



*an illustration from the original
manuscript of the poem, artist unknown.
The scene shows the Green Knight on his horse
after Gawain has beheaded him.*

sir gawain and the green knight

Introduction

Chronology

PARALLEL TEXT

Notes

Glossary

Further Reading and Links

[In the medieval original, the term NOTE at the end of a line indicates a crux in translation. Click on the term for an immediate transfer to further discussion, and then on the word RETURN to come back to the text.]

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INTRODUCTION

Translating *Sir Gawain*

There are few better testimonies to the vibrancy, subtlety and complexity of the medieval literary imagination in England than the poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In terms of narrative design, to be sure, the poem embraces a directness and clarity that make it immediately accessible. The events in the poem, which is divided into four parts, can be summarised as follows:

- i) the Christmas celebrations at King Arthur's court are one year interrupted by a Green Knight, who challenges anyone to strike him a blow with his axe, on the undertaking that he may return the blow a year later. Sir Gawain accepts the challenge and cuts off the knight's head, only to see the body walking off with the head, which tells Gawain to seek him out at a Green Chapel in a year's time.
- ii) seeking the Chapel twelve months later, Gawain is welcomed by the lord of a castle who confirms the Chapel is nearby. While he goes hunting, his wife will look after Gawain. The two men agree to exchange whatever they gain in the course of the day.
- iii) three days of hunting take place while the wife makes three attempts to seduce Gawain, only to achieve kisses which Gawain passes on to the lord, in return for the spoils of his hunt. But on her third attempt, the wife persuades Gawain to accept her girdle, which she says will protect his life. Gawain conceals this gift from the lord.
- iv) finding the Green Chapel and the Green Knight, Gawain is given three feinted blows, the last just nicking his neck. The Green Knight reveals that he is the lord of the castle, and that

INTRODUCTION

the last blow is a reproof for Gawain's failure to reveal the gift of the girdle. Chastened, Gawain returns to Arthur's court, which welcomes him back.

Such a bald summary, however, inevitably belies the richness of the poem's design and perceptions, and the numerous interpretations that have subsequently arisen. From the psychological to the anthropological, the semiotic to the feminist, the mythic to the moral, the environmental to the Christian, different approaches to *Sir Gawain* have served only to re-confirm its fertility, indeed inexhaustibility, as a masterful expression of the literary imagination – as telling in the 21st century as in the 14th.

Given this richness, it is worth exploring some of the central issues of language that the poem raises, issues that directly affect the kind of translation offered on this site. What are the distinctive qualities of the style in which *Sir Gawain* is written? What special features of vocabulary, diction, syntax, sound, and verse form make up the linguistic world of the poem? With what, in short, does any translation begin?

It begins with a language that presents an immediate impression of range, suppleness and flexibility, embracing as it does both literary sophistication and a raw, more primitive energy. On the one hand, the language evokes the declarative urgency of action and overt statement, of known, accessible objects and events in a real and tangible world. Men and women talk, laugh, eat, feast, ride, pray, sleep, and so forth. On the other, the language evokes a realm of implication and ambiguity – those ironies and resonances that subvert clear knowledge and secure understanding. Men and women may talk, but what they say is often a game, sometimes a concealment, at worst a betrayal. This basic opposition sounds throughout the words of the poem. In syntax, the language plays off paratactic simplicity against complex, and sometimes convoluted, hypotaxis. Its sound-world is energised by both repetition and singularity, both rhyme and non-rhyme, both reiterated yet also varied rhythms and metrical pulses. It capitalises upon the accessibility of common, ordinary words, but it revels too in the heteroglossia of dialect forms or specialised terms to do with knights' armour, hunting, castle architecture, and chivalric design. It seems a language, in short, that is *in her first age*, in the bloom of youth – dynamic, creative, diverse, resourceful.

In terms of actual vocabulary, it is true, the lexical base of *Sir Gawain* does not at first sight appear remarkable. Although word-counts of literary texts are notoriously problematic (should compound-words, for

example, or inflected forms of –ing or –ed, be considered as the same or as separate terms?), the number of different words used by the poet seems to be about 2,650, a substantially smaller figure than the lexical base of his contemporaries Langland, Gower, and Chaucer. Of this total, about 62% of words are derived from Old English and Germanic roots, about 28% from French and Romance roots, and nearly 10% from Scandinavian. At the time the poem was written, of course, any number of these words had become so thoroughly domesticated in the contemporary language as to have lost any sense of novelty or strangeness (the Scandinavian derivatives of *alofte*, *anger*, *call*, *dreme*, *knif*, *lawe*, *take*, for instance, were as integrated in common discourse as the French derivatives of *age*, *chance*, *honour*, *joy*, *serue*, *vse*, *werre*). Nevertheless, the language of *Sir Gawain* often capitalises upon the imaginative tensions between its base roots. The polished surfaces of courtly sophistication, expressed through such Old French derivatives as *aventure*, *cortaysye*, *countenance*, *gentyle*, *nurture*, are often set against far more abrasive, elemental worlds, expressed through Old English or Old Norse derivatives like *aghlich*, *draveled*, *gryndel-layk*, *schynder*, *snitered*, *vgly*. Then again, the diction of the poem reveals a further expressive tension between set, even formulaic terms and a wealth of synonyms for crucial figures or actions. *Clene*, *dere[ly]*, *fayre*, *hende*, *luff[y]ly*, *rich*, *stif* – each of these adjectives and adverbs is repeated more than fifteen times, sometimes in very different contexts. Central terms like ‘man’, however, yield no fewer than eleven synonyms (*burn*, *freke*, *gome*, *hathel*, *lede*, *renk*, *schalk*, *segge*, *tulk*, *segge*, *wyghe*, in addition to *knight*, *mon*, *noble*, *prince*), which are deployed flexibly and variously as the narrative unfolds. In this respect as in others, prodigality of vocabulary plays off against spareness, abundance against restrictedness.

These tensions between individual words are mirrored in the larger patterns that the poem presents: its syntactic relationships, for example, or the verse forms in which those relationships are placed. On the one hand, sentence construction is clean, bare, even rudimentary, with simple noun-verb-object sequences evoking an unambiguous world of human action and response. On the other, syntax can be dislocated, with sudden shifts of tense or convoluted accumulations of phrase upon phrase. In verse form, similarly, the poem plays off symmetries against asymmetries. The rhyme and metre of the five-line ‘bob and wheel’ that concludes each verse is maintained throughout (a rhyme scheme of ababa, with a single iambic foot for the ‘bob’). But against this kind of consistency run more variable, plastic effects, in verses that can range anywhere between twelve and thirty-seven lines in length. Repeated

patterns of lineation are set against much freer, unrestrained expanses of narrative, which may be short or long, as impulse leads.

But of all the linguistic resources revealed in *Sir Gawain*, it is its sound-world that is its most imaginatively compelling feature. Far from the major impact of sound being confined merely to final rhymes, it permeates the length of every line, generating an acoustic energy that never flags throughout the poem. The foundation of this energy has always been recognised: a relatively long alliterative line with four major stresses, of which the first three are the words generally alliterating (*The tulk that the trammes of tresoun there wrought... Ner slayn wyth the slete he sleped in his yrnes*). Within this basic framework, though, there is very considerable flexibility. The number of stressed alliterative words in a line can vary between two and five, as can the number of syllables – between seven and sixteen. The pitch of successive alliterative words can rise, or fall, or remain the same. Sometimes, two alliterative sounds are deployed in a line, rather than one only. But whatever the norms and variations of sound patterning, the entire poem is energised by the plosives and fricatives, pitches and tones, pulses and rhythms, of the speaking voice. Although the narrative of *Sir Gawain* has been transmitted in written form, its profounder imaginative allegiance is to a tradition of oral recitation, to the muscular, tactile force of a heard language. It is a language that, centuries later, the Dorset poet William Barnes evocatively summarised as ‘shapen of the breath-sounds of speakers, for the ear of hearers, and not from speech-tokens in books’.

This, then, is the kind of language with which a translator of *Sir Gawain* begins. What the translator does with such a text, however, is considerably more problematic. Like any piece of medieval writing, *Sir Gawain* presents a striking ambiguity. It is demonstrably closer to contemporary English than, say, modern-day French or German; but it is also, in significant cultural respects, further away. At the same time, though, the issues that are raised by its similarity and closeness pose an equal challenge to those raised by difference and distance. Some sense of these questions, and the variety of response they have elicited, can be well illustrated by placing together six modern versions of a very short passage from the poem. All the versions were published between 1959 and 1998. The five lines in the extract describe Gawain’s hazardous journey after leaving Arthur’s court:

INTRODUCTION

*Mony klyf he overclambe in contrayez straunge,
 Fer floten fro his frendez fremedly he rydez.
 At uche warthe other water ther the wyghe passed
 He fonde a foo hym byfore, bot ferly hit were,
 And that so foule and so felle that feght hym byhode.
 (713-17)*

- a) He rode far from his friends, a forsaken man,
 Scaling many cliffs in country unknown.
 At every bank or beach where the brave man crossed water,
 He found a foe in front of him, except by a freak of chance,
 And so foul and fierce a one that he was forced to fight.
- b) Many a cliff must he climb in country wild;
 Far off from all his friends, forlorn must he ride;
 At each strand or stream where the stalwart passed
 'Twere a marvel if he met not some monstrous foe,
 And that so fierce and forbidding that fight he must.
- c) He climbed over cliffs in many strange lands,
 Nowhere near home, friendless now,
 And at every ford over every stream
 He found himself facing enemies so foul
 And wild that they forced him to fight for his life.
- d) Many a cliff he climbed o'er in countries unknown,
 far fled from his friends without fellowship he rode.
 At every wading or water on the way that he passed
 he found a foe before him, save at few for a wonder;
 and so foul were they and fell that fight he must needs.
- e) He clambers over rough slopes in curious regions;
 Estranged from his friends, he rides on, ranging far.
 At each water-ford, or river-reach that he crossed
 He found, more often than not, a foe before him –
 One so foul and violent he had to fight him.
- f) Many fells he climbed over in territory strange;
 Far distant from his friends like an alien he rides.
 At every ford or river where the knight crossed
 He found an enemy facing him, unless he was in luck,
 And so ugly and fierce that he was forced to give fight.

INTRODUCTION

None of these extracts, and certainly none of the larger translations of which they are a part, is without merit – and a merit that is attentively revealed in the smallest of details. In version e), for instance, the translator effectively captures the lonely endlessness of Gawain's journey by adding the simple preposition 'on' to *he rydez*, just as the translator of d) convincingly transfers the epithet 'many' from the cliffs to the 'many strange lands'. Similarly, the use of 'scaling' in version a) signals the physical difficulties evoked by the verb *overclambe*, just as f) gives the *mony klyf* a legitimate Northern resonance in its 'many fells'. These and other examples could be easily multiplied. For all this, though, the prevailing impression generated by the extracts is of a dilution – even perhaps a fundamental dilution – of the original's strengths. It is not merely that compressed phrases like *bot ferly hit were* are rendered so unpersuasively, from the archaic 'Twere a marvel if he met not' in b), through the tortuous and unidiomatic 'save at few for a wonder' in d), to the simple omission of the words altogether in c). But common phrases, too, can create similar incongruities. *Contrayez straunge* is reasonably if unsurprisingly translated in four of the versions, yet some political or military connotation seems to be intimated in the 'territory strange' of passage f), and an almost 18th-century resonance evoked in the 'curious regions' of e). Likewise, the two common nouns in *uche warthe other water* are rendered in no fewer than ten different ways: bank, beach, ford, river, river-reach, strand, stream, wading, water, water-ford. And in half the translations, at least, alliterative pressure appears to have radically undermined natural idiom and common-sense meaning:

At every bank or beach where the brave man crossed water...
 At each strand or stream where the stalwart passed...
 At every wading or water on the way that he passed...

This is a hybrid, 'translated' English, belonging to neither writing nor speech, or indeed to any century at all.

What these and similar examples indicate, of course, is the central importance of creating and sustaining a convincing register, a mode of language that avoids both medieval quaintness and contemporary colloquialism, both contrived alliteration and dulled monotone, both poetic artifice and prosaic utterance. The problems of fashioning such a register, and the kinds of solution offered in this translation, can be

usefully divided into four major areas: diction, syntax, rhyme, and rhythm.

Diction

The vocabulary of *Sir Gawain*, as already noted, is both richer and narrower than contemporary English; and there is no question that its wealth is by far the harder of the two qualities to capture. The many synonyms for ‘man’, for instance, are simply unavailable in the modern-day language; and to try for some comparable list by presenting substitutes like ‘fellow’, ‘hero’, ‘master’, is to create even worse artificiality. Where the medieval synonym is used somewhat redundantly (as in *nade he sayned hymself*, segge, *bot thrye*, 763), there may be some justification for substituting it with the pronoun ‘he’; but elsewhere, the word ‘man’ has to stand. Similarly, the poet’s distinction between second-person singular (*thou*, *thee*, *thine*) and plural (*ye*, *yow*, *your/yowre*), through which subtle though not always consistent connotations of status, power and intimacy are conveyed, no longer survives. To retain a thou/you or thou/ye differentiation would be to invoke incongruous archaism. Where *Sir Gawain*’s lexical range is relatively narrow, however, modern English can provide substantial compensation. In different lines of the poem, the word *clene*, for example, has the various force of ‘pure’, ‘bright’, ‘elegant’, ‘fair’, ‘shining’, ‘neatly’, ‘completely’, ‘brilliantly’. To deploy in these circumstances a single generic equivalent such as ‘clean[ly]’ would be to suppress the vigour and variety of an immediately available resource. Likewise, the tension between broadly Germanic and Romance derivatives can still resonate in a modern translation, even though its impact may have been diluted in the course of six centuries. A sequence of words like ‘sharp, shattered, bones, sank, flesh, split, steel, bit’ (all occurring within three lines in this translation, 424-6) continues to evoke the abrasive force of Germanic derivatives, just as a similar sequence of ‘courteous, chivalrous, choose, chivalry, prized, practice’ (again occurring within three lines, 1511-13) attests to the different power of Romance derivatives.

