

## Color Symbolism, Heraldry, and Sir Gareth

Gareth fights single-colored knights in the order of Black, Green, Red, Blue, and second Red Knight

By Malory's time existed a complex system of associating "tinctures" (principal color of a knight's coat of arms) with alchemy and astrology.

Alchemical connections: the four knights represent the four elements: earth, water, fire, earth, from which Gareth emerges purified as the Gold Knight.

These tincture colors share abstract qualities about knighthood in a hierarchical fashion.

Primary principles: there were only two primary colors, black and white, with black being the lower of the two.

Secondary colors contain black and white, ranked by their amount of white  
These colors reflected abstract traits related to knighthood

Red: associated with ferocity and courage, sanguine humor

White: innocence and purity

Gold: royalty

Gareth fights the knights in increasing order of color importance that ultimately sets the stage for his fight with the Red Knight of the Red Lands. Gareth also assumes or masters the qualities associated with the colors.

Black Knight: patience, prudence, constancy

Green Knight: beauty, delight, love, joy, permanence

Red Knight: ferocity and the martial virtues of highness, prowess, hardiness (in medial position; has equal amount of black and white)

Blue Knight: rulership and royalty

Briefly, Gareth is a White Knight, signaling perfection.

But then Gareth emerges as Yellow or Gold Knight: noble color of princes and their families.

This signals some imperfection, possibly an over-eagerness for worldly "worship."

Excerpted from: Kenneth J. Tiller, "The Rise of Sir Gareth and the Hermeneutics of Heraldry," *Arthuriana* 17.3 (2007): 74-91.