Chivalry and Knighthood in the Past and Present; Contrasting “Gawain” and *Fire Emblem Three Houses*

**Abstract**

In my paper, I delve into the socio-political dimensions of knighthood and chivalry during the Medieval era of Europe through a comparison between the Medieval English poem, “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,” and the video game, *Fire Emblem Three Houses*, published in 2019 by Nintendo. Within both texts, I explore chivalry and knighthood as a specific social code and institution of power, both of which are complex constructs beneath its veneer of idealism and romanticism. More prominently however, I discuss the interplay between chivalry as a system of power and one’s humanity. I argue that the Blue Lions path of *Three Houses* compellingly demonstrates this dynamic through its characters and their interactions together, while also shining a light on the reality of individuals beholden to institutional power. Although contemporary narratives may tend to misconstrue the past for dramatic effect, I believe there is value in examining them because they may conversely reveal previously overlooked aspects of historical concepts due to the biases and values of the period.

**Introduction**

Within a plethora of Western texts, both contemporary and Medieval, knighthood and chivalry are held in great esteem and romanticism. Especially with regards to the narratives of Arthur and his knights, the concept of knighthood and chivalry has been imbued with a sense of venerable awe.  However, removing this lens of romanticism and idealism reveals other important facets of knighthood and chivalry. Namely, that it was a medieval social code of behaviour as well as a prominent signifier of socio-political power in the form of status as well as authority or military might.

In medieval historian Nigel Saul’s book on the history and impact of chivalry in Medieval England, he draws attention to chivalry as a shared “ethos and value system” of the aristocratic elite[[1]](#footnote-1).  Knighthood, which was originally a mounted combative role, garnered greater prestige as an “elite identity” marker as it became increasingly ritualized through ceremony[[2]](#footnote-2). Furthermore, the expenses and training necessary to be a knight meant that one had to have ample wealth and leisure time, both of which are things that only privileged classes had an abundance of[[3]](#footnote-3). Meanwhile, the archetypical chivalric values of “loyalty, generosity, dedication, courage and courtesy” stemmed from desirable attributes of the military class bound to a lord, king, or religious leader, as well as being the celebrated qualities of leaders themselves, which were similarly composed of the social elite[[4]](#footnote-4). Consequently, we can see that chivalry and knighthood have undeniable ties to power beneath its romanticization. However, while Saul and other scholars have explored the socio-political context of chivalry and knighthood at length, especially within the chivalric romance genre, one aspect that has been overlook in their discussions is the interplay between chivalry as a system of power and one’s humanity.  Here, I define “humanity” as not only one’s personal sense of morality and/or ideals, but also the condition of being a sentient being that subjectively experiences the socio-cultural and physical environments around them.

One piece of media in which this interplay plays a central role is the video game *Fire Emblem Three Houses[[5]](#footnote-5)* (henceforth *Three Houses*). *Three Houses* tells the story of a continent divided into three territories, whose rulers rise up to wage war against each other over their clashing ideals and interests. Furthermore, the game splits into three different paths depending on which leader you side with. In this paper I will be focusing on the “Blue Lions” path and how its characters engage with the ideals of chivalry and one’s humanity. Moreover, I will be contrasting it with the Medieval English poem, “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" (henceforth "Gawain")[[6]](#footnote-6). "Gawain" lends itself to a productive comparison because it contains elements that are typical of a chivalric romance like an emphasis on valour and a quest, while also exploring aspects that are atypical of such romances such as personal shame and failure.  Comparing these two texts then allows for a discussion of what has been overlooked regarding the reality of chivalry and knighthood, beyond reductive understandings of these concepts.  Although it can be argued that modern media such as video games may fall into the category of “reductive understanding” due to their general emphasis on spectacle and fantasy, I believe they have the equal capacity to enrich our understanding of the past as a narrative medium due to their novel approaches to exploring and incorporating their inspirations. In that vein, I ultimately argue that the Blue Lions’ path offers a fresh perspective on the historical socio-political dimensions of knighthood, where chivalry is a system of power, while also addressing the conflicts between the chivalric system and one’s humanity. However, this path goes further to demonstrate what constitutes true honour and strength through its stark presentation of human fallibility and struggle to make positive change outside of systems of power.