Syntax

In syntax, too, *Sir Gawain* embraces a similar contrast between simplicity and sophistication. As has often been recognised, there is a clear difference between the force and directness of the Green Knight’s language and the complex layerings of Gawain’s speech:

‘Gawayn,’ quoth that grene gome, ‘God the mot luke!’
Iwysse thou art welcom, wyghe, to my place,

And thou hatz tymed thi travayl as truee mon schulde,
And thou knowez the covauntez kest uus bytwene:
At this tyme twelmonyth thou toke that the falled,
And I schulde at this New Yere yeply the quyte.
And we ar in this valay verayly oure one;
Here are no renkes us to rydde, rele as uus lykes.
Haf thy helme of thy hede, and haf here thy pay.
(2239-47)

Gret is the gode gle, and gomen to me huge,
That so worthy as ye wolde wyne hidere,
And pyne yow with so pouer a man, as play wyth your knyght
With anys kynnez countenance, hit keverez me ese;
Bot to take the torvayle to myself to trwluf expoun,
And towche the temez of tyxt and talez of armez
To yow that, I wot wel, weldez more slyght
Of that art, by the half, or a hundreth of seche
As I am, other ever schal, in erde ther I leve,
Hit were a folé felefolde, my fre, by my trawthe.
(1536-45)

The Green Knight’s speech is characteristically full of parataxis (and...and...and...and), simple noun-verb-object formulations (thou hatz tymed thi travayl...thou knowez the covauntez) and direct imperatives (haf thy helme of thy hede...haf here thy pay). Gawain’s, by contrast, embraces a convoluted hypotaxis, replete with subordinate clauses, parallelisms, parentheses, and suspensions. Main verbs galvanise the Green Knight’s utterance; they scarcely surface above Gawain’s eddying rhetoric. These syntactic differences are of course central to the poem as a whole, pointing as they do towards a deeper, more elemental conflict between savagery and sophistication, natural world and human civilisation. And to soften those edges in translation – to simplify Gawain’s syntax or make the Green Knight’s more complex – would be to undermine a basic opposition in the poem. This translation, therefore, tries to preserve the syntactic shapes of the original as much as possible, shapes that modern English is able to convey with considerable facility. In one other respect, however, there is a clear imaginative decision that has to be made about the poem’s syntax: its many shifts, often unexpected, between past and present tenses:

The wyghe *watz* war of the wylde, and warly *abides*,
And *braydez* out the bryght bronde, and at the best *castez*.
And he *schunt* for the scharp, and schulde *haf arered*;

INTRODUCTION

A rach *rapes* hym to, ryght er he *myght*,
And ryght bifore the hors fete thay *fel* on hym alle...
(1900-4)

He *myntez* at hym maghtyly, bot not the mon *rynez*,
Withhelde heterly his honde er hit hurt *myght*.
Gawayn graythely hit *bydez*, and *glent* with no membre,
Bot *stode* styлле as the ston, other a stubbe auther...
(2290-3)

A simple inventory of the tenses deployed in these passages (past, present, present, present, past, past, present, past, past; and present, present, past, past, present, past, past) is sufficient to show how freely the poet moves between them. Indeed, to a modern ear, the shifts can sometimes seem almost arbitrary, since they rarely signal that switch to a *sustained* historic present by which a sense of dramatic immediacy is established and maintained. In these circumstances, the translator faces four possibilities: to cast the entire narrative in a consistent past tense, to cast it alternatively in a consistent present, to editorialise and determine which parts of the narrative should be rendered in past and which in present, or to reproduce the shifts between tenses in the original. This last option has been chosen here for two reasons. Comparable transitions in mid-sentence (for instance, from indirect to direct speech) are quite common in medieval English; and to retain them here reinforces the historical positioning of the narrative. More importantly, the shifts of time-scale set up a further dynamic tension in the poem. Is this a narrative securely established in time past, with all the collective authority that accrues to the re-telling of mythic event, or is it being enacted in time present, without known conclusion? *Sir Gawain* plays powerfully upon the ambiguity.

Rhyme

An equally problematic issue raised is whether to retain or to discard the rhyming scheme of the five-line ‘bob and wheel’ that concludes each verse. Clearly, there are advantages in retention. After the pounding alliterative drive of the previous lines, the rhymes evoke a different kind of sound-world: more shaped, more regular, more contained, yet not without some sense of a compacting energy that then explodes in the first lines of the next stanza. But the metrical compression of the bob and wheel is a litmus-test of translation, for it serves to accentuate not only the force of rhymes that work, but more often, the bathos of those that do not:

INTRODUCTION

On many broad hills and high Britain he sets,
most fair.
Where war and wrack and wonder
By shifts have sojourned there,
And bliss by turns with blunder
In that land’s lot had share. (14-19)

He was less love-laden because of the loss he must
now face.
His destruction by the stroke,
For come it must was the case.
The lady of leaving then spoke;
He assented with speedy grace. (1284-89)

You may take one when you like and leave off at
your whim.’
She graciously leans his way
And neatly kisses him –
And of love’s turnings they say
Much in the interim. (1502-7)

These examples, taken from three different modern translations, could easily be multiplied; and there is, I imagine, no need to point out the incongruities of phrasing, mis-translations, failures of tone, and fractured rhythms, that have resulted from the attempt to preserve the rhyme scheme of the original. Indeed, given that such attempts must be made 101 times in the course of the text, serious questions arise whether the poem can survive such repeated infelicities. The judgment made in this translation is that it cannot, and that a sacrifice of rhyme is a small price to pay compared with the far more fatal sacrifice of tone and meaning. Occasionally in the translation, rhymes or half-rhymes have occurred naturally, usually when rhyming-words in the original have retained their meaning in modern English; and these terms have been retained. Elsewhere, though, the wrenching of idiom and sense into the straitjacket of rhyme has been rejected.

Rhythm

Whatever the effects of rhyme or non-rhyme upon the sound-world of the poem, the fashioning of an acoustically convincing rhythm is crucial to the success, or failure, of any translation. With numerous variations, the basic pulse in the original is anapestic, the light-light-strong stresses generating a constant sense of forward movement – a movement too

INTRODUCTION

subtle to be called galloping, too emphatic to be called ambling. The pulse is not without some balancing element in a mid-line caesura, and its movement does not often spill over into the following line in *enjambement*. But neither is it pulled up by a continual succession of masculine end-rhymes. A single example may help to convey something of the texture and pace of the typical pulse:

With merthe and mynstralsye, wyth metez at hor wylle,
Thay maden as mery as any men moghten
With laghyng of ladies, with lotez of bordez.
Gawayn and the godemon so glad were thay bothe
Bot if the douthe had doted, other dronken ben other.
Both the mon and the meyny maden mony japez
Til the sesoun watz seghen that thay sever moste;
Burnez to hor bedde behoved at the laste. (1952-9)

The flexible rhythms here, as elsewhere throughout the poem, evoke a sense of vibrant but disciplined energy. Dynamism is unobtrusively regulated. Most of all, the rhythms are constantly informed by the pitch and accent of a speaking voice, as it rises and falls, quickens and slows, recedes and advances. It goes without saying that such a voice is capable of an infinite variety of inflexions, as one word is slightly more stressed than another, or a barely held pause subtly separates two phrases. But the rhythms of a heard language remain the bed-rock of the poem. And it is the imaginative excitement of the voice that is carried by them that this translation tries to capture.

These significant features of diction, syntax, rhyme and rhythm are, of course, only part of the rich totality that is the poet's language. But if there is an English into which such a language could be translated, I have believed it to be an English that is a-historical, even timeless, in its simplicity and clarity. It is an English that is free both of incongruous colloquialism and of unconvincing archaism. It acknowledges the primitive, almost tribal, force of a human voice telling a story. It stays as close as possible to the original, recognising the imaginative power of that first utterance. Above all, it is an English that tries to capture the enduring spirit of the poem: the breadth and generosity of its perceptions, its celebratory force, its fundamental drive and embrace of life. For Gawain and Green Knight, court and natural world, are much more than ancestral images safely embalmed in some distant tomb. They are re-pictured in our world. And if this translation, in however small a

INTRODUCTION

way, allows them to live again in the present, it will have more than fulfilled its purpose.

Tim Chilcott
May 2003

CHRONOLOGY

- 1370s – 1390s probable decades for the poem's composition, with an earliest possible dating of *circa* 1350, and a latest of *circa* 1400. Both poet and scribe remain unidentified, although many conjectures have been offered. However, the dialect has been generally agreed as that of south-east Cheshire/north-west Staffordshire, in other words the north-west Midlands of England.
- 16th – 18th centuries although poem and manuscript must have been known during the 15th century, no record exists until the sole extant manuscript appears in the library of Henry Savile (1568-1617). It passes to Sir Robert Cotton (1571-1631), and then his son; Cotton collection is bequeathed to the nation in 1700, and eventually taken to the British Museum in 1753.
- 1824 first printed extract from the poem (ll. 20-36) appears in Thomas Warton's *The History of English Poetry*, ed. Richard Price.
- 1839 the poem first published, in *Syr Gawayne: A Collection of Ancient Romance-Poems by Scottish and English Authors, Relating to that Celebrated Knight of the Round Table*, ed. Sir Frederic Madden.
- 1839 – present Madden's edition, in the words of one commentator, 'introduce[s the poem] to a world of readers who have never allowed it to be forgotten.' Since that time, several thousand editions, translations, critical books, adaptations, articles, and related material concerned with the poem have been published.

I

Sithen the sege and the assaut watz sesed at Troye,
 The borgh brittened and brent to brondez and askez,
 The tulk that the trammes of tresoun ther wroght
 Watz tried for his tricherie, the trewest on erthe.
 Hit watz Ennias the athel and his highe kynde
 That sithen depreced provinces, and patrounes bicomme
 Welneghe of al the wele in the west iles.
 Fro riche Romulus to Rome ricchis hym swythe,
 With gret bobbaunce that burghe he biges upon fyrst,
 And nevenes hit his aune nome, as hit now hat;
 Tirus to Tuskan and teldes bigynnes,
 Langaberde in Lumbardie lyftes up homes,
 And fer over the French flod Felix Brutus
 On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez
 with wyne;
 Where werre and wrake and wonder
 Bi sythez hatz wont therinne,
 And oft both blysse and blunder
 Ful skete hatz skyfted synne.

NOTE

Ande quen this Bretayn watz bigged bi this burn rych,
 Bolde bredden therinne, baret that lofden,
 In mony turned tyme tene that wroghten.
 Mo ferlyes on this folde han fallen here oft
 Then in any other that I wot, syn that ilk tyme.
 Bot of alle that here bult, of Bretayne kynges,
 Ay watz Arthur the hedest, as I haf herde telle.
 Forthi an aunter in erde I attle to schawe,
 That a selly in syght summe men hit holden,
 And an outrage awenture of Arthurez wonderez.
 If ye wyl lysten this laye bot on little quile
 I schal telle hit as-tit, as I in toun herde,
 with tonge,
 As hit is stad and stoken

NOTE

I

After the siege and assault were ended at Troy,
 The city laid waste and burned down to ash,
 The man who had plotted the treacherous scheme
 Was tried for his treason, the plainest on earth.
 It was princely Aeneas and his noble kin
 Who then conquered kingdoms, and came to be lords
 Of well nigh all riches in the lands of the west.
 Noble Romulus goes towards Rome with all speed,
 Where he builds a new city with great pomp and pride
 And gives it his own name, a name it still has.
 In Tuscany, Tirus sets up new houses,
 In Lombardy, Langobard establishes homes,
 And far across the French sea Felix Brutus
 On many broad hillsides settles Britain
 in joy.
 There war and grief and miracle
 Have visited in turns,
 And often joy and turmoil
 Have alternated since.

When Britain had been founded by this prince of men,
 Bold men were bred there, who loved to do battle,
 Who caused strife and trouble in many times past.
 More wondrous things have happened in this land
 Than any that I know of, since that time.
 But of all who lived there, of the British kings,
 Arthur was noblest, as I have heard tell.
 And so an actual adventure I want to relate
 That some men have thought a miraculous thing
 And the strangest of happenings in tales about him.
 If you'll listen to this story just a short while,
 I'll tell it at once, as I heard it told
 in court.
 As it's been written down

In stori stif and stronge,
 With le1 letteres loken,
 In londe so hatz ben longe.

NOTE

This kyng lay at Camylot upon Krystmasse
 With mony luflych lorde, lendez of the best,
 Rekenly of the Rounde Table alle tho rich brether,
 With rych revel oryght and rechles merthes.
 Ther tournayed tulkes by tymeze ful mony,
 Justed ful jolilé thise gentyle knyghtes,
 Sythen kayred to the court caroles to make.
 For ther the fest watz ilyche ful fiften dayes,
 With alle the mete and the mirthe that men couthe avyse;
 Such glaume and gle glorious to here,
 Dere dyn upon day, daunsyng on nyghtes,
 Al watz hap upon heghe in hallez and chambrez
 With lordez and ladies, as levest him thoght.
 With all the wel of the worlde thay woned ther samen,
 The most kyd knyghtez under Krystes selven,
 And the lovelokkest ladies that ever lif haden,
 And he the comlokest kyng that the court halde;
 For al watz this fayre folk in her first age,
 on sille,
 The hapnest under heven,
 Kyng hyghest mon of wylle;
 Hit were now gret nye to neven
 So hardy a here on hille.

NOTE

Wyle Nwe Yer watz so yep that hit watz nwe cummen,
 That day double on the dece watz the douth served.
 Fro the kyng watz cummen with knyghtes into the halle,
 The chauntré of the chapel cheved to an ende,
 Loude crye watz ther kest of clerkez and other,
 Nowel nayted onewe, nevened ful ofte;
 And sythen riche forth runnen to reche hondeselle,
 Yeghed yeres-giftes on high, yelde hem bi hond,
 Debated busyly aboute tho giftes;
 Ladies laghed ful loude, thogh thay lost haden,

NOTE

In story brave and strong,
 With letters linking fittingly,
 That has survived through time.

