero portrayed as a Good Samaritan. He wanderers in the wasteland helping people to survive since there are no home to return.
At the very beginning, Camelot, the representation of justice on earth was distant from the fame once achieved. It is easy to believe that this environment was going to become fuzzy someday. History has shown uncountable kings that preferred to enjoy themselves instead of governing their realm; and where the there is no order, the chaos is the ruler. Olivares asserts the conclusion of this stage: “Gawain, finalmente, es la personificación del ideal caballeresco, el guardián del equilibrio en Camelot” (Olivares, 1998: 234)

**Freedom to Live**

Gawain is back to where all started, and the cycle is then closed. Now the mission is to adapt to the world or reconstruct it. Gawain now can be a mentor for future knights, and he can teach what he roughly learned through his mission. There are many possibilities once the mission is accomplished:

> 'Þis is þe bende of þis blame I bere in my nek,
> Þis is þe laþe and þe losse þat I la3t haue
> Of couardise and couetyse þat I haf ca3t þare;
> Þis is þe token of vntrawþe þat I am tan inne,
And I mot nedez hit were wyle I may last; (ll. 2506- 2510)
> ‘This belt confirms the blame I bear on my neck,
> My bane and debasement, the burden I bear
> For being caught by cowardice and covetousness,
> This is the figure of the faithlessness found in me,
> Which I must needs wear while I live.

Once the hero has finished he can choose the life he wants to follow. If he does not need to fulfill any further oath, then can adapt a new way of life, an ordinary one or return to his previous affairs, the ones that he was doing when the adventure knocked at his door. However, now that the mission is concluded, why not starting with another one?
7. Conclusion: The heroes survive through cinema

The importance of The Hero’s Journey nowadays:

The structure defined by Campbell has been applied uncountable times not only in literary analysis, but for the creation of movie scripts and films. Since visuals take a significant dominance over printed materials in a society that is eager for new stories and quickly gets bored, somehow the movie industry is redefining the concept of the hero. Nevertheless, Campbell’s pattern is still present in a representative number of contemporary works. Even Campbell himself made his contributions in television and at Skywalker Ranch, where he commented on George Lucas phenomena Star Wars.

Despite illegal copies and downloads, cinema is far from losing its appeal to the mass and popular culture and it is an adaptable art in which many factors are combined to create stories:

En efecto, el cine engloba las artes del espacio (la pintura, la escultura y la arquitectura), las artes del tiempo (la poesía y la música), y también las que participan del espacio y del tiempo (el teatro y la danza) (Gortari & Barbáchamo, 1981: 50)

Society is an eager consumer of stories. We choose what we want according to what we like. How to know what the people want? Well, publicity works and also does the box-office reports. We also should take into account the new phenomena of the web reviews. Today not only specialized online databases or film critics can deconstruct a film. There is a spectator or “Troll” with access to the internet, there is also a critic ready to make public his opinion. As it was stated in this TFG, many stories follow a cyclic structure and the same happens with trends: Trends are continuously being revived. The key might be the degrees of awareness with those changes are applied to create a new work. Campbell knew of the promptness with which society changes its likes: “Life today is so complex, and it is changing so fast, that there is no time for anything to constellate itself before it’s thrown over again” (Campbell & Moyers, 1988: 132). So the hero nowadays matures as the society and trends do. Changes are always made in a profitable way. Maybe it is sad to assume that the primary purpose of today’s heroes is not to teach, or simply entertain but to overpass the budget.

We got all kind of heroes nowadays since they adapt to every public, every year. We can find a suitable interpretation in the following lines: “The different visions of the male hero
respond to the wish to fulfill certain social demands at each specific time” (Carrasco, 2006: 62). The reader can easily find a broad range of values very different to those idealized standards of behavior analyzed in SGGK. We find sexist attitudes, like Ash in Evil Dead III: The Army of Darkness\(^{46}\) (1991). Violent ones like the suspicious Macready fighting his paranoid men in The Thing (1981), Superheroes of all the shapes and sizes, developed by DC and Marvel (many critics and directors claim that we are experiencing the golden age of familiar super-heroes) and the more adult squad designed by Alan Moore and carried to the cinema in Watchmen\(^{47}\) (2009). Also by the hand of Alan Moore we find anti-heroes like V in V for Vendetta (2006) or heroines like Sarah Connor, breaking the molds of the weak female stereotypes especially in Terminator II: Judgement Day (1991). Other types include post-apocalyptic survivors like, the astronaut Taylor in that Planet of the Apes\(^{48}\) (1968), and tragic ones as the also survivor Robert Neville in Omega Man (1971) and the mercurial Kikuchiyo in Seven Samurai\(^{49}\) (1954). Today we got a great range of heroes that are in the cinema, changing constantly. Sometimes films and trends are conditioned by the situation in which they are being filmed (e.g. war propaganda, nationalist topics, etc.)