**Further Context for *Three Houses***

Before moving onto my analysis, I will further elaborate on how the game organizes exposition and character interactions to mitigate any confusion. Firstly, the game is divided into chapters which each contain turn-based battle gameplay, exploration segments, as well as “Support Conversations.” In my paper, I will primarily be focused on these Conversations[[7]](#footnote-7). They consist of cutscenes that are sequentially unlocked from “C” to “A”[[8]](#footnote-8) between two characters within the cast once they have interacted together a certain number of times during gameplay.  They reveal important information about each character’s personality, background, and their progressing relationships with each other.  When a conversation is referenced, they will be cited like so with the one to speak the line being the first name: Di.+Fe., C Support.

In my analysis, I will be concentrating on the conversations Ashe (As.), Felix (Fe.), and Dimitri (Di.) have with each other and the rest of the Blue Lions cast with one exception[[9]](#footnote-9).  These characters begin the game as students and staff members of the Officer’s Academy, which is run by the Church of Seiros, the dominant religious institution of the game’s setting. They are also training to be knights and the future heads of their noble houses (if they are of the nobility) during their time in the Academy.

**Ashe: Chivalry and its Conflation with Humane Qualities**

Starting with the most idealistic or romantic perception of chivalry in the game, I will examine Ashe’s character and relationships. For Ashe, who is a commoner orphan adopted by a nobleman, knighthood and chivalry constitute a formative influence on his motivations, worldview, and ambitions. This is illustrated repeatedly within his character interactions. He often references his love of "knightly tales"[[10]](#footnote-10), which he describes as being full of “exciting adventures”[[11]](#footnote-11)  of knights who “value friendship, loyalty, and justice”[[12]](#footnote-12). Meanwhile the kind of knight he wants to be is someone “gallant and brave”[[13]](#footnote-13), who upholds “virtuous” ideals and can protect those who need it[[14]](#footnote-14). This kind of noble language is echoed in “Gawain” within descriptions of his “virtuous”[[15]](#footnote-15) and “valiant”[[16]](#footnote-16) qualities universally inspiring reverence throughout the poem.

 Evidently, Ashe’s identity and goals center around this romantic vision of knighthood.

 He equates knighthood and chivalry to doing good because that is what his adoptive father modelled for him.  Ashe sees him as a “knight out a story”  (As.+By.., B Support) and wants to be a knight like him because in doing so he can “leave the world better than [he] found it”  (As.+By., B Support).  Consequently, it is clear he has internalized knighthood and chivalry as a means to embody humane qualities and actualizing the tangible change he wants to see in the world.

However, even within romantic narratives of knights and their quests such as “Gawain,"  the associations with power are still present though covert.  “Gawain” tells the story of an Arthurian knight who departs Camelot to uphold his half of a promise after he accepts a challenge from the Green Knight. Before departing for his journey to seek out his adversary, the titular Gawain is described as adorned in gold, silver, and silk. These adornments serve to reinforce his radiant virtue, but they are all also important material and visual symbols of the wealthy and social elite[[17]](#footnote-17). He and his abundance of “courtly virtue” are likened to “refined gold”[[18]](#footnote-18) itself, and this refinement is repeatedly mentioned in the poem to highlight Gawain as a “brilliant leader” under his King and God[[19]](#footnote-19). Even the token that Gawain gains as a reminder of his shameful mistake in the conclusion of the poem is made of gold and silk[[20]](#footnote-20). Although Gawain looks upon it as a “sign of [his] failing” rather than a mark of material and personal worth or honour[[21]](#footnote-21), his court and social circle take up a similar token and view it as symbol of honour and virtue, particularly, Gawain’s[[22]](#footnote-22). Additionally, the “endless knot” that adorns Gawain’s shield can then not only be read as a symbol of his knightly perfection and eternal commitment to its virtues and his masters, but also his unshakeable authority and status as a member of an empowered estate[[23]](#footnote-23).