The king had spent that Christmas time at Camelot
 With many splendid lords, men of the best,
 Fine brothers-in-arms from all the Round Table,
 And, as was right, great revelry and carefree joy.
 They tussled in tournaments time and again,
 And jousted most gallantly, these valiant knights,
 Then rode back to court for dancing and song.
 The feast lasted there a full fifteen days
 With all the food and amusement that could be devised:
 Such cries of enjoyment splendid to hear,
 Days full of uproar, dancing at night.
 Happiness sounded through chambers and halls
 Among lords, among ladies, whatever pleased best.
 With all of life's joy, they spent time together,
 The most famous knights in all Christendom,
 And the loveliest ladies who ever drew breath,
 And the handsomest king to rule over court,
 For these fair people were all in the flower of their youth
 in the hall.
 Most blessed under heaven,
 A king of finest cast,
 It would be hard to name
 So bold a group of men.

When New Year was so fresh it had scarcely begun
 Double helpings were served that day at high table.
 When the king and his knights arrived in the hall
 And the mass in the chapel had come to an end,
 The clergy and others all cried aloud:
 'Nowel', the name celebrated time and again.
 Then nobles ran forward to hand out their gifts,
 Calling presents aloud, given in person,
 Argued about them, all carried away.
 Ladies laughed loudly, although they had lost,

And he that wan watz not wrothe, that may ye wel trawe.
 Alle this mirthe thay maden to the mete tyme;
 When thay had waschen worthyly thay wenten to sete,
 The best burne ay abof, as hit best semed,
 Whene Guenore, ful gay, graythed in the myddes,
 Dressed on the dere des, dubbed al aboute,
 Smal sendal bisides, a selure hir over
 Of tryed tolouse, of tars tapites innoghe,
 That were enbrawd and beten wyth the best gemmes
 That myght be preved of prys wyth penyes to bye,
 in daye.

The comlokest to discrye
 Ther glent with yghen gray,
 A semloker that ever he syghe
 Soth moght no mon say.

NOTE

Bot Arthure wolde not ete til al were served,
 He watz so joly of his joyfnes, and sumquat childgered:
 His lif liked hym lyght, he lovied the lasse
 Auther to longe lye or to longe sitte,
 So bisied him his yonge blod and his brayn wyld.
 And also an other maner meved him eke
 That he thurgh nobelay had nomen, he wolde never ete
 Upon such a dere day er hym devised were
 Of sum aventurus thyng an uncouthe tale,
 Of sum mayn mervayle, that he myght trawe,
 Of alderes, of armes, of other aventurus,
 Other sum segg hym bisoght of sum siker kyght
 To joyne wyth hym in justyng, in jopardé to lay
 Lede, lif for lyf, leve uchon other,
 As fortune wolde fulsun hom, the fayrer to have.
 This watz the kynges countenance where he in court were,
 At uch farande fest among his fre meny
 in halle.

Therefore of face so fere
 He stightlez stif in stalle,
 Ful yep in that Nw Yere
 Much mirthe he mas withalle.

And winners weren't angry, as you can believe.
 This merriment went on till the time for the feast.
 When they'd washed properly, they went to their seats,
 Noblest knight at the top, as seemed fitting and right.
 The lovely Queen Guenevere was placed in the middle
 And sat on the dais, adornments all round,
 Fine silk by her side, a canopy over
 Of fine Toulouse silk, a Tharsian carpet
 Embroidered and studded with all the best gems
 That were proved of worth, and that money could buy
 anywhere.

The loveliest to behold
 Glanced round with blue-grey eyes.
 That he had seen more beautiful,
 No man could truly say.

But Arthur would not eat till all were served.
 He was so joyous in his youth, almost a boy.
 He loved to live life. He cared very little
 To lie down for long, or sit in a chair,
 So throbbed his young blood and his mind on fire.
 And then another custom touched him too,
 Became a point of honour: he would not eat
 On such a special day till he'd been told
 A strange, new tale about some perilous thing,
 Of some great wonder that he might believe,
 Of ancestors, of arms, or other marvellous deeds.
 Or till some knight had begged a trusty foe
 To join with him in jousting, set all to chance,
 Risk life for life, each letting the other,
 As fortune would smile, gain the advantage.
 Such was the king's custom when he was in court,
 At every splendid feast among his lords
 in hall.

With pride upon his face
 He stands there, masterful,
 So valiant on that New Year's Day
 And joking with them all.

Thus ther stondes in stale the stif kyng hisselven,
 Talkkande bifore the hyghe table of trifles ful hende.
 There gode Gawan watz graythed Gwenore bisyde,
 And Agravayn à la dure mayn on that other syde sittes,
 Bothe the kynges sistersunes and ful siker knightes;
 Bischop Bawdewyn abof biginez the table,
 And Ywan, Uryn son, ette with hymselven.
 Thise were dight on the des and derworthly served,
 And sithen mony siker segge at the sidbordez.
 Then the first cors come with crakkyng of trumpes,
 Wyth mony baner ful bryght that therbi hended;
 Nwe nakryn noyse with the noble pipes,
 Wylde werbles and wyght wakned lote,
 That mony hert ful highe hef at her towches.
 Dayntés dryven therwyth of ful dere metes,
 Foyssoun of the fresche, and on so fele disches
 That pine to fynde the place the peple biforne
 For to sette the sylveren that sere sewes halden
 on clothe.

Iche lende as he loved hymselfe
 Ther laght withouten lothe;
 Ay two had disches twelve,
 Good ber and bryght wyn bothe.

Now wyl I of hor servise say yow no more,
 For uch wyghe may wel wit no wont that ther were.
 An other noyse ful newe neghed bilive
 That the lude myght haf leve liflode to cach;
 For unethe watz the noyce not a whyle sesed,
 And the fyrst cource in the court kyndely served,
 Ther hales in at the halle dor an aghlich mayster,
 On the most on the molde on mesure hyghe;
 Fro the swyre to the swange so sware and so thik,
 And his lyndes and his lymes so longe and so grete,
 Half etayn in erde I hope that he were,
 Bot mon most I algate mynn hym to bene,

NOTE

So standing there the bold king stays,
 Chatting of trifles before high table.
 The worthy Gawain sat beside Guinevere,
 Agravain à la Dure Main on her other side,
 Both the king's nephews, and most trusty knights.
 Bishop Baldwin sits in the high place of honour
 And Ywain, son of Urien, ate by his side.
 These sat on the dais and were sumptuously served,
 And then at the side tables, other true men.
 The first course came in with a flourish of trumpets
 And many bright banners hanging down from them.
 A new sound of kettledrums with splendid pipes
 Wakened echoes with wild and with shrill, warbling notes,
 That many hearts thrilled to the music's loud blast.
 Then came on rich delicacies, exquisite food,
 Fresh meats piled up high, in so many dishes
 That space was scarce found in front of the guests
 To set down the silverware holding the stews
 on the board.

Each took what he wanted,
 Helped himself without grudge,
 Each pair had twelve dishes,
 Good beer and bright wine.

I'll say nothing more now of how they were served,
 For all will be sure there was no shortage there.
 Another noise, quite different, quickly drew near
 That would give the king leave to swallow some food.
 The sound of the music had scarcely died down
 And the first course been properly served to the court
 Than there bursts through the hall a ghastly knight,
 Quite the tallest in height of all men upon earth.
 From the neck to the waist, so thickset and square,
 His loins and his limbs so massive and long,
 In truth half a giant I think he must be.
 For all that, I judge him the hugest of men,

And that the myriest in his muckel that myght ride;
 For of his bak and his brest al were his bodi sturne,
 Both his wombe and his wast were worthily smale,
 And alle his fetures folyande, in forme that he hade,
 ful clene;

For wonder of his hwe men hade,
 Set in his semblaunt sene;
 He ferde as freke were fade,
 And overal enker-grene.

And al grathed in grene this gome and his wendes:
 A strayte cote ful streght, that stek on his sides,
 A meré mantile abof, mensked withinne
 With pelure pured apert, the pane ful clene
 With blythe blaunner ful bryght, and his hode bothe,
 That watz laght fro his lokkez and layde on his schulderes;
 Heme wel-haled hose of that same,
 That spenet on his sparlyr, and clene spures under
 Of bryght golde, upon silk bordes barred ful ryche,
 And scholes under schankes there the schalk rides;
 And all his vesture verayly watz clene verdure,
 Bothe the barres of his belt and other blythe stones,
 That were richely rayled in his aray clene
 Aboutte hymself and his sadel, upon silk werkez.
 That were to tor for to telle of tryfles the halve
 That were enbrauded abof, wyth bryddes and flyghes,
 With gay gaudi of grene, the gold ay inmyddes.
 The pendauntes of his payttrure, the proude cropure,
 His molaynes, and alle the metail anamayld was thenne,
 The steropes that he stod on stayned of the same,
 And his arsounz al after and his athel skyrtes,
 That ever glemered and glent al of grene stones;
 The fole that he ferkkes on fyn of that ilke,
 sertayn.

A grene hors gret and thikke,
 A stede ful stif to strayne,
 In brawdren brydel quik;
 To the gome he watz ful gayn.

For his size the finest to ride on a horse.
 Though the back and the chest of his body were broad,
 Both his belly and waist were decently small.
 All his features were equally fit for his shape,
 in all ways.

His colour, though, astounded them
 So clearly to be seen.
 He rode as bold could be,
 But completely vivid green.

The man and his clothes were all covered in green:
 Straight, close-fitting coat that clung to his sides,
 A fine mantle over, adorned on the inside
 With closely trimmed fur, the facing made bright
 With fine shining ermine, as well as his hood
 Thrown back from his hair, and laid on his shoulders.
 Neat, tightly-drawn stockings coloured to match
 Clung to his calves; below, shining spurs
 Of bright gold, over richly barred bands of embroidered silk.
 And there the man rides, without shoes on his feet.
 Every piece of his clothing was in truth brilliant green,
 Both the bars on his belt and other bright gems
 That were lavishly set in his shining array
 Round himself and his saddle, on embroidered silk.
 It would be hard to describe even half of the details –
 The birds and the butterflies – embroidered upon it
 In lovely bright green, with gold in the centre.
 The horse's breast hangings, its wonderful crupper,
 The studs on the bit, all the metal enamelled.
 The stirrups he stood in were coloured the same,
 So too his saddle-bows, and fine saddle-skirts
 That constantly glittered and gleamed with green gems.
 The horse that he rides on is totally green –
 not a doubt.

A green horse huge and strong
 A fearless steed to tame
 Champing in its bridle
 Yet obedient to the man.

We1 gay watz this gome gered in gene,
 And the here of his hed of his hors swete.
 Fayre fannand fax umbefoldes his schulderes;
 A much berd as a busk over his brest henges,
 That wyth his highlich here that of his hed rechtes
 Watz evesed al umbetorne abof his elbowes,
 That half his armes ther-under were halched in the wyse
 Of a kyngez capados that closes his swyre;
 The mane of that mayn hors much to hit lyke,
 We1 cresped and cemmed, wyth knottes ful mony
 Folden in with a fildore aboute the fayre grene,
 Ay a herle of the here, an other of golde;
 The tayl and his toppyng twynnen of a sute,
 And bounden bothe wyth a bande of a bryght grene,
 Dubbed wyth ful dere stonez, as the dok lasted,
 Sythen thrawen wyth a thwong a thwarle knot alofte,
 Ther mony bellez ful bryght of brende golde rungen.
 Such a fole upon folde, ne freke that hym rydes,
 Watz never sene in that sale wyth syght er that tyme,
 with yghe.

He loked as layt so lyght,
 So sayd al that hym syghe;
 Hit semed as no mon myght
 Under his dynttez dryghe.

Whether hade he no helme ne no hawbergh nauther,
 Ne no pysan ne no plate that pented to armes,
 Ne no schafte ne no schelde to schwve ne to smyte,
 Bot in his on honde he hade a hollyn bobbe,
 That is grattest in grene when grevez ar bare,
 And an ax in his other, a hoge and unmete,
 A spotos sparthe to expoun in spelle, quoso myght.
 The lenkthe of an elnyerde the large hede hade,
 The grayn al of grene stele and of golde hewen,
 The bit burnyst bryght, with a brod egge

Most handsome this man was, all clothed in green,
 With the hair on his head matching that of his horse.
 Waving, fine hair falls over his shoulders
 A great, bushy beard hangs down on his chest
 Which, just like the fine hair that falls from his head,
 Was trimmed all around above the elbows
 So that his arms were half-hidden beneath, just like
 A king's hooded cape that covers his neck.
 The great horse's mane was almost the same,
 Well curled and combed, with numerous knots
 Plaited with gold thread around the fine green,
 One strand of hair, then another of gold.
 Its tail and its forelock were plaited to match,
 Both tied with a ribbon of brilliant green,
 Studded with gems to the end of its tail,
 Then tied with a thong to an intricate knot
 Where many bright bells of burnished gold rang.
 No such horse upon earth, no such rider indeed,
 Had ever been seen in that hall before then,
 no, never.

His glance was swift as light,
 All said who saw him there.
 It seemed that no man could
 Survive his massive blows.

Yet he had no helmet, nor hauberk either,
 No neck-armour or normal fighting plate,
 No spear, no shield, to thrust or strike;
 But in one hand, he had a holly branch
 That is at its greenest when forests are bare,
 And an axe in the other, monstrous and huge,
 A terrible axe to tell of in words, if one could:
 The huge head as long as a measuring-rod,
 The spike made entirely of green and gold steel,
 The blade burnished brightly, its broad cutting-edge

As wel schapen to schere as scharp rasores,
 The stele of a stif staf the sturne hit bi grypte,
 That watz wunden wyth yrn to the wandez ende,
 And al bigraven with grene in gracios werkes;
 A lace lapped aboute, that louked at the hede,
 And so after the halme halched ful ofte,
 Wyth tryed tasselez therto tacched innoghe
 On botounz of the bryght grene brayden ful ryche.
 This hathel heldez hym in and the halle entres,
 Drivande to the heghe dece, dut he no wothe,
 Haylsed he never one, bot heghe he over loked.
 The fyrst word that he warp, 'Where is,' he sayd,
 'The governour of this gyng? Gladly I wolde
 Se that segg in syght, and with hymself speke
 raysoun.'