“La influencia social del cine en cuanto a medio de expresión y de comunicación es un hecho fácilmente constatable desde su nacimiento. Esta influencia ha tenido siempre un doble carácter: por un lado, la producción cinematográfica ha venido condicionada en mayor o menor grado por la situación política, social o económica del medio en que se desarrollaba, y por otro, el propio cine ha ejercido y ejerce a su vez una notable influencia sobre el espectador y, por tanto, sobre el medio.” (Gortari & Barbáchamo, 1981: 58)

In other cases, when the film became a landmark, and many people feel somehow identified, then the popularization of the film creates the trend. How many people use quotes from his favorite film characters, wears the costumes, buys the collectibles and are part of the fandom? Campbell was concerned of that “I’ve heard youngsters use some of George Lucas’ terms) “The Force” and “The dark side”\(^{50}\) So it must be hitting somewhere. It’s a good sound teaching, I would say” (Campbell & Moyers, 1988:141)

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\(^{46}\) See appendix, figure 22: Ash in The Evil Dead. It is B-series movie in which an ordinary sales-clerk travels in time to help King Arthur against hordes of zombies.

\(^{47}\) See appendix, figure 23: The Super Heroes of Alan Moore’s Watchmen.

\(^{48}\) See appendix, figure 24: Taylor. As Mad Max, here we find a devastated world but in this case the evolution has a decisive role in the film.

\(^{49}\) See appendix, figure 25: Seven Samurai: How different skilled warriors can become heroes.

\(^{50}\) See appendix, figure 26: Darth Vader and the Emperor in The Return of the Jedi (Marquand, 1983). The Dark Side of the Force.
Is Gawain a modern hero ready to be released again in cinemas?

The answer would be: How many artistic licenses do you want to take? How accurate do you want to be? We find a clue in the following lines:

“Desde luego, debemos imaginarnos al Arturo “real” no como un rey caballeresco de brillante armadura, sino como un rudo guerrero que vivía en una fortaleza pensada más para la defensa que para el placer” (Alonso & Mastache & Alonso, 2007: 168)

The King Arthur Legend seems to be a never ending topic, released every certain time and portrayed by different actors, like the handsome knights in King Arthur\(^{51}\) (2004)

Certainly we notice many characteristics in SGGK also present in today’s narrations and well accepted: his humanism and determination or facing solitude and his inner fears are a portrayal of the human hero. He is also self-made hero that has to suffer to gain experience. The scars and dirt would be a right approach to realism. I believe that the like for the anti-hero should be present, a stronger presence of the temptation and open possibilities in his choices. “The hero of yesterday becomes the tyrant of tomorrow” (Campbell, 2008: 303). Today’s heroes are not completely flawless, since they are more pragmatic. To be successful with an ordinary audience it should combine more cinematic action than psychological torment.

In conclusion, we like saviors. To set Sir Gawain in a cinematic orgy of action in a race against evil, would be well accepted if we modify some archetypes, change the visual aspects and create an innovative storyline. The symbols of purity share world, with a not so naïve attitude but the sword and the courage still trap new audiences.

\(^{51}\) See appendix, figure 27: Sir Gawain in King Arthur’s 2004 version.
8. Bibliography


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**Pictures**

All the images shown in the appendix are in the public domain.
Figure 1: The hero’s journey (Campbell 2008: 210)

Figure 2: Saint George and the Dragon. Raphael, (1504-1506)
Figure 3: *Sigurd Slaying Fafnir*. Illustration in Old Norse Stories (1900)

Figure 4: *Accolade*. Edmund Blair Leighton (1901)
Figure 5: The Hobbit in smoking in his garden (2012)

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Figure 14: Ripley in the corridors surrounded by an invisible menace: the aliens (1986)
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Figure 16: Galadriel, the goddess in the Lord of the Rings trilogy. (2001-2003)
Figure 17: Morgan le Fay. The evil goddess in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Figure 18: Saturn Devouring his Son. Even in mythology we find terrible fathers. Francisco Goya (1819-1823)
Figure 19: Sean Connery as Professor Henry Jones sharing adventures with Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones in *The Last Crusade* (1989) Fathers can also be a protective figure.

Figure 20: The Green Chapel. The isolated place where the Beheading Game ends.
Figure 21: *Mad Max: The Road Warrior.* The helping hero of the wasteland. (1981)

Figure 22: Ash in *Evil Dead III: The Army of Darkness.* The other King Arthur’s savior. An ordinary clerk enforced to fight evil forces in medieval ages. Do not expect knight code from him. (1992)
Figure 23: *Watchmen*, each one has to face his own moral dilemmas even with the condition of super-hero. (2009)

Figure 24: Charlton Heston as Taylor, the astronaut that lands in a world dominated by apes. As in *SGGK*, the climax comes with the discovery of the truth. (1968)
Figure 25: The seven samurais. Another example of willing heroes ready to fight for justice in the medieval Japan. (1954)

Figure 26: The Emperor and Darth Vader, The master and the apprentice of the dark side. Ruling the galaxy with iron fist and defeated by a farmer boy. (1983)
Figure 27: Joel Edgerton as Sir Gawain in the film *King Arthur.* (2004)