Although historical knights did perform virtuous deeds such as defending civilians during pilgrimages to holy sites, it is impossible to separate them from institutions of power because they were largely a body that served their own socio-political class interests, as well as the interests of the leading authority figures in Medieval Europe[[24]](#footnote-24). One such example is the Medieval Catholic religious institution, which promoted the campaigns of the Holy Wars to establish greater Christian dominion and authority[[25]](#footnote-25). This institution finds a parallel with the "Church of Seiros'' in the game. In Chapter 3, the Blue Lions cast are tasked by the head of the Church to put down a rebellion against the Church's authority. The one leading the rebellion is none other than Lonato, Ashe's adoptive father. At the church's behest, Ashe as a servant of the militant institution "had" to contribute to the suppression and slaughter of his father and the civilians that were "so nice to him" in the past[[26]](#footnote-26). At the end, he is left with the question of what his actions make him. The player themself is left with this question as well, and is encouraged to think critically about the institutions within the world they are immersed in.

While a case can be made for the privileged and powerful having more opportunities to be charitable than the disadvantaged, Ashe’s goal to be a knight as “glorious”[[27]](#footnote-27) as the ones he idolizes is a motivating ideal that obscures the fact that helping others is an internal desire and inherently a choice one must make. He has a romantic vision of power in the form of knighthood, and conflates that power with personal goodness and the ability to act in good will. This is then challenged in his interaction with Marianne.  In their B Support, he carelessly says to Marianne “think about all the good you could do for the world with your power”[[28]](#footnote-28) when talking about her status as a noble with a crest[[29]](#footnote-29). However, Marianne sharply rejects her crest as a “curse” and its potential power because of its associations with evil and corruption[[30]](#footnote-30) [[31]](#footnote-31) Her crest led to her isolation from others her entire life and furthermore contributed to her feelings of self-loathing. It also did not protect her when she lost her original family [[32]](#footnote-32). Moreover, no amount of power, personal or systematic, stopped her adoptive father from using her as a pawn in his ambition to elevate his rank[[33]](#footnote-33).

So what does Marianne frame as “good” and goodness?  According to Marianne, it is “how much we help those around us” and whether “we can make other people smile”[[34]](#footnote-34). It is action on an individual level and something that is particularly detached from systemic or institutional forms of paper.  It represents a shift away from characterizing worthiness as conferred to an individual by class or institutional association to individual choice. This choice to be a good person is something that fundamentally characterizes Ashe because he “genuinely enjoy[s] helping people…[and] making [people] smile”[[35]](#footnote-35). Furthermore, in an alternate set of dialogue for Ashe and Marianne’s A support conversation, Marianne states that she believes a person’s value is found in their smile[[36]](#footnote-36) [[37]](#footnote-37).  For Ashe, who is consistently the most cheerful and optimistic of the Blue Lions cast, it shows that he already has the capacity for good despite not being a knight.

Here, we can see one facet of the conflict between knighthood as a construct of power and humanity. Through Ashe, we see how the power afforded to knighthood and idyllic concepts of chivalry are conflated with positive attributes of humanity and the actualization of compassion.  Ashe’s character demonstrates that these are separate concepts. Having ideals itself is not a fault, however being a member of a system of power is not a condition for aiding those in need and following through with such righteous ideals. Meanwhile, adhering to a prescribed role can make one complicit within a system that utilizes violence for their own gain.

**Felix: Chivalry and its Deprivation of Humanity**

On the opposite side of the spectrum, we have Felix who has no such delusions of grandeur regarding knighthood and chivalry.  Instead, he staunchly perceives them as constructs that deprive individuals of their sense and humanity. In his C Support with Ashe, he frankly calls out the values  of “friendship, loyalty and justice” and knight’s tales for being “ridiculous"[[38]](#footnote-38). To Felix, they are “nonsense” that “seize control of people’s thoughts” and distort the true nature of those who died in battle as being “heroes,” when in actuality they are “killed for nothing”[[39]](#footnote-39).  He additionally asserts that he “knows better than to heedlessly obey orders'' and “romanticize blind obedience,” revealing how knightly and chivalric values underpin a social code or system where authority and power make up its foundation[[40]](#footnote-40). Returning briefly to ideas of virtue attached to chivalry, it is essential to understand that in addition to the established code of courtesy for knights, medieval discourse on honour and virtue in relation to knighthood historically had to do with conforming to a Christian and Aristotelian concept of morality and obedience, where "piety" forms the "fundamental orientation" of chivalry rather than modern conceptions of integrity and goodness[[41]](#footnote-41) (Gerald 137, 148-149). Ergo, mentions of “good” in reference to Gawain within the poem must be understood through this context as well[[42]](#footnote-42). Furthermore, chivalry and knighthood cannot be regarded as systems wholly based on individual merit and compassion, thereby making connotations of heroism dubious in how it is defined by an obligation to perform to the demands of a system that evaluates human life on a different standard.