To knyghtez he kest his yghe,
 And reled hym up and down;
 He stemmed, and con studie
 Quo walt ther most renoun.

Ther watz lokyng on lenthe the lude to beholde,
 For uch mon had mervayle quat hit mene myght
 That a hathel and a horse myght such a hwe lach
 As growe gren as the gres and grener hit semed,
 Then grene aumayl on golde glowande bryghter.
 Al studied that ther stod, and stalked hym nerre
 With al the wonder of the worlde what he worche schulde.
 For fele sellyez had thay sen, bot such never are;
 Forthi for fantoun and fayryye the folk there hit demed.
 Therefore to answare watz arghe mony athel fieke,
 And al stouned at his steven and stonstil seten
 In a swogh sylence thurgh the sale riche;
 As al were slypped upon slepe so slaked hor lotez
 in hyghe;
 I deme hit not al for doute,
 Bot sum for cortaysye,
 Bot let hym that al schulde loute
 Cast unto that wyghe.

Finely fashioned for shearing, as the sharpest of razors.
 The grim knight gripped the handle, a strong, stout staff,
 Wound round with iron to the end of the haft,
 And engraved in green with graceful designs.
 A thong wrapped around it, that was held at the head
 Then looped round the handle time and again
 With many fine tassels fastened to it
 By studs of richly embroidered bright green.
 The knight bursts in and rides through the hall,
 Goes up to the dais, fearless of harm,
 Greeting no-one, but looking over their heads.
 He spoke his first words, 'Where is', he asked,
 'The leader of this lot? I'd be glad
 To clap eyes on the man, and have a few words
 with him.'

He looked down at the knights,
 As he swaggered around,
 Then paused, looked with care:
 Who had most renown?

A long time they just looked and stared at the man,
 For everyone wondered what it could mean
 That a knight and his horse could get such a colour,
 Growing green as the grass, even greener it seemed,
 Shining brighter than green enamel on gold.
 All standing there gazed, crept cautiously closer,
 Wondering what in the world he would do.
 They had seen many marvels, but never like this,
 And those there thought it illusion or magic.
 Many good knights, therefore, feared to reply:
 Stunned by his voice, they sat there stock-still
 While dead silence swept over all the rich hall;
 As if they'd slipped into sleep, their noise was stilled
 at a stroke.

Not just for fear, I think,
 But some for courtesy:
 To let the man whom all revere
 Speak to the knight the first.

Thenne Arthour bfore the high dece that aventure byholdez,
 And rekenly hym reverenced, for rad was he never,
 And sayde, 'Wyghe, welcum iwys to this place,
 The hede of this ostel Arthour I hat;
 Lyght luflych adoun and lenge, I the praye,
 And quat-so thy wylle is we schal wyt after.'
 'Nay, as help me,' quoth the hathel, 'he that on hygh syttes,
 To wone any quyle in this won hit watz not myn ernde;
 Bot for the los of the, lende, is lyft up so hyghe,
 And thy burgh and thy burnes best ar holden,
 Stifest under stel-gere on stendes to ryde,
 The wyghtest and the worthyest of the worldes kynde,
 Preve for to playe wyth in other pure laykez,
 And here is kydde cortaysye, as I haf herd carp,
 And that hatz wayned me hider, iwysis, at this tyme.
 Ye may be seker bi this braunch that I bere here
 That I passe as in pes, and no plyght seche;
 For had I founded in fere in feghtyng wyse,
 I have a hauberghe at home and a helme bothe,
 A schelde and a scharp spere, schinande bryghte,
 Ande other weppenes to welde, I wene wel, als;
 Bot for I wolde no were, my wedez ar softer.
 Bot if thou be so bold as alle burnez tellen,
 Thou wyl grant me godly the gomen that I ask
 bi ryght.'

Arthour con onsware,
 And sayd, 'Sir cortays knyght,
 If thou crave batayl bare,
 Here faylez thou not to fyght.'

NOTE

NOTE

'Nay, frayst I no fyght, in fayth I the telle,
 Hit arn aboute on this bench bot berdlez chylder.
 If I were hasped in armes on a heghe stende,
 Here is no mon me to mach, for myghtez so wayke.
 Forthy I crave in this court a Crystemas gomen,
 For hit is Yol and Nwe Yer, and here at yep mony.
 If any so hardy in this hous holdez hymselfen,

Arthur regards that wonder by high table,
 Greeted him courteously – he did not know fear –
 And said 'Sir, you're welcome indeed to this place.
 I'm master here. My name is Arthur.
 Please do dismount and stay here, I beg you,
 And what you have come for, we can learn later.'
 'No, by Him', said the knight, 'who sits up on high,
 To stay any time in this house was not what I came for.
 But because your fame, sir, is so highly regarded,
 Your city and warriors considered the best,
 Fearless in armour and riding on horseback,
 Bravest and worthiest of all living men,
 Valiant to fight with in other fine sports.
 Here courtesy's shown, as I have heard tell,
 And that's brought me here, indeed, at this time.
 You can be assured by this branch that I hold
 That I come here in peace. I don't seek a fight.
 Had I travelled with company, in war-like way,
 I've a hauberk at home and a helmet too,
 A shield and sharp spear, glittering bright,
 And other weapons to wield, I know that for sure.
 Since I look for no battle, though, my clothes are soft.
 If you are as bold as everyone says,
 You'll graciously grant me the game that I ask for
 by right.'

Arthur answered
 And said, 'Courteous knight,
 If you seek single combat,
 You won't lack a fight.'

'No, I'm seeking no fight, I can tell you for sure.
 Those round on this bench are just beardless boys.
 Were I buckled in armour and on a great horse,
 No man here could match me, your strength is so weak.
 So I ask of the court a Christmas game.
 It's Yule and New Year, and young men abound.
 If anyone here thinks himself brave enough,

Be so bolde in his blod, brayn in hys hede,
 That dar stifly strike a strok for an other,
 I schal gif hym of my gyft thys giserne ryche,
 This ax, that is hevé innogh, to hondele as hym lykys,
 And I schal bide the fyrst bur as bare as I sitte.
 If any freke be so felle to fonde that I telle,
 Lepe lyghtly me to, and lach this weppen,
 I quit-clayme hit for ever, kepe hit as his awen,
 And I schal stonde hym a strok, stif on this flet,
 Ellez thou wyl dight me the dom to dele hym an other
 barlay;
 And yet gif hym respite
 A twelmonyth and a day;
 Now hyghe, and let se tite
 Dar any herinne oght say.'

NOTE

If he hem stoned upon fyrst, stiller were thanne
 Alle the heredmen in halle, the hyghe and the lowe.
 The renk on his rouncé hym ruced in his sadel,
 And runischly his red yghen he reled aboute,
 Bende his bresed browez, blycande grene,
 Wayved his berde for to wayte quo-so wolde ryse.
 When non wolde kepe hym with carp he coghed ful hyghe,
 Ande rimed hym ful richely, and ryght hym to speke:
 'What, is this Arthures hous?' quoth the hathel thenne,
 'That al the rous rennes of thurgh ryalmes so mony?
 Where is now your sourquydrye and your conquestes,
 Your gryndellayk and your greme, and your grete wordes?
 Now is the revel and the renoun of the Rounde Table
 Overwalt wyth a worde of on wyghes speche,
 For al dares for drede withoute dynt schewed!
 Wyth this he laghes so loude that the lorde greved;
 The blod schot for scham into his schyre face
 and lere;
 He wex as wroth as wynde,
 So did alle that ther were.
 The kyng as kene bi kynde
 Then stod that stif mon nere,

NOTE

So bold in his blood, so crazed in his mind,
 To strike a blow fearlessly, then take one back,
 I'll give him this rich battle-axe as a gift –
 This axe of some weight – to use as he likes;
 I'll stand the first blow, unarmed as I am.
 If any's so fierce to try what I say,
 Run to me quickly, and pick up this weapon.
 I give up all claim to it; he can keep it for ever.
 I'll suffer his blow, unmoved on this floor,
 If you grant me the right to strike in return
 when I claim.
 But respite I'll give him
 Of a year and a day.
 So hurry, let's see now
 If any dare speak.'

If he'd stunned them at first, even stiller were now
 All the courtiers there, the high and the low.
 The man on the horse turned about in his saddle,
 Ferociously rolling his red eyes around,
 Knitting his eyebrows, bristling with green,
 Sweeping his beard, to see who would stand up.
 When no-one would answer, he coughed, very loud,
 Drew himself up quite grandly, and started to speak.
 'What, is this Arthur's house?' he exclaimed,
 'Whose fame is so talked of in so many lands?
 Where are your pride and your victories now,
 Your fierceness and anger, your great-sounding words?
 The revelry, repute of the Round Table now
 Overthrown with a word from one man's mouth.
 You cower in fear, and not a blow has been struck!
 He then laughs so loud that the king takes offence.
 The blood rushed up in shame to his fair face
 and cheeks.
 He turned wild as the wind
 As did all who were there.
 The king, by nature brave,
 Went up close to the man.

And sayde, 'Hathel, by heven, thy askyng is nys,
 And as thou foly hatz frayst, fynde the behoves.
 I know no gome that is gast of thy grete wordes,
 Gif me now thy geserne, upon Godez halve,
 And I schal baythen thy bone that thou boden habbes.'
 Lyghtly lepez he him to, and laght at his honde,
 Then feersly that other freke upon fote lyghtis.
 Now hatz Arthure his axe, and the halme grypez,
 And sturnely sturez hit aboute, that stryke wyth hit thought.
 The stif mon hym bifore stod upon hyght,
 Herre then ani in the hous by the hede and more.
 With sturne schere ther he stod he stroked his berde,
 And wyth a countenance dryghe he drogh down his cote,
 No more mate ne dismayd for his mayn dintez
 Then any burne upon bench hade broght hym to drynk
 of wyne.

Gawan, that sate bi the quene,
 To the kyng he can enclyne:
 'I beseche now with sayez sene
 This melly mot be myne.

'Wolde ye, worthilych lorde,' quoth Wawan to the kyng,
 'Bid me bowe fro this benche, and stonde by yow there,
 That I wythoute vylanye myght voyde this table,
 And that my legge lady lyked not ille,
 I wolde com to your counseyl bifore your cort riche.
 For me think hit not semly, as hit is soth knawen,
 Ther such an askyng is hevened so hyghe in your sale,
 Thagh ye yourself be talentyf, to take hit to yourselven,
 Whil mony so bolde yow aboute upon bench sytten
 That under heven I hope non hagherer of wylle,
 Ne better bodyes on bent ther baret is rered.
 I am the wakkest, I wot, and of wyt feblest,
 And lest lur of my lyf, quo laytes the sothe:
 Bot for as much as ye are myn em I am only to prayse,
 No bounté bot your blod I in my bodé knowe;

NOTE

And said, 'By heaven, sir, you've asked foolish things;
 But as you've sought folly, find it you should.
 No man I know is afraid of your boasts.
 Give me your battle-axe, in the name of God,
 And I'll grant you the wish that you've made.'
 He quickly goes to him, caught hold of his hand
 As proudly the other man climbed to the ground.
 The axe is now Arthur's. He grips its shaft,
 Swings it grimly around, as if meaning to strike.
 Towering before him stood the bold man,
 Taller than any in court, by more than a head.
 He stood there grim-faced, stroking his beard,
 And face unmoved, pulled down his coat,
 No more daunted, dismayed by those mighty strokes
 Than if a man in the hall had brought him a drink
 of wine.

Sitting by Guenevere,
 Gawain bowed to the king:
 'I beg you in the plainest words
 To let this fight be mine.'

'If you would, honoured lord', Gawain said to the king
 'Bid me rise from my seat and stand at your side,
 If I might leave the table without seeming rude,
 Without my liege lady being displeased,
 I'll come to consult you before your royal court.
 I don't think it fitting, if truth be known,
 When so boastful a request is made in your hall,
 To take it yourself, however glad you might be,
 While so many brave men sit round you on benches
 Whom I think are the firmest of will in the world
 And strongest in field when battle begins.
 I'm the weakest, I know, and the slowest of mind.
 My death would count least, were the truth to be known.
 I only am praised because you're my uncle;
 No merit I know in myself but your blood.

And sythen this note is so nys that nocht hit yow falles,
 And I have frayned hit at yow fyrst, foldez hit to me;
 And if I carp not comlyly, let alle this cort rych
 bout blame.'

NOTE

Ryche togeder con roun,
 And sythen thay redder alle same,
 To ryd the kyng wyth croun
 And gif Gawan the game.

Then comaunded the kyng the knyght for to ryse;
 And he ful radly upros, and rucheched hym fayre,
 Kneled down biforn the kyng, and cachez that weppen;
 And he luflyly hit hym laft, and lyfte up his honde
 And gef hym Goddez blessing, and gladly hym biddes
 That his hert and his honde schulde hardi be bothe.
 'Kep the, cosyn,' quoth the kyng, 'that thou on kyrf sette,
 And if thou redez hym ryght, redly I trowe
 That thou schal byden the bur that he schal bede after.'
 Gawan gotz to the gome with giserne in honde,
 And he baldly bym bydez, he bayst never the helder.
 Then carpez to Sir Gawan the knyght in the grene,
 'Refourme we oure forwardes, er we fyrrre passe.
 Fyrst I ethe the, hathel, how that thou hattes
 That thou me telle truly, as I tryst may.'
 'In god fayth,' quoth the goode knyght, 'Gawan I hatte,
 That bede the this buffet, quat-so bifallez after,
 And at this tyme twelmonyth take at the an other
 Wyth what weppen so thou wylt, and wyth no wygh ellez
 on lyve.'

That other onswarez agayn,
 'Sir Gawan, so mot I thryve,
 As I am ferly fayn
 This dint that thou schal dryve.

'Bigog,' quoth the grene knyght, 'Sir Gawan, me lykes
 That I schal fange at thy fust that I haf frayst here.

This affair is so foolish, unfitting for you –
 Since I asked you the first, it should come to me.
 If I've spoken improperly, let all the court judge
 for itself.'

Nobles whispered together,
 Agreed their advice;
 Their king would withdraw,
 Gawain take his place.

