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Marc Rhodes-Taylor

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The Green Knight. Directed by David Lowery. 2021. Reviewed by Marc Rhodes-Taylor

I was really struck when this film was withdrawn from UK cinemas and am still looking for a place where I can see it on the big screen, hopefully we will all be able to at some point. This is really a requirement for a film as visually stunning as this film is, a rare achievement in itself. I am not sure whether this film will be for

everyone as it leans very much on artistry and drama and character and has limited action which is what many people look for in their entertainment.

The green knight is looking for something much deeper and longer lasting, and I think that it is a film which will endure. You may need to watch this film more than once as it feels like a grower, a film which you start to like more and more the more that you think about it, rather than an immediately lovable film due to the deep intellectual and artistic content. *The Green Knight* feels distinctly different from *Excalibur*, perhaps the most obvious point of comparison. Although there are some signs of combat, unlike *Excalibur* the combat is very much in the background.

On an artistic level *Excalibur* is highly operatic, whilst *The Green Knight* might be described as somewhat Shakespearean in its intent. Dev Patel does a great job in providing Sir Gawain with layers of character and development, making him believable and watchable even though he is not obviously likeable. Gawain is highly flawed in many ways and there is every suggestion that his mission is misguided or even a failure. This film is very much about an individual's personal quest to find themselves rather than the traditional and popular adventure. Gawain is not a knight at the beginning and there are frequent questions over whether he is ever really a knight in the true sense as he often fails in his duties. There is also the question of whether the quest is more important than the destination, which is very much unknown and unknowable. I must say that this film looks absolutely beautiful and is well worth seeing on that basis, it is not likely that you will soon see a film which appears more stunning.

The film can be very dark in places, which sometimes made it hard to work out what was actually happening. Darkness and shadow are used quite heavily here at many points. The sound design and music are equally wonderful, as is the choir which sometimes appears in the background. Some of the music is medieval, some of it is very strange indeed; I was absorbed by the very weirdness of certain pieces such as the green knight theme.

The green knight himself is an excellent design clearly designed to represent the green man of legend. Nature is here seen as a palpable force

in its own right, and magic as being real; the green knight's appearances often bring supernatural phenomena of some form with them. The talking fox was a nice idea but I didn't quite get it, I didn't understand quite what it was supposed to be and the CGI was not completely convincing in any case. Aside from the knight himself we also have the mysterious giants, an overtly fantastical element; much of the rest of the film feels fairly realistic and convincing. Arthur is portrayed in a rather interesting way as a very elderly king who is looking increasingly fragile and helpless; the rest of the court including the knights and indeed many of the citizens of the kingdom appear equally aged and withering away. Morgana is depicted in a somewhat understated manner but is still capable of deception and magic.

There are a few unexpected and almost random incidents which do change the course of events, some were straightforward some I did not quite understand. Joel Edgerton's lord is quite important, by his words and actions he implies that he actually knows Gawain quite well; raising questions as to how this is so, possibly Edgerton is another manifestation of the green knight himself in shapeshifted form. Gawain takes the axe at an early stage and keeps it with him for some time; clearly this is symbolic in itself in some way as the camera often lingers on it and it becomes part of the plot, although exactly what it means I couldn't quite work out. It could be related to the quest for personal honour as Patel himself says that he desires honour and that this is what a knight is supposed to strive for.

There is a magical scarf which Gawain wears around his waist which supposedly grants him invulnerability, this gift is significant as well and turns up at a number of points. Gawain is passed Arthur's sword at one point but has to give it up for the green knight's axe instead, perhaps this means that nature is more important than the human kingdom. Another important point is that sometimes women turn up wearing blindfolds, there are at least two women who do this although why they do so is again not completely clear. Possibly this is some reference to the supernatural and seership and being able to see beyond the everyday world into the realms of hidden mysteries.