Consequently, Felix’s conversations shine a light on how knighthood as an institution can be callous and manipulative of human life in order to achieve a goal. The social code acts as an extension of an authority and uses individuals as strategic pawns to die in military or ideological conflict.  So much so, that in literary historian Morgan Gerald's discussion of knighthood in relation to Geoffery Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales[[43]](#footnote-43)*, he posits that the entire medieval royal and aristocratic social system was "organized above all for war" (117). Knights could then be characterized as people who "had to be prepared to die" because they did invariably die for a cause, lofty or not[[44]](#footnote-44) (134).

 Within the game itself, Felix’s resentment of chivalry primarily stems from the glorification of his older brother’s death while serving as a member of the royal guard.  While there is something to be said about Felix projecting his grief onto chivalry, as well as sacrifice as a conscious choice that comes from deeply loving and cherishing another person, it is problematic to hold up death as an ideal expression of those desires. It can be argued instead that there is greater value in living and following through with one’s convictions despite the struggles that may ensue.  By martyring those who “died like a true knight” like his older brother, Felix criticizes the systematic erasure of one’s humanity and how they should have to undergo suffering in order to prove their worth[[45]](#footnote-45). There is a similar plot point in “Gawain” when the titular knight takes up a dangerous life-or-death game to prove his virtue and uphold the social obligations of chivalry.  Gawain is determined to “deliberately bring harm on [himself] and lose his life by [his] own wish”[[46]](#footnote-46) so that he would not be branded a “cowardly knight”[[47]](#footnote-47).  Furthermore, when Gawain merely flinches at the prospect of his life ending at the hands of the Green Knight's axe, it is enough for him to be berated by the Green Knight for this act. It is framed as an act of cowardice.[[48]](#footnote-48) Gawain is not conducting himself in a virtuous manner befitting of a knight and he is then compelled to risk his life in order to prove such virtue. According to literary scholar D.N Beauregard's article on the moral theology behind "Gawain," this act can be read as a commitment to the Christian ideal of martyrdom as the highest demonstration of faith and virtue[[49]](#footnote-49). According to Felix however, such a perspective on suffering only “begets the worship and glorification of death,” which he believes is a “grotesque” treatment of human life[[50]](#footnote-50). His harsh words bring to light for the player how the individualization of suffering obscures the culpability of the system that justifies it. Subsequently, the continued reverence of the institution only serves to reinforce the normalcy of needless sacrifice and loss for the benefit of those with power.

Throughout Felix’s character arc, he holds onto this staunch belief against chivalry. He believes that it is a flawed system and fundamentally wrong, even if he cannot change his comrades’ stance on chivalry as an ideal. Consequently, he is dedicated to protecting them from needlessly throwing their lives away[[51]](#footnote-51). This is not to say that he unknowingly adheres to the value of friendship in chivalry, but that he sees the value in human life and cannot bear for it to be squandered within a potentially callous system.  His character brings to light the insidiousness of chivalry and knighthood to the player and challenges the way it can exploit human beings.