The king then commanded Gawain to stand.
 He got up at once, went forward with grace,
 And kneeled down before him, grasping the weapon.
 He gave it him graciously and, lifting his hand,
 Gave him God's blessing. He cheerfully urged
 That his heart and his hand should both remain strong.
 'Nephew, take care', the king said, 'how you deal the one blow.
 If you strike him just right, I fully believe
 You'll survive any blow he plans in return.'
 Gawain goes to the man, the axe in his hand,
 Who waits for him boldly, not a bit bothered.
 The knight in the green then addresses Gawain,
 'Let's restate our agreement, before we go on.
 First, knight, I beg you to give me your name,
 And give me it truly, so that I can have trust.'
 'In good faith, I'm Gawain', the honest knight said.
 'Whatever comes after I give you this blow,
 Next year on this day, I'll take a blow back,
 With what weapon you choose, and from no other person
 alive.'

The other man replies,
 'Sir Gawain, as I live,
 I am extremely glad
 That you will strike this blow.'

'By God', the Green Knight said, 'Sir Gawain, I'm pleased
 That I'll get from your hand what I've asked for here.

And thou hatz redily rehersed, bi resoun ful trwe,
 Clanly al the covaunant that I the kynge asked,
 Saf that thou schal siker me, segge, bi thi trawthe,
 That thou schal seche me thiself, where-so thou hopes
 I may be funde upon folde, and foch the such wages
 As thou deles me to-day bfore this douthe ryche.'
 'Where schulde I wale the?' quoth Gawan, 'Where is thy place?
 I wot never where thou wonyes, bi hym that me wrought,
 Ne I know not the, knyght, thy cort ne thi name.
 Bot teche me truly therto, and telle me how thou hattes,
 And I schal ware alle my wyt to wynne me theder,
 And that I swere the for sothe, and by my seker traweth.'
 'That is innogh in Nwe Yer, hit nedes no more,'
 Quoth the gome in the grene to Gawan the hende;
 'Yif I the telle trwly quen I the tape have,
 And thou me smothely hatz smyten, smartly I the teche
 Of my hous and my home and myn owene nome,
 Then may thou frayst my fare and forwardez holde;
 And if I spende no speche, thenne spendez thou the better,
 For thou may leng in thy londe and layt no fyrre –
 bot slokes!
 Ta now thy grymme tole to the,
 And lat se how thou cnokez.'
 'Gladly, sir, for sothe,'
 Quoth Gawan: his ax he strokes.

NOTE

The grene knyght upon grounde graythely hym dresses,
 A littel lut with the hed, the lere he discoverez,
 His longe lovelych lokkez he layd over his croun,
 Let the naked nec to the note schewe.
 Gawan gripped to his ax and gederes hit on hyght,
 The kay fot on the folde he before sette,
 Let hit doun lyghtly lyght on the naked,
 That the scharp of the schalk schyndered the bones,
 And schrank thurgh the schyire grece, and schade hit in twynne,
 That the bit of the broun stel bot on the grounde.
 The fayre hede fro the halce hit to the erthe,
 That fele hit foyned wyth hir fete, there hit forth roled;

You've fully repeated, in accurate terms,
 The whole of the contract I put to the king –
 Save that you will assure me, sir, on your word,
 You'll seek me yourself, wherever you think
 I may be found upon earth, to take back the payment
 You deal me today before this great crowd.'
 'Where should I find you?' said Gawan, 'where's your home?
 I don't know where you live, by Him who made me,
 Nor do I know you, your court or your name.
 Just tell me the truth, and what you are called,
 And I'll use all my wits to find my way there.
 I swear you this truly, upon my pledged word.'
 'That's enough for New Year; no more needs saying',
 Said the man in green to the courteous Gawan,
 'If I give you an answer after taking the blow
 That you'll give me so deftly, I'll tell you at once
 Of my house and my home and my actual name.
 Then you can ask how I am, and honour your pledge.
 But if I say nothing, the better for you:
 You can stay in your country, and look no further –
 but enough!
 So grip your grim weapon,
 Let's see how you strike.'
 'Gladly indeed, sir',
 Gawain says. He strokes the blade.

The Green Knight readily takes up his stand,
 Bowed his head slightly, exposing the flesh.
 His long lovely hair he swept over his head
 In readiness, letting his naked neck show.
 Gawain grasps hold the axe and lifts it up high,
 Set his left foot before him firm on the ground.
 He brought it down swiftly sheer through the bare flesh
 So that the sharp blade shattered the bones of the man,
 And sank through the white flesh, split it in two,
 And the shining steel blade bit into the floor.
 The handsome head flew from the neck to the ground:
 Many kicked with their feet as it rolled past them there.

The blod brayed from the body, that blykked on the grene;
 And nawther faltered ne fel the freke never the helder,
 Bot stythly he start forth upon styf schonkes,
 And runyschly he raght out, there as renkkez stoden,
 Laght to his lufly hed, and lyft hit up sone;
 And sythen bowez to his blonk, the brydel he cachchez,
 Steppez into stelbawe and strydez alofte,
 And his hede by the here in his honde haldez.
 And as sadly the segge hym in his sadel sette
 As non unhap had hym ayled, thagh hedlez he were
 in stedde.

He brayde his bulk aboute,
 That ugly bodi that bledde;
 Moni on of hym had doute
 Bi that his resounz were redde.

For the hede in his honde he haldez up even,
 Toward the derrest on the dece he dressez the face,
 And hit lyfte up the yghe-lyddez and loked ful brode,
 And meled thus much with his muthe, as ye may now here:
 'Loke, Gawan, thou be graythe to go as thou hettez,
 And layte as lelly til thou me, lude, fynde,
 As thou hatz hette in this halle, herande thise knyghtes;
 To the grene chapel thou chose, I charge the, to fotte
 Such a dunt as thou hatz dalt, disserved thou habbez
 To be yenderly yolden on Nw Yeres morn.
 The knyght of the grene chapel men knowen me mony,
 Forthi me for to fynde if thou fraystez, faylez thou never.
 Therefore com, other recreaunt be calde thou behoves.'
 With a runisch rout the raynez he tornez,
 Halled out at the hal dor, his hed in his hande,
 That the fyr of the flynt flaghe fro fole hoves.
 To quat kyth he becom knwe non there,
 Never more then thay wyste from quethen he watz wonnen.

What thenne?

The kyng and Gawan thare
 At that grene thay laghe and grenne;
 Yet breved watz hit ful bare

Blood spurts from the trunk, and gleamed on the green.
 Yet the man did not falter or fall for all that
 But stoutly strode forward on legs that were firm,
 And fiercely reached out where all the knights stood,
 Grabbed hold of his head, and snatched it up quickly;
 Then he strides to his horse, and snatches the bridle,
 Steps in the stirrups, and swings up aloft,
 His other hand holding his head by the hair.
 He sat in the saddle just as steadily
 As if he'd suffered no injury, though headless he sat
 in his seat.

He turned his body round,
 That gruesome trunk that bled;
 Many were struck with fear
 When he had had his say.

For he holds up indeed the head in his hand,
 Turns its face to the noblest lady at table.
 It lifted its eyelids and stared with wide eyes,
 And spoke with its mouth this much, as you'll hear:
 'Be ready to do as you promised, Gawain,
 And look for me faithfully until I am found,
 As you've sworn in this hall, and as heard by these knights.
 I charge you to go to the Green Chapel, to get
 Such a blow as you've given – you deserve
 To be promptly repaid on next New Year's Day.
 Men know me as the Knight of the Green Chapel,
 So you won't fail to find me, as long as you ask.
 Therefore come, or merit the name of a craven coward.'
 With a violent jerk, he tugs the reins round,
 Hurtled out the hall door, his head in his hand,
 So that flint-sparks flew up from his horse's hooves.
 What land he returned to, no-one there knew,
 No more than they knew from where he had come.

And then?

The king and Gawain laugh,
 And at the Green Knight grin;
 Yet it was judged quite openly

A mervayl among tho menne.

Thagh Arther the hende kyng at hert hade wonder,
 He let no semblaunt be sene, bot sayde ful hyghe
 To the comlych quene wyth cortays speche,
 'Dere dame, to-day demay yow never;
 We1 bycommes such craft upon Cristmasse,
 Laykyng of enterludez, to laghe and to syng,
 Among these kynde caroles of knyghtez and ladyez.
 Never the lece to my mete I may me wel dres,
 For I haf sen a selly, I may not forsake.'
 He glent upon Sir Gawen, and gaynly he sayde,
 'Now sir, heng up thyn ax, that hatz innogh hewen.'
 And hit watz don abof the dece on doser to henge,
 Ther alle men for mervayl myght on hit loke,
 And bi trwe tytel therof to telle the wonder.
 Thenne thay bowed to a borde these burnes togeder,
 The kyng and the gode knyght, and kene men hem served
 Of alle dayntyez double, as derrest myght falle;
 Wyth alle maner of mete and mynstralcie bothe,
 Wyth wele walt thay that day, til worthed an ende
 in londe.

Now thenk wel, Sir Gawen,
 For wothe that thou ne wonde
 This aventure for to frayn
 That thou hatz tan on honde.

A wondrous thing by them.

Though gracious king Arthur was deeply astonished,
 He gave away nothing, but loudly remarked
 To the beautiful queen in courteous words:
 'Dear lady, let nothing distress you today.
 Such strange goings-on are proper at Christmas,
 Just like the interludes, laughter and singing
 During courtly dances of ladies and knights.
 None the less, I can surely now go to my food.
 I've witnessed a marvel, I cannot deny.'
 He glanced at Sir Gawain and fittingly said,
 'Now sir, hang up your axe. It's severed enough.'
 It was hung above the dais, on a wall-tapestry,
 Where everyone might gaze on it amazed,
 The living proof of this most marvellous happening.
 Then together these two men went to a table –
 The king, the good knight – and bold men then served them
 With double helpings of delicacies, befitting their rank,
 With all kinds of food and minstrelsy too.
 They spent the day joyfully, till it drew into night
 on the earth.

Take care, Gawain, now,
 Don't neglect out of fear
 To seek out this quest that
 You've sworn to pursue.

II

This hanselle hatz Arthur of aventurus on fyrst
 In yonge yer, for he yerned yelpyng to here.
 Thagh hym wordez were wane when thay to sete wenten,
 Now ar thay stoken of sturne werk, stafful her hond. **NOTE**
 Gawan watz glad to begynne those gomnez in halle,
 Bot thagh the ende be hevy haf ye no wonder;
 For thagh men ben mery quen thay han mayn drynk,
 A yere yernes ful yerne, and yeldez never lyke,
 The forme to the fyniment foldez ful selden.
 Forthi this Yol overyede, and the yere after,
 And uche sesoun serlepes sued after other:
 After Crystenmasse com the crabbed lentoun
 That fraystез flesch wyth the fysche and fode more symple;
 Bot thenne the weder of the worlde wyth wynter hit threpez,
 Colde clengez adoun, cloudez upliften,
 Schyre schedez the rayn in schowrez ful warme,
 Fallez upon fayre flat, flowrez there schewen,
 Bothe groundez and the grevez grene ar her wendez,
 Bryddez busken to bylde, and bremlych syngen
 For solace of the softe somer that sues thereafter
 bi bonk;
 And blossomez bolne to blowe
 Bi rawez rych and ronk,
 Then notez noble innoghe
 Ar herde in wod so wlonk.

After the sesoun of somer wyth the soft wyndez,
 Quen Zeferus syflez hymself on sedez and erbez,
 Wela wynne is the wort that waxes theroute,
 When the donkande dewe dropez of the levez,
 To bide a blysfyl blusch of the bryght sunne.
 Bot then hyghes hervest, and hardenes hym sone,
 Warnez hym for the wynter to wax ful rype.
 He dryves wyth droght the dust for to ryse

II

This marvel was Arthur's first New Year's gift
 When the year was new born; he loved to hear challenges.
 Though they did not speak much as they sat down at table,
 Grim business confronts them; their hands are cram-full.
 Glad had Gawain been to start those games at court,
 But don't be surprised if the outcome is grim.
 Though men are light-hearted when they have strong drink,
 A year passes quickly, never bringing the same;
 Beginning and ending are seldom alike.
 So Yuletide passed by, and then the year after,
 Each season following the other in turn.
 After Christmas came mean, sullen Lent
 Trying the flesh with fish and plain food.
 But then the world's weather does battle with winter.
 Cold shrinks to the ground; the clouds rise up high
 And shed sparkling rain in ever-warm showers,
 Falling down on fair plains where flowers appear.
 Both the fields and the woodlands are clothed in green.
 The birds build busily, and rapturously sing
 For joy of gentle summer that soon follows
 on the slopes.
 The blossoms swell to bloom
 In hedgerows rich with growth,
 And many splendid songs
 In glorious woods resound.

Then comes the summer season with its gentle winds,
 When Zephyrus blows soft on seeds and grass,
 How lovely is the plant that springs from them
 When moistening dew drips from the leaves
 And waits for joyous gleamings from the shining sun.
 But then the autumn comes to urge it on,
 Warns it to ripen before the winter comes.
 Dry winds of autumn force the dust to rise

Fro the face of the folde to flyghe ful hyghe;
 Wrothe wynde of the welkyn wrastelez with the sunne,
 The levez lancen fro the lynde and lyghten on the grounde,
 And al grayes the gres that grene watz ere.
 Thenne al rypez and rotez that ros upon fyrst,
 And thus yirnez the yere in yisterdayez mony,
 And wynter wyndez agayn, as the worlde askez,
 no fage;
 Til Meghelmas mone
 Watz cumen wyth wynter wage;
 Then thenkkez Gawan ful sone
 Of his anious vyage.