**Dimitri: Chivalry and its Toll on One’s Humanity**

Finally, Dimitri’s character arc shines light on the potentially tragic consequences for those on the receiving end of another’s chivalric devotions. It also reveals the harsh reality of warfare and killing in the name of a cause or authoritative figure or system, which conceptions of chivalry tends to gloss over. Dimitri’s character strikes a balance between believing in chivalric ideals like Ashe and rejecting them for their inherent cruelty towards the people obligated to that system and those adjacent to them like Felix. Dimitri’s comrades view him as a “faultless warrior”[[52]](#footnote-52) and someone that is “always so kind to [his] allies” even if they are commoners in rank[[53]](#footnote-53). Similar to Ashe, he also believes in the values of “friendship, loyalty, and justice”[[54]](#footnote-54). Despite being the crown prince, he makes an effort to treat his friends as equals and commits time to building a relationship with them[[55]](#footnote-55). Additionally, he has no qualms about jumping into the fray of battle to protect his allies[[56]](#footnote-56). More prominently however, Dimitri has an intensely strong sense of justice.  He readily stands up against unfounded prejudice towards those close to him despite how it may negatively impact his reputation[[57]](#footnote-57). He can criticize a black-or-white sense of institutional justice and reflect on the validity of his actions within the systems he is beholden to as a member of royalty.  During Chapter 3 with Lonato's Rebellion, Dimitri questions afterwards whether it is “OK to take any life [one] please[s], all in service of some implacable ‘just cause’...Who’s to say [their cause] wasn’t [just]?”[[58]](#footnote-58).  Similarly, he reflects on the nature of killing and duty:

He was a soldier. An enemy. Someone we had cut down without hesitation. But in that moment, I realized he was also a real person, just like the rest of us. Of course, we cannot stand idly by and allow anyone to commit senseless acts of violence. Yet in dispensing what we call justice, we take the lives of cherished family members. Beloved friends. Killing is part of the job, but even so... There are times when I'm chilled to the bone by the depravity of my own actions[[59]](#footnote-59).

Dimitri concludes by also asserting that he “could never trust someone who kills without batting an eye. [His] heart won't allow it”[[60]](#footnote-60).  It is precisely this just heart of his that then abhors sacrifice in his name as another form of “senseless” violence[[61]](#footnote-61).

When confronted with the idea of the death of Felix’s brother, Glenn, as the “ultimate sacrifice” of a “perfect knight,” Dimitri becomes exasperated and instead frames Glenn’s death as an example of “needless” violence[[62]](#footnote-62). As someone who witnessed Glenn’s death firsthand, Dimitri saw no honour in his corpse, nor a “beautiful, proud death” that could be found in any “heroic tales”[[63]](#footnote-63). The idea of anyone dying and martyring themselves for “the sake of loyalty or duty”[[64]](#footnote-64) to him because of his unique status as royalty devastates Dimitri and has terrible ramifications for his character. In fact, such deaths eventually break him. Dimitri later goes mad from his trauma and survivor’s guilt. He abandons his kingdom and fails to uphold his reflective sense of justice in a violent quest to avenge those who died for his sake. He becomes obsessively compelled to prove that their deaths were not in vain and that their lives had value within such a system.

This development is in stark contrast to Gawain, whose honour is tarnished in theory by his “cowardice and covetousness” in facing the antagonist figure, the Green Knight, under the protection of a token from the Knight’s wife[[65]](#footnote-65).  However, Gawain still retains his status as an “honoured” knight and the respect of others at the end of his tale[[66]](#footnote-66). His actions are also readily absolved by the Green Knight himself, who looks past his slip from knightly grace and instead sees his true character as a worthy knight[[67]](#footnote-67).  This conclusion indicates how Gawain’s authority and status as a member of an elite class is functionally maintained and affirmed despite his personal shame.  It underscores how beneath the veneer of idealism and romanticism, chivalry and knighthood have more to do with a hierarchical system of power rather than individual merit.  There is no real social or political consequence for Gawain because his disgrace and failure are internal. Meanwhile his failure and subsequent humility becomes another facet of Gawain’s virtue in the eyes of Arthur’s court[[68]](#footnote-68).

In contrast, Dimitri’s fall from virtue has direct consequences for his character and drives him into destructive and cruel coping mechanisms for his grief.  So much so that it turns him into a “murderous monster” that has even slain innocent people on his revenge quest[[69]](#footnote-69). It additionally makes him believe he has “no right to live” anymore when he regains most of his former composure[[70]](#footnote-70). As illustrated by Dimitri’s character arc, the social code of chivalry has a traumatic toll on the humanity of those who are on the receiving end of loyalty, or who have been left behind because of it. His struggle delves into questions concerning justice and its fallibility on an individual and systemic scale for the player, who in turn has to reflect on how human nature fits within such systems. This human dimension is rarely if not entirely unaddressed in texts grappling with knighthood, chivalry, and its reality for individuals on various sides of a conflict.

**Real Honour**

As I have demonstrated in my discussion about chivalry, knighthood, and its various contentious relationships to one’s humanity, they are as much a system of power as a romanticized ideal. They can be falsely conflated with goodness, a callous institution that strips away one’s humanity to make them tools, and a devastating obligation that must be followed. If that is the case, then what constitutes true honour, especially with reference to the Blue Lion’s path?

This path proposes that honour has less to do with adhering to a social ideal, but rather hinges on a personal striving to grow and do good despite adversity or tragedy. In comparison, when Gawain is confronted by his personal failure to uphold his knightly virtues, he feels that his own virtue has been ruined permanently[[71]](#footnote-71). Gawain equates his sense of virtue as something derived from his blood relation to Arthur[[72]](#footnote-72), revealing ideological class distinctions of "noblesse," which defined the superior identity of the noble classes[[73]](#footnote-73) [[74]](#footnote-74). Another facet of Gawain’s failure lies in his not being able to perform to the Christian standard of sacrifice and obedience discussed by Beauregard[[75]](#footnote-75). Having failed his personal and systemic sense of distinction, Gawain exclaims that he is now "false and unworthy"[[76]](#footnote-76), that the “stain” of his shameful actions “can never be lifted” and is resigned to living on carrying his shame[[77]](#footnote-77). However, that resignation is the extent of Gawain's actions.  When he returns to Camelot, there is no need for him to prove himself and his honour is instead redeemed and affirmed by his noble peers–those with ideological authority in society[[78]](#footnote-78). Gawain’s atonement of perpetual humility begins and ends in conformity with Medieval Christian and socio-political ideals for the organization of society and individual conduct. He as a subject is not explored further. The fact that others in the court take up the same symbol of humility “for his sake”[[79]](#footnote-79) and declared that “whoever afterwards wore it was always honored” [[80]](#footnote-80) presents this conclusion as an exemplar to be emulated. Furthermore, it reveals that the poem’s intention in exploring the unconventional topic of shame within a chivalric romance is to stress the dominant values of that period rather than re-examining and challenging ideals of chivalry and knighthood on an individual level.

 Meanwhile, unlike Gawain, the characters from the Blue Lions path do not give into resigned humility in the face of their shortcomings but choose to act for the better.  Ashe strives to be a knight “only he can be”[[81]](#footnote-81) and steps away from his past as a thief to work towards“leav[ing] the world better than [he] found it”[[82]](#footnote-82).  In a misguided attempt at atonement for his failure to uphold a chivalric, Ashe goes on to call out a former knight for abandoning those who needed him[[83]](#footnote-83). He states, “I do think you should have seen things through to the end. Even if you had to endure dishonor for a while, you could have restored your name!”[[84]](#footnote-84) Meanwhile, Felix refuses to give in to his grief over the death of his brother and turns his attention to what he can do in the present. He states plainly that he will not “wallow” in his pain[[85]](#footnote-85) and continues fighting to protect his friends[[86]](#footnote-86).  Finally, Dimitri learns to grapple with his guilt and keep living for the sake of those who need him in the present.  He acknowledges that it is “an act of cowardice”[[87]](#footnote-87) for him to keep turning away from the present and wishing that he had “[died] along with the others”[[88]](#footnote-88). This is still the case even if many people resent him for the atrocities he has committed.  For Dimitri, the choice to keep living and rebuilding his broken kingdom is what constitutes true atonement for his mistakes. Like in Ashe and Felix’s character arc, the emphasis on an individual commitment to growth and moving forward despite personal hardship is plain to see. Simultaneously, their character arcs reveal questions that challenge our conception of chivalry and knighthood, and contribute to a nuanced vision of these historical concepts.

**Limitations**

This paper is focused exclusively on the Blue Lions path and its characters, thereby making it limited in scope to have a focused discussion of my targeted themes. A future study could explore how the other three paths of the game engage with the institutions of chivalry and knighthood, and how these paths may intersect or conflict with each other for a wholistic examination of the game.

Furthermore, this topic can be expanded to discuss other games with a focus on such Medieval institutions, especially those with an emphasis on realism rather than fantasy such as *Life is Feudal*, developed by Bitbox Ltd., to compare the differences in the incorporation and understanding of these historical concepts as well as the Medieval period itself more broadly.