Yet quyl Al-hal-day with Arther he lenges;
 And he made a fare on that fest for the frekez sake,
 With much revel and ryche of the Rounde Table.
 Knyghtez ful cortays and comlych ladies
 Al for luf of that lede in longynge thay were,
 Bot never the lece ne the later thay nevened bot merthe;
 Mony joylez for that jentyle japez ther maden.
 And after mete with mournyng he melez to his eme,
 And spekez of his passage, and pertly he sayde,
 'Now, lege lorde of my lyf, leve I yow ask;
 Ye knowe the cost of this case, kepe I no more
 To telle yow tenez therof, never bot trifel;
 NOTE
 Bot I am boun to the bur barely to-morne
 To sech the gome of the grene, as God wyl me wysse.'
 Then the best of the burgh bowed togoder,
 Aywan and Errik, and other ful mony,
 Sir Doddinaval de Savage, the duc of Clarence,
 Launcelot and Lyonel, and Lucan the gode,
 Sir Boos and Sir Bydver, big men bothe,
 And mony other menskful, with Mador de la Port.
 Alle this compayny of court com the kyng nerre
 For to counseyl the knyght, with care at her hert.
 There watz much derne doe1 driven in the sale
 NOTE
 That so worthé as Wawan schulde wende on that ernde,
 NOTE
 To dryve a delful dynt, and dele no more

And fly up high above the face of earth.
 Fierce winds of heaven wrestle with the sun,
 Leaves fly from trees, and fall upon the ground,
 And withered is the grass that once was green.
 All things that first sprung up ripen, then rot,
 And so the year goes by in many yesterdays,
 And winter comes again, as is the way of the world,
 to be sure;
 Until the moon of Michaelmas
 Has come with winter's pledge.
 Then soon in Gawain's mind
 Rise thoughts of his grim quest.

Yet he stays with Arthur till All Saints' Day,
 When the king holds a feast to honour the knight,
 With all the Round Table's rich revelry.
 The most courteous knights and lovely ladies
 Were distressed out of care and love for the man.
 For all that, they talked of pleasant things only;
 Many joked, but felt joyless for the kindly knight's sake.
 And after the feast, he sorrowfully talks to his uncle,
 Speaks of his journey, and honestly says:
 'Liege lord of my life, I now ask you leave:
 You know the terms of this matter. I don't want
 To trouble you with them; they're nothing but details.
 But without fail tomorrow, I set out for the blow,
 To seek this green man, as God will guide.'
 The best in the court then gathered together,
 Ywain and Eric, many others beside,
 Sir Dodinal the Fierce, the Duke of Clarence,
 Lancelot and Lionel, and Lucan the good,
 Sir Bors and Sir Bedevere, both powerful men,
 And many nobles besides, with Mador of the Gate.
 This group of courtiers approached the king
 To give the knight counsel, with pain in their heart.
 Much secret sorrow was felt in the hall
 That one as noble as Gawain should go on that quest,
 Suffer a terrible blow, and never more brandish

wyth bronde.

The knyght mad ay god chere,
And sayde, 'Quat schuld I wonde?
Of destinés derf and dere
What may mon do bot fonde?'

He dowellez ther al that day, and dressez on the morn,
Askez erly hys armez, and alle were thay broght.
Fyrst a tulé tapit tyght over the flet,
And miche watz the gild gere that glent theralofte.
The stif mon steppez theron, and the stel hondelez,
Dubbed in a dublet of a dere tars,
And sythen a crafty capados, closed aloft,
That wyth a bryght blaunner was bounden withinne.
Thenne set thay the sabatounz upon the segge fotez,
His legez lapped in stel with luflych greves,
With polaynez piched therto, policed ful clene,
Aboute his knez knaged wyth knotez of golde;
Queme quyssewes then, that coyntlych closed
His thik thrawen thyghez, with thwonges to tachched;
And sythen the brawden bryné of bryght stel rynggez
Umbeweved that wygh upon wlonk stuffe,
And wel bornyst brace upon his bothe armes,
With gode cowters and gay, and glovez of plate,
And alle the godlych gere that hym gayn schulde
that tyde;
Wyth ryche cote-armure
His gold sporez spend with pryde,
Gurde wyth a bront ful sure
With silk sayn umbe his syde.

When he watz hasped in armes, his harnays watz ryche:
The lest lachet other loupe lemed of golde.
So harnayst as he watz be herknez his masse,
Offred and honoured at the heghe auter.
Sythen he come to the kyng and to his cort-ferez,
Lachez lufly his leve at lordez and ladyez;

his sword.

The knight stayed cheerful still
And said 'What should I fear?
For whether harsh or kind,
A man's fate must be tried.'

He stays there that day, gets ready the next,
Calls early for his armour; all was brought in.
First a red silken carpet was spread on the floor;
There was much gilded armour brightly piled there.
The brave knight steps on it and picks up the steel,
Dressed in a tunic of rich Tharsian silk
With a well-fashioned hood, fastened at the neck
And trimmed on the inside with spotless white fur.
Steel shoes were then fitted upon the man's feet,
His legs lapped in steel with elegant greaves,
Knee-pieces attached to them, polished so clean
And held round his knees with knots of gold.
Next the fine cuisses that neatly enclosed
His thick muscled thighs, and fastened with thongs.
The linked coat of mail, then, with bright rings of steel,
Was wrapped round the knight and his beautiful clothes,
And well burnished braces on both of his arms
With fine elbow-pieces and gloves of steel plate,
And all the fine trappings of use to him
at that time.
With costly coat-armour,
His gold spurs worn with pride,
Girt with a trusty sword,
A silk belt round his side.

All buckled in armour, his harness was fine;
The smallest lachet or loop was gleaming with gold.
All armoured like this, he goes to hear mass
Offered and celebrated at the high altar.
Then he comes to the king and his comrades at court,
And takes gracious leave of the lords and the ladies;

And thay him kyst and conveyed, bikende hym to Kryst.
 Bi that watz Gryngolet grayth, and gurde with a sade l
 That glemed ful gayly with mony golde frenges,
 Ayquere naylet ful nwe, for that note ryched;
 The brydel barred aboute, with bryght golde bounden,
 The apparayl of the payttrure and of the proude skyrtez,
 The cropore and the covertor, acorded wyth the arsounnez;
 And al watz rayled on red ryche golde naylez,
 That al glytered and glent as glem of the sunne.
 Thenne hentes he the helme, and hastily hit kysses,
 That watz stapled stifly, and stoffed wythinne.
 Hit watz hyghe on his hede, hasped bihynde,
 Wyth a lyghtly uryoun over the aventayle,
 Enbrawdnen and bounden wyth the best gemmez
 On brode sylkyn borde, and bryddez on semez,
 As papjayeze paynted pervyng bitwene,
 Tortors and trulofez entayled so thyk
 As mony burde theraboute had ben seven wynter
 in toune.

The cercle watz more o prys
 That umbeclypped hys croun,
 Of diamauntez a devys
 That bothe were bryght and broun.

Then thay schewed hym the schelde, that was of schyr goulez,
 Wyth the pentangel depaynt of pure gold hwez.
 He braydez hit by the bauderyk, aboute the hals kestes,
 That bisemed the segge semlyly fayre.
 And quy the pentangel apendez to that prynce noble
 I am in tent yow to telle, thof tary hyt me schulde:
 Hit is a syngne that Salomon set sumquyle
 In bytoknyng of trawthe, bi tytyle that hit habbez,
 For hit is a figure that haldez fyve poyntez,
 And uche lyne umbelappez and loukez in other,
 And ayquere hit is endelez; and Englych hit callen
 Overal, as I here, the endeles knot.
 Forthy hit acordez to this knyght and to his cler armez,
 For ay faythful in fyve and sere fyve sythez

NOTE

NOTE

They kiss and escort him, commend him to Christ.
 By then, Gringolet was ready, girt with a saddle
 That splendidly gleamed with many gold fringes,
 Newly studded all over for this special goal.
 The bridle was striped, and trimmed with bright gold,
 The breast-harness adorned, the fine saddle-skirts,
 The crupper and horse-cloth matched the saddle-bows.
 All over, and set against red, were rich golden nails
 That glittered and glinted like gleams of the sun.
 Then he picks up his helmet, kisses it quickly;
 It was stapled strongly, and padded inside.
 It sat high on his head, and was fastened behind
 With a shining silk band above the chain-mail neck-guard,
 Embroidered, embossed with the finest of gems
 On a broad silken border, with birds on the seams:
 Parrots painted midst periwinkles,
 Turtle doves, true-love knots, embroidered as densely
 As if many ladies had worked on it seven years
 in court.

A circlet still more precious
 Was ringed about his head,
 Made of flawless diamonds
 That were both clear and dark.

Then they showed him the shield with its shining gules,
 And the pentangle painted on it in pure gold.
 He catches the strap, throws it over his neck,
 And it suited the knight exceedingly well.
 Why the pentangle befitted that noble prince
 I intend to explain, though delay me it may:
 It's a symbol that Solomon shaped long ago
 As an emblem of truth, and quite rightly so;
 For it's a figure comprising five points,
 Where each line laps over and joins to another,
 And there's no end anywhere. In England, it's called
 In all parts, so I hear, the knot without end.
 And so it well suits this knight, his bright armour;
 Ever faithful in five ways, five times in each way,

Gawan watz for gode knawen, and as golde pured,
 Voyded of uche vylany, wyth vertuez ennourned
 in mote;

Forthy the pentangel nwe
 He ber in schelde and cote,
 As tulk of tale most trwe
 And gentylest knyght of lote.

Fyrst he watz funden fautlez in his fyve wyttez,
 And eft fayled never the freke in his fyve fyngres,
 And alle his afaunce upon folde watz in the fyve woundez
 That Cryst caght on the croys, as the crede tellez;
 And quere-so-ever thys mon in melly watz stad,
 His thro thoght watz in that, thurgh alle other thynges,
 That alle his forsnes he feng at the fyve joyez
 That the hende heven-quene had of hir chylde;
 At this cause the knyght comlyche hade
 In the inore half of his schelde hir image depaynted,
 That quen he blusched therto his belde never payred.
 The fyft fyve that I fynde that the frek used
 Watz fraunchyse and felaghschyp forbe al thyng,
 His clannes and his cortaysye croked were never,
 And pité, that passez alle poyntez: thyse pure fyve **NOTE**
 Were harder happed on that hathel then on any other.
 Now alle these fyve sythez, for sothe, were fetled on this knyght,
 And uchone halched in other, that non ende hade,
 And fyched upon fyve poyntez, that fayld never,
 Ne samned never in no syde, ne sundred nouter,
 Withouten ende at any noke I oquere fynde,
 Wherever the gomen bygan, or glod to an ende.
 Therefore on his schene schelde schapen watz the knot
 Ryally wyth red golde upon rede gowlez,
 That is the pure pentaungel wyth the peple called
 with lore.

Now graythed is Gawan gay,
 And laght his launce ryght thore,
 And gef them alle goud day,
 He wende for evermore.

Gawain was known for his goodness, like gold refined,
 Free from all vice, and with all courtly virtues
 adorned.

So this new-painted pentangle
 He bore on shield and coat,
 As a man of trusted word
 And the fairest-spoken knight.

He was first found faultless in his five senses,
 Next, his five fingers never failed the knight;
 And all his earthly faith was in the five wounds
 Christ received on the cross, as the creed declares;
 And whenever the man was embroiled in battle,
 His one steadfast thought was that, above all else,
 He should draw all his courage from the five joys
 That the sweet Queen of Heaven found in her child.
 For this reason the gracious knight had
 Her image depicted inside his shield:
 So that when he looked at it, his heart never failed.
 The fifth group of five that he honoured, I hear,
 Was generosity and fellowship above everything.
 His purity and courtesy were never at fault,
 And surpassing all these, his compassion: these five
 Were more deeply ingrained in that man than any.
 Now all these five groups were embodied in him,
 Each one linked to another, without any end,
 And based on five points that always were fixed,
 Neither joining in one line, nor coming apart,
 Concluding at no point that I could make out,
 Wheresoever it started or came to an end.
 And so the knot was fashioned on his bright shield
 Most royally, red gold on red gules,
 And is called the true pentangle by people
 who know.

Now Gawain is finely prepared
 And takes his lance in hand.
 He bade them all farewell,
 For ever, so he thought.

He sperres the sted with the spurez and sprong on his way,
 So stif that the ston-fyr stroke out thereafter.
 Al that sey that semly syked in hert,
 And sayde softly al same segges til other,
 Carande for that comly, 'Bi Kryst, hit is scathe
 That thou leude, schal be lost, that art of lyf noble!
 To fynde hys fere upon folde, in fayth, is not ethe.
 Warloker to haf wroght had more wyt bene,
 And haf dyght yonder dere a duk to have worthed;
 A lowande leder of ledez in londe hym wel semez,
 And so had better haf ben then britned to noght,
 Hadet wyth an alvisch mon, for angardez pryde.
 Who knew ever any kyng such counsel to take
 As knyghtez in cavelaciounz on Crystmasse gomnez!
 We1 much watz the warme water that waltered of yghen,
 When that semly syre soght fro tho wonez
 thad daye.

He made non abode,
 Bot wyghtly went hys way;
 Mony wylsum way he rode,
 The bok as I herde say.

Now ridez this renk thurgh the ryalme of Logres,
 Sir Gawan, on Godez halve, thagh hym no gomen thoght.
 Oft leudlez and alone he lengez on nyghtez
 Ther he fonde noght hym byfore the fare that he lyked.
 Hade he no fere bot his fole by frythez and dounez,
 Ne no gome bot God bi gate wyth to carp,
 Til that he neghed ful neghe into the Northe Walez.
 Alle the iles of Anglesay on lyft half he haldez,
 And farez over the fordez by the forlondez,
 Over at the Holy Hede, til he hade eft bonk
 In the wyldrenesse of Wyrle; wonde ther bot lyte
 That auther God other gome wyth god hert lovied.
 And ay he frayned as he ferde, at frekez that he met,
 If thay hade herde any karp of a knyght grene,

He spurred on his horse and sprang on his way
 So strongly that sparks flew up from the stones.
 All who saw the fair knight sighed deep in their hearts,
 Together said quietly one to the other,
 Distressed for the fairest of men, 'By Christ, what a shame
 That your life should be lost, fair prince that you are.
 To find his equal on earth is not easy, indeed.
 It would have been wiser to have acted more cautiously,
 And appointed that nobleman, made him a duke.
 A glorious leader of men suits him well
 And would have been better than battered to nothing,
 Beheaded by an ogre from overweening pride.
 Who knew any king to heed the advice
 That knights give in quibbles about Christmas games?'
 Floods of warm tears flowed down from their eyes
 As the elegant knight set out from the castle
 that day.

He did not linger there
 But quickly went his way.
 Taking confusing roads,
 So I've heard the story say.

The knight now rides through England's realm,
 Sir Gawain, in God's name – but he found it no game.
 Often friendless, alone, he passes the nights,
 Finding before him no food that he liked.
 No friend but his horse past forests and hills,
 And no one but God to address on the way,
 Till he came very close to the north part of Wales.
 All the islands of Anglesey he keeps on his left,
 And at the headlands, he crosses the fords,
 There at the Holyhead, till he regained the shore
 In the wilderness of Wirral. Few people lived there
 Who loved either God or good-hearted men.
 And as he rode, always, he asked those he met
 If they'd ever heard talk of a knight all in green

In any grounde therabout, of the grene chapel;
 And al nykked hym wyth nay, that never in her lyve
 Thay seye never no segge that watz of suche hwez
 of grene.

The knyght tok gates straunge
 In mony a bonk unbene,
 His cher ful oft con chaunge
 That chapel er he myght sene.

NOTE

Mony klyf he overclambe in contrayez straunge,
 Fer floten fro his frendez fremedly he rydez.
 At uche warthe other water ther the wyghe passed
 He fonde a foo hym byfore, bot ferly hit were,
 And that so foule and so felle that feght hym byhode.
 So mony mervayl bi mount ther the mon fyndez,
 Hit were to tore for to telle of the tenthe dole.
 Sumwhyle wyth wormez he werrez, and with wolves als,
 Sumwhyle wyth wodwos that woned in the knarrez,
 Bothe wyth bullez and berez, and borez otherquyle,
 And etaynez that hym aneledede of the heghe felle;
 Nade he ben dughty and dryghe, and Dryghtyn had served,
 Douteles he hade ben ded and dreped ful ofte.
 For werre wrathed hym not so much that wynter nas wors,
 When the colde cler water fro the cloudez schadde,
 And fres er hit falle myght to the fale erthe.
 Ner slayn wyth the slete he sleped in his yrnas
 Mo nyghtez then innoghe in naked rokkez,
 Ther as claterande fro the crest the colde borne rennez,
 And hinged heghe over his hede in hard iisse-ikkles.
 Thus in peryl and payne and plytes ful harde
 Bi contray caryez this knyght, tyl Krystmasse even,
 al one;

The knyght wel that tyde
 To Mary made his mone,
 That ho hym red to ryde
 And wysse hym to sum wone.

Or a green chapel, anywhere there about.
 They all answered no, that never in their lives
 Had they seen a man who was such a colour
 of green.

The knight took unknown roads
 By many a wild hill-side
 His mood would often change
 Before he saw that chapel.

He scaled many cliffs in country unknown;
 Far off from his friends, like a stranger he rides.
 At each ford or river where the knight crossed,
 It was rare if no enemy was not facing him,
 One so foul and so fierce that he had to fight him.
 So many wonders he saw in the hills
 It would be hard to recount a tenth part of them.
 He sometimes fights dragons, and wolves as well,
 And sometimes wild men who lived in the crags,
 Both with bulls and with bears, and at other times boars,
 And with giants who pursued him across the high fells.
 Had he not been brave and determined, trusting in God,
 He would doubtless have died or been killed many times.
 Fighting troubled him less than the harshness of winter,
 When the cold, clear water fell down from the clouds
 And froze before it could reach the pale earth.
 Near dead from the sleet, he slept in his armour
 More nights than enough among the bare rocks,
 Where freezing streams ran, splashing down from the hilltops,
 And hung high overhead in hard icicles.
 So in danger, in hardship, and continual pain,
 The knight rides on through the land till Christmas Eve
 all alone.

Fervently he then
 Cried out to Mary
 To guide him as he rode,
 And find some lodging-place.

Bi a mounte on the morne meryly he rydes
 Into a forest ful dep, that ferly watz wylde;
 Highe hillez on uche a halve, and holtwodez under
 Of hore okez ful hoge a hundreth togeder;
 The hasel and the haghthorne were harled al samen,
 With roghe raged mosse rayled aywhere,
 With mony bryddez unblythe upon bare twyges,
 That pitosly ther piped for pyne of the colde.
 The gome upon Gryngolet glydez hem under,
 Thurgh mony misy and myre, mon al hym one,
 Carande for his costes, lest he ne kever schulde
 To se the servyse of that syre, that on that self nyght
 Of a burde watz borne, our baret to quelle;
 And therefore sykyng he sayde, 'I beseche the, lorde,
 And Mary, that is myldest moder so dere,
 Of sum herber ther heghly I myght here masse,
 And thy matynez to-morne, mekely I ask,
 And therto prestly I pray my pater and ave
 and crede.'

He rode in his prayere,
 And cryed for his mysdede,
 He sayned hym in sythes sere,
 And sayde, 'Cros Kryst me spende!'

Nade he sayned hymself, segge, bot thrye,
 Er he watz war in the wod of a wone in a mote,
 Abof a launde, on a lawe, loken under boghez
 Of mony borelych bole aboute bi the diches:
 A castle the comlokest that ever knyght aghte,
 Pyched on a prayere, a park al aboute,
 With a pyked palays pyned ful thik,
 That umbeteye mony tre mo then two myle.
 That holde on that on syde the hathel avysed
 As hit schemered and schon thurgh the schyre okez;
 Thenna hatz he hendly of his helme, and heghly he thonkez
 Jesus and sayn Gilyan, that gentyle ar bothe,
 That cortaysly had hym kydde, and his cry herkened.
 'Now bone hostel,' cothe the burne, 'I beseche yow yette!'

By a hill on that morning he splendidly rides
 Into deep forest, wondrously wild;
 Steep slopes on each side, and woods at the bottom
 Of massive grey oaks, in hundreds together;
 Hazel and hawthorn were thickly entangled
 And covered all over with rough, shaggy moss,
 Where many sad birds upon the bare branches
 Piteously piped from pain at the cold.
 The knight on Gringolet glides under trees,
 Through swamps and through marshes, a man all alone,
 Concerned for his duties, lest he should fail
 To hear mass for that Lord who, on that same night,
 Was born of a maiden, to end all our pain.
 Therefore sighing he said, 'I beg of you, Lord,
 And of Mary, gentlest mother so dear,
 For some lodging where I might hear mass devoutly
 And your matins tomorrow, humbly I ask,
 And at once I will say my pater, my ave
 and creed.'

He rode on in prayer,
 And bewailed all his sins
 He often crossed himself,
 Crying 'Christ's cross be my aid.'

The knight had hardly crossed himself three times
 Than he glimpsed through the trees a moated building
 Above a field, on a mound, shut in by the boughs
 Of great, massive trees that surrounded the moat:
 The finest of castles ever owned by a knight,
 Set in a meadow, a park all around,
 With a spiked palisade, close fastened together,
 That enclosed many trees for more than two miles.
 That side of the stronghold Gawain surveyed
 As it shimmered and shone through the splendid oak-trees,
 Then respectfully takes off his helmet, devoutly thanks
 Jesus and St. Julian, both of them kind,
 Who had treated him courteously, and answered his prayer.
 'Now good lodging', he said, 'I beg you to grant.'

Thenne gerdez he to Gryngolet with the gilt helez,
 And he ful chauncely hatz chosen to the chef gate,
 That broght bremly the burne to the bryge ende
 in haste.

The bryge watz breme upbrayde,
 The gatez were stoken faste,
 The wallez were wel arayed
 Hit dut no wyndez blaste.

The burne bode on blonk, that on bonk hoved
 Of the depe double dich that drof to the place;
 The walle wod in the water wonderly depe,
 And eft a ful huge heght hit haled upon lofte
 Of harde hewen ston up to the tablez,
 Enbaned under the abataylment in the best lawe;
 And sythen garytez ful gaye gered bitwene,
 Wyth mony luflych loupe that louked ful clene:
 A better barbican that burne blusched upon never.
 And innermore he behelde that halle ful hyghe,
 Towres telded bytwene, trochet ful thik,
 Fayre fylyolez that fyghed, and ferlyly long,
 With corvon coprounez craftyly sleghe.
 Chalkwhyth chymnees ther ches he innoghe
 Upon bastel rovez, that blenked ful quyte;
 So mony pynakle paynted watz poudred ayquere,
 Among the caste1 carnelez clambred so thik
 That pared out of papure purely hit semed.
 The fre freke on the fole hit fayre innoghe thoght,
 If he myght kever to com the cloyster wythinne,
 To herber in that hostel whyl halyday lested,
 avinant.

He calde, and son ther com
 A porter pure plesaunt,
 On the wal his ernde he nome,
 And haylsed the knyght erraunt.

'Gode sir,' quoth Gawan, 'woldez thou go myn ernde,

Then with his gilt spurs he urges on Gringolet,
 And by happy chance came on the main path
 That led him straight to the end of the drawbridge
 at once.

The bridge was drawn up firm,
 The gates were bolted fast,
 The walls were strongly built,
 They feared no stormy blast.

The knight stayed on his horse, and paused by the bank
 Of the deep double ditch that surrounded the place.
 The walls plunged in the water, incredibly deep,
 Then soared up above an astonishing height,
 Made of hard, hewn stone right up to the cornices
 With coursings beneath battlements in the finest of styles.
 There were turrets at intervals, splendidly built,
 With many fine loop-holes that stayed tightly shut.
 A better barbican the knight had never observed.
 Further in, he caught sight of a lofty hall
 With towers set at intervals, richly ornate.
 Fine pinnacles fitted them, wonderfully tall,
 That were topped with carved ornament, skilfully worked.
 He saw chalk-white chimneys – so many of them –
 On the roofs of the towers that dazzled all white.
 So many painted pinnacles were scattered all over,
 And clustered so thick in the castle's embrasures,
 That it seemed to be cut out of paper, indeed.
 To the man on his horse, it seemed so inviting
 Could he only manage to get through inside,
 And lodge in the building while the holy days lasted
 pleasantly.

He called; at once there came
 A most pleasant porter
 On the wall. He asked his business,
 Greeting the questing knight.

'Good sir', Gawain said, 'would you carry a message

To the hegh lorde of this hous, herber to crave?'
 Ye, Peter,' quoth the porter, 'and purely I trowee
 That ye be, wyghe, welcum to wone quyle yow lykez.'
 Then yede the wyghe yerne and com agayn swythe,
 And folke frely hym wyth, to fonge the knyght.
 Thay let down the grete draght and derely out yeden,
 And kneled down on her knes upon the colde erthe
 To welcum this ilk wygh as worthy hom thoght;
 Thay yolden hym the brode gate, yarked up wyde,
 And he hem raysed rekenly, and rod over the brygge.
 Sere segges hym sesed by sadel, quel he lyght,
 And sythen stabled his stede stif men innoghe.
 Knyghtez and swyerez comen down thenne
 For to bryng this burne wyth blys into halle;
 Quen he hef up his helme, ther hyghed innoghe
 For to hent it at his honde, the hende to serven;
 His bronde and his blasoun both thay token.
 Then haylsed he ful hendly tho hatelez uchone,
 And mony proud mon ther presed that prynce to honour.
 Alle hasped in his hegh wede to halle thay hym wonnen,
 Ther fryre fyre upon flet fersly brenned.
 Thenne the lorde of the lede loutez fro his chambre
 For to mete wyth menske the mon on the flor;
 He sayde, 'Ye at welcum to welde as yow lykez
 That here is: al is yowre awen, to have at yowre wyllle
 and welde.'
 'Graunt mercy,' quoth Gawayn,
 'Ther Kryst hit yow foryelde.'
 As frekez that semed fayn
 Ayther other in armez con felde.

Gawan glynte on the gome that godly hym gret,
 And thught hit a bolde burne that the burgh aghte;
 A hoge hathel for the nonez, and of hyghe eldee;
 Brode, bryght, watz his berde, and al Bever-hwed,
 Sturne, stif on the stryththe on stalworth schonkez,
 Felle face as the fyre, and fre of hys speche,
 And wel hym semed, for sothe, as the segge thught,

To the lord of this house, to ask for lodging?'
 'By St Peter, yes', the porter replied. 'Indeed I'm sure
 You'll be welcome to stay, sir, as long as you please.'
 The man went off speedily, and quickly returned
 With others all ready to welcome the knight.
 They lowered the great drawbridge and came out politely,
 Kneeled down on their knees upon the cold ground
 To welcome the knight in the way they thought fit.
 They ushered him through the broad gate, opened wide,
 He courteously bade them all stand, and rode over the bridge.
 Several men held his saddle as he stepped to the ground,
 Then strong men in plenty stabled his horse.
 Knights and squires then came down
 To escort the man joyously into the hall.
 As he took off his helmet, many ran forward
 To take it off from his hands, and so serve a prince.
 His sword and his shield they took away, too.
 Then he greeted most courteously each of these knights;
 Many proud men pressed forward, to honour the prince.
 They brought him, still clad in his armour, to the hall
 Where a beautiful fire fiercely burned in the hearth.
 Then the lord of the household comes down from his chamber
 To meet and to honour the man in his hall.
 He said, 'You are welcome to do as you please
 With everything here: all is yours, to have and to use
 As you like.'
 'Warmest thanks', Gawain said,
 'May Christ reward you.'
 Like men glad to meet,
 They clasped each other close.

Gawain gazed at the man who graciously greeted him,
 And thought him a bold knight who governed the castle,
 A huge man indeed, in the prime of his life.
 His beard, broad and glistening, was all reddish-brown.
 Stern-looking, standing firmly on muscular legs,
 With a face fierce as fire, and noble in speech.
 It suited him well, so Gawain considered,

Sanap, and salure, and sylverin sponez.
 The wyghe wesche at his wylle and went to his mete:
 Seggez hym served semly innoghe,
 Wyth sere sewes and sete, sesounde of the best,
 Double-felde, as hit fallez, and fele kyn fischez,
 Summe baken in bred, summe brad on the gledez,
 Summe sothen, summe in sewe saved with spyces,
 And ay sawes so sleghe that the segge lyked.
 The freke calde hit a fest ful frely and ofte
 Ful hendely, quen alle the hatheles rehayted hym at onez,
 as hende,
 'This penaunce now ye take,
 And eft hit schal amende.'
 That mon much merthe con make,
 For wyn in his hed that wende.

Thenne watz spyed and spured upon spare wyse
 Bi prevé poyntez of that prynce, put to hymselfen,
 That he biknew cortaysly of the court that he were
 That athel Arthure the hende haldez hym one,
 That is the ryche ryal kyng of the Rounde Table,
 And hit watz Wawen hymself that in that won syttez,
 Comen to that Krystmasse, as case hym then lymped.
 When the lorde hade lerned that he the leude hade,
 Loude laghed he therat, so lef hit hym thoght,
 And alle the men in that mote maden much joye
 To apere in his presense prestly that tyme,
 That alle prys and prowes and pured thewes
 Apendes to hys persoun, and praysed is ever;
 Byfore alle men upon molde his mensk is the most.
 Uch segge ful softly sayde to his fere:
 'Now schal we semlych se sleghtez of thewez
 And the teccheles termes of talkyng noble,
 Wich spede is in speche unspurd may we lerne,
 Syn we haf fonged that fyne fader of nurture.
 God hatz geven us his grace godly for sothe,
 That such a gest as Gawan grauntez us to have,
 When burnez blythe of his burthe schal sitte

With over-cloth, salt-cellar, and silver spoons.
 He washed when he wished, and sat down to eat.
 Men served him most handsomely
 With many fine soups that were wonderfully seasoned,
 Double portions, as fitting, then all kinds of fish,
 Some baked in pastry, some grilled over coals,
 Some poached, some flavoured with spices in stews,
 And always with delicate sauces to relish his taste.
 He kindly proclaimed it a feast, many times,
 As the knights all together urged him on,
 just as courteous:
 'Just take this penance now,
 And then it will improve.'
 Gawain was full of mirth
 As wine went to his head.

Then inquiry and queries were tactfully made,
 Discreet questions put to the prince,
 Till he politely admitted he belonged to the court
 Which the great, gracious Arthur rules alone –
 The royal, noble king of the Round Table –
 That it was Gawain himself who was sitting right there,
 Come at this Christmas, as fortune had chanced.
 When the lord of the castle learned who was his guest,
 He laughed out aloud, so much was he pleased;
 All the men in the castle were so overjoyed
 To make themselves known to him, soon as they might.
 All excellence, valour, and most refined manners
 Belonged to that knight, and were everywhere praised;
 His fame was the greatest of all men on earth.
 And each knight said quietly to his companion:
 'Now we'll enjoy fine displays of good manners,
 The impeccable language of noble speech.
 Without asking, we'll learn what makes for fine talk
 Since now we have welcomed this master of breeding.
 God has generously given his grace, indeed,
 In letting us have a guest such as Gawain
 Whose birth men will happily sit down

and synge.

In menyng of manerez mere
This burne now schal us bryng,
I hope that may hym here
Schal lerne of luf-talkyng.'

Bi that the diner watz done and the dere up
Hit watz negh at the nyght neghed the tyme.
Chaplaynez to the chapeles chosen the gate,
Rungen ful rychely, ryght as thay schulden,
To the hersum evensong of the hyghe tyde.
The lorde loutes therto, and the lady als,
Into a cumly closet coyntly ho entrez.
Gawan glydez ful gay and gos theder sone;
The lorde laches hym by the lappe and lendez hym to sytte,
And couthly hym knowez and callez hym his nome,
And sayde he watz the welcomest wyghe of the worlde;
And he hym thonkked throly, and ayther halched other,
And seten soberly samen the servise quyle.
Thenne lyst the lady to loke on the knyght,
Thenne com ho of hir closet with mony cler burdez.
Ho watz the fayrest in felle, of flesche and of lyre,
And of compass and colour and costes, of all other,
And wener then Wenore, as the wyght thoght.
Ho ches thurgh the chaunsel to cheryche that hende.
An other lady hir lad bi the lyft honde,
That watz alder then ho, an auncian hit semed,
And heghly honowred with hathelez aboute.
Bot unlyke on to loke tho ladyes were,
For if the yonge watz yep, yolwe watz that other;
Riche red on that on rayled ayquere,
Rugh ronkled chekez that other on rolled;
Kerhofes of that on, wyth mony cler perlez,
Hir brest and hir bryght throte bare displayed,
Schon schyrer then snawe that schedez on hillez;
That other wyth a gorger watz gered over the swyre,
Chymbled over hir blake chyn with chalkquyte vayles,
Hir frount folden in sylk, enfoubled ayquere,

and sing.

A knowledge of manners
This man will now teach us.
I think those who listen
Will learn how love-talk sounds.'

When dinner had finished and Gawain had risen,
The time had drawn on and was close now to night.
Chaplains made their way to their chapels,
Rang the bells loudly, just as they should,
For the solemn evensong of that festive day.
The lord makes his way there, his lady too;
She gracefully enters a lovely closed pew.
Gawain hastens there happily, quickly arrives.
The lord catches his sleeve, leads him to his seat.
He greets him familiarly, calls him by name,
And says he's the most welcome guest in the world.
Gawain heartily thanked him, and the two men embraced,
Sat quietly together while the service lasted.
The lady then wished to set eyes on the knight.
She came from her pew with many fair women.
She was the loveliest on earth in skin and complexion,
Above all others in figure, and colour, and bearing,
More lovely than Guinevere, it seemed to the knight.
She came down the chancel to greet him with grace.
Another lady led her by the left hand
Who was older than her, much older it seemed,
And respectfully treated by the knights all around.
Very different in looks these two ladies were;
While the young one looked fresh, the other was withered.
Every part of the one glowed rosy and red,
But rough, wrinkled cheeks hung down on the other.
The one wore her kerchiefs, with many bright pearls,
Which showed off her breast and her white throat, all bare,
And shining more brightly than new snow on hills.
The other had a gorget wrapped round her neck,
Her swarthy chin swathed in veils white as chalk,
Her forehead enfolded in silk, and all muffled up,

On the morne, as uch mon mynez that tyme
 That Dryghtyn for oure destyné to deye watz borne,
 Wele waxez in uche a won in world for his sake;
 So did hit there on that day thurgh dayntés mony.
 Bothe at mes and at mele messes fuld quaynt
 Derf men upon dece drest of the best.
 The olde auncian wyf heghest ho syttez,
 The lorde lufly her by lent, as I trowe;
 Gawan and the gay burde togeder thay seten,
 Even inmyddez, as the messe metely come,
 And sythen thurgh al the sale as hem best semed.
 Bi uche grome at his degré graythely watz served,
 Ther watz mete, ther watz myrthe, ther watz much joye,
 That for to telle therof hit me tene were,
 And to poynte hit yet I pyned me paraventure.
 Bot yet I wot that Wawen and the wale burde
 Such comfort of her compaynye caghten togeder
 Thurgh her dere dalyaunce of her derne wordez,
 Wyth clene cortays carp closed fro fylthe,
 That hor play watz passande uche prynce gomen,
 in vayres.
 Trumpes and nakerys,
 Much pypyng ther repayres;
 Uche mon tented hys,
 And thay two tented thayres.

Much dut watz ther dryven that day and that other,
 And the thryd as thro thronge in thereafter;
 The joye of sayn Jonez day watz gentyle to here,
 And watz the last of the layk, leudez ther thoghten.
 Ther wer gestes to go upon the gray morne,
 Forthy wonderly thay woke, and the wyn dronken,
 Daunsed ful dreghly wyth dere carolez.
 At the last, when hit watz late, thay lachen her leve,
 Uchon to wende on his way that watz wyghe straunge.
 Gawan gef hym god day, the godmon hym lachchez,
 Ledes hym to his awen chambre, the chemné bysyde,
 And there he drawez hym on dryghe, and derely hym thonkkez

The next day, when all men remember the time
 That God was born, who died for our good,
 Joy spreads through each dwelling on earth for His sake;
 So did it there on that day, through many delights.
 Both for dinner and for light meals, most exquisite dishes
 With the finest of dressings men set on the dais.
 The very old lady sits highest in honour,
 With the lord at her side, I think out of courtesy.
 Gawain and the lovely lady sat down together
 Right in the middle, where the food was served first, as was fitting.
 Then it passed down the hall, as seemed to them best,
 So that each man was served according to rank.
 Such food and such laughter, such joy was there there
 That to tell you about it I would find hard,
 Especially perhaps to give all of the details.
 I know, though, that Gawain and the lovely lady
 Found such pleasure together in each other's company,
 In their playful diversions of private remarks
 And pure courteous talk that was free from all sin,
 That their pleasure surpassed every revel of princes,
 to be sure.
 Trumpets and kettledrums
 And piping there sounds.
 All follow their wishes
 As the two followed theirs.

Much joy filled that day and the one that came after,
 And the third just as happy came pressing in then.
 The joy on St John's Day was lovely to hear,
 The end of festivities, people there knew,
 Since the guests were to leave the grey morning after.
 So they revelled all night, and drank up the wine,
 And danced on and on with beautiful songs.
 At last, very late, they all took their leave –
 The ones who were guests there – to go on their way.
 Gawain says his goodbyes, but his host takes his arm,
 Leads him back to his own room, beside the fire,
 And there he detains him, and thanks him profusely

For I schal teche yow to that terme bi the tymes ende,
 The grene chapayle upon grounde greve yow no more;
 Bot ye schal be in yowre bed, burne, at thyn ese,
 Quyle forth dayez, and ferk on the fyrst of the yere,
 And cum to that merk at mydmorn, to make quat yow likez
 in spenne.

Dowellez whyle New Yeres daye,
 And rys, and raykez thenne,
 Mon schal yow sette in waye,
 Hit is not two myle henne.'

Thenne watz Gawan ful glad, and gomenly he laghed:
 'Now I thonk yow thryvandely thurgh alle other thyng,
 Now acheved is my chaunce, I schal at your wyll
 Dowelle, and ellez do quat ye demen.'
 Thenne sesed hym the syre and set hym bysyde,
 Let the ladiez be fette to lyke hem the better.
 Ther watz seme solace by hemsself stille;
 The lorde let for luf lotez so myry
 As wygh that wolde of his wyte, ne wyst quat he myght.
 Thenne he carped to the knyght, criande loude,
 'Ye han demed to do the dede that I bidde;
 Wyl ye halde this hes here at thys onez?'
 'Ye, sir, for sothe,' sayd the segge trwe,
 'Why I I byde in yowre borghe, be bayn to yowre hest.'
 'For ye haf travayled,' quoth the tulk, 'towen fro ferre,
 And sythen waked me wyth, ye am not wel waryst
 Nauther of sostnaunce ne of slepe, sothly I knowe;
 Ye schal lenge in your lofte, and lyghe in your ese
 To-morn quyle the messequyle, and to mete wende
 When ye wyl, wyth my wyf, that wyth yow schal sitte
 And comfort yow with compayny, til I to cort torne;
 ye lende,
 And I schal erly ryse,
 On huntyng wyl I wende.'
 Gavayn grantez alle thyse,
 Hym heldande, as the hende.

I'll show you the way to your meeting at the year's end.
 Let the green chapel's whereabouts tax you no more.
 You shall lie in your bed, sir, taking your ease
 Till late in the day, then leave on the first of the year
 And get to the place by mid-day, to do as you please
 in the spot.

Stay till New Year's Day
 And then prepare to go.
 You will be shown the path;
 It's not two miles away.'

Then Gawain was joyful, and cheerfully laughed,
 'I heartily thank you for this, above everything.
 Since my quest is accomplished, I shall as you wish
 Remain here, and do whatever you think will be fit.'
 Then the lord took his arm, sat him by his side,
 Had the ladies brought in to increase their delight.
 They had marvellous pleasure by themselves alone.
 In his rapture, the lord spoke so joyously,
 As if losing his mind, unaware what he did.
 Then he said to the knight out aloud:
 'You've agreed to see through whatever I ask;
 Do you still keep that promise, right here and now?'
 'Sir, yes indeed', replied the true knight,
 'While I stay in your castle, I obey your command.'
 'You've had a hard journey', said the man, 'come from far,
 You've revelled all night with me. You've not yet recovered
 Your eating or sleep, I know that for sure.
 You shall stay in your room and lie at your ease
 Tomorrow till mass-time, then go to your meal
 When you wish, with my wife who will sit at your side
 With the comfort of company, till I return home.

You stay.
 I shall rise early
 And go to the hunt.'
 Gawain agrees to all this
 And bows graciously.

'Yet firre,' quoth the freke, 'a forwarde we make:
 Quat-so-ever I wyne in the wod hit worthez to yourez,
 And quat chek so ye acheve chaunge me therforne.
 Swete, swap we so, sware with trawthe,
 Quether, leude, so lympe, lere other better.'
 'Bi God,' quoth Gawain the gode, 'I grant thertylle,
 And that yow lyst for to layke, lef hit me thynkes.'
 'Who bryngez uus this beverage, this bargayn is maked':
 So sayde the lorde of that lede; thay laghed uchone,
 Thay dronken and dalyeden and dalten untyghtel,
 This lordez and ladyez, quyle that hem lyked;
 And sythen with Frenkysch fare and fele fayre lotez
 Thay stoden and stemed and stylly speken,
 Kysten ful comlyly and kaghten her leve.
 With mony leude ful lyght and lemande torches
 Uche burne to his bed watz broght at the laste,
 ful softe.
 To bed yet er thay yede,
 Recorded covauntez ofte;
 The olde lorde of that leude
 Cowthe wel halde layk alofte.

'But further', the man said, 'let us make an agreement:
 Whatever I catch in the woods shall be yours;
 Whatever fortune you come by, exchange it with me.
 Dear sir, let us swap in this way – swear on your honour –
 Whatever falls to our lot, whether worthless or better.'
 'By God', said good Gawain, 'to that I agree.
 That you like to play games gives me much delight.'
 'When we're brought a drink, this bargain is struck',
 Said the lord of the household, and everyone laughed.
 They drank and they dallied and revelled away,
 These lords and these ladies, as