However, with regards to analyzing videogames as a medium, a critical concept to consider is the term “ludonarrative dissonance”[[89]](#footnote-89). Coined by game designer Clint Hocking in 2007, it refers to the disconnect between the story a game is trying to convey and the actual gameplay experience. A simple example of this is when a game tries to convey a message of “violence is bad,” but the only way to progress through the game is by killing people without the ramifications of that violence being addressed. This design flaw then undercuts the game’s message and the potential impact of the themes it is addressing. The Blue Lion’s path in *Three Houses* (and the *Fire Emblem* series as a whole) tends to fall prey to ludonarrative dissonance, as it brings up questions about justice and war without necessarily following through on allowing the player to challenge the dominant institutions in that path. This dissonance is better addressed within the other paths of *Three Houses*; however, I believe there is still value to the unanswered questions that the Blue Lion’s path proposes because it brings complicated issues to light and challenges the player to think critically and seek out their own answer.

**Conclusion**

In the Blue Lions path of *Fire Emblem: Three Houses*, we get insight into how knighthood and chivalry historically functioned as a system of power and its complex interplay with one’s humanity. Furthermore, the game presents how true honour is found in one’s struggle and commitment to grow and be good rather than within a social code or set of ideals. “Gawain” and *Three Houses* bring to the forefront aspects of chivalry and knighthood that go unacknowledged in other works. In reading them together, we can explore the historical reality and values of the Medieval period in greater depth and find compelling avenues to explore.

However, *Three Houses* as a modern work particularly goes further in its examination of ideals and suffering to explore people within these systems as human beings with complex emotions and motivations intertwined with their socio-political environment.  It also asks questions that challenge the romanticization and normalization of systems of power. Although contemporary pieces of media like video games may have the tendency to misconstrue or romanticize elements of the past such as chivalry for the sake of spectacle, texts like "Gawain" are not free of their own biases and cannot be uncritically upheld as complete reflections of their historical reality. Moreover, with the distance and hindsight of time, modern pieces of media can conversely shine a light on concepts that may have been overlooked and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the past. They can also be a fresh and accessible avenue to engage an audience, motivating them to pursue a greater understanding of its inspirations. Consequently, modern media’s potential for storytelling and critical commentary on the past should not be so readily dismissed in our discussion of literature. There is always the potential to gain and enrich our experience of the world when we expand our horizons.

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2. Saul, *Chivalry and Knighthood*, 18-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Saul, 14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Saul, 3, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Fire Emblem Three Houses,* developed by Intelligent Systems and Koei Tecmo (Kyoto: Nintendo, 2019.) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “Gawain and the Green Knight,” in *Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Medieval Period*, ed. Joseph Black, 3rd ed., (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2015), 581-696. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Quotations outside of these Conversations will be cited with the abbreviated name of the character who speaks the line followed by when it takes place, like so: (Di., Ch. 3 Post-Battle Scene) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Some Support Conversation chains go beyond a stand-alone letter. For example, some chains may have a “B+” or “A+” scene. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cast discussed in relation to these three are Gilbert (Gi.), Ingrid (In.), Byleth (By.), Seteth (Se.), Sylvain (Sy.), Annette (An.), Mercedes (Me.), and Dedue (De.), with an additional character from the “Golden Deer” path, Marianne (Ma.), because of her relevance to Ashe and Dimitri. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Three Houses*, As.+By., C Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Three Houses*, As.+By., C Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Three Houses*, As.+Fe., C Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Three Houses*, As.+Fe., C Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Three Houses*, As.+Sy., C Support.  [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. “Gawain,” Lines 381, 633, 1262. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. “Gawain,” Lines 42, 261, 724, 1510, 1865, 2334 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. “Gawain,” Lines 562-639. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. “Gawain,” Lines 633, 635. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. “Gawain,” Line 679. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. “Gawain,” Lines 2430-2431. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. “Gawain,” Lines 2430-2434. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. “Gawain,” Lines 2513-2520. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. “Gawain,” Line 630. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Saul, *Chivalry and Knighthood*, 161, 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Saul, 199-200, 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Three Houses*, As., Ch. 3 Post-Battle Scene. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Three Houses*, As.+In., B Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Three Houses*, As.+Ma., B Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. A magical power that enhances one’s abilities in fighting or healing that is passed down by blood in noble households.  It manifests itself as a glowing symbol when activated. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Three Houses*, Ma.+By., B & A Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Details referenced from Marianne’s A Support in this paragraph refers to both the standard and alternate Support Conversation, which is unlocked if the player has completed the “Forgotten Hero” Paralogue or optional side quest in the game. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Three Houses*, Ma.+By., A Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *Three Houses*, Ma.+By., B Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. *Three Houses*, Ma.+As., A Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. *Three Houses*, As.+By., B Support.  [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Three Houses, Ma.+As., A Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. This dialogue line is unlocked if the player has already previously completed Marianne and Sylvain’s Support Conversation chain. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *Three Houses*, Fe.+As., C Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. *Three Houses*, Fe.+As. C Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *Three Houses*, (Fe.+In., B Support).  [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Morgan Gearld, “The Worthiness of Chaucer’s Worthy Knight,” *The Chaucer Review* 44, no. 2 (January 2009): 117, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25642137. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. “Gawain,” Lines 109, 304, 482, 1110, 1179, 1228, 1297, 2116, 2214, 2270, 2385, 2465. 2491. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. More specifically, "The Knight's Tale." [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Gerald, “Chaucer’s Knight,” 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. *Three Houses*, Fe.+Se., B Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. “Gawain,” Lines 2140-2141. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. “Gawain,” Lines 2131. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. “Gawain,” Lines 2265-2279. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. D.N Beauregard, “Moral theology in Sir Gawain and the Greeen Knight: The Pentangle, the Green Knight, and the Perfection of Virtue,” Renascence 65, no.3 (2013): 150-154, DOI: 10.5840/renascence20136537. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. *Three Houses*, Fe.+Se., B Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. *Three Houses*, In.+Fe., A Support; Fe.+Sy., A+ Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *Three Houses*, As.+Di., C Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. *Three Houses*, As.+Di., B Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. *Three Houses*, As.+Fe., C Support.  [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. *Three Houses*, Di.+As., C-B support; Di.+Me. C Support; Di.+An. C-B Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. *Three Houses*, Di.+Ma., C Support.  [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. *Three Houses*, Di.+De. C-A Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. *Three Houses,* Di., Ch. 3, Post-Battle Scene. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. *Three Houses*, Di.+By., B Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. *Three Houses*, Di.+By., B Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. *Three Houses*, Di.+By., B Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. *Three Houses*, Di.+In., B Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. *Three Houses*, Di.+In., B+ Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. *Three Houses*, Di.+In., B+ Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. “Gawain,” Line 2374. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. “Gawain,” Lines 2513-2520. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. “Gawain,” Lines 2405-2410. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. “Gawain,” Lines 2513-14, 2390-2394.  [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. *Three Houses*, Di., Ch. 17 Post-Battle Scene. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. *Three Houses*, Di., Ch. 17 Post-Battle Scene.  [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Alice F. Blackwell, “The Right Stuff: Habitus and Embodied Virtue in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,”*Quidditas* 31, (January. 2010): 84-85, DOI: 10.5840/renascence20136537. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. “Gawain,” Line 357. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Blackwell, “The Right Stuff,” 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Saul, *Chivalry and Knighthood*, 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Beauregard, “Moral Theology in Gawain,” 150-154. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. “Gawain,” Line 2382. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. “Gawain,” Lines 2310-2312. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. “Gawain,” Lines 2390-2394. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. “Gawain,” Line 2518. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. “Gawain,” Line 2520. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. *Three Houses*, As.+Fe., B Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. *Three Houses,* As.+By., B Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. The knight was unable to save his King from being assassinated, and subsequently thought he was unworthy to remain beside his family and serve at the crown prince's side. (Gi.+De., C-B Supports) [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. *Three Houses*, As.+Gi., B Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. *Three Houses*, Fe.+Di., A Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. *Three Houses*, In.+Fe., A Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. *Three Houses*, Gi.+.Di., A Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. *Three Houses*, Di.+Ma., B Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Clint Hocking, “Ludonarrative Dissonance in Bioshock”, *Click Nothing*, October 7, 2007, clicknothing.typepad.com/click\_nothing/2007/10/ludonarrative-d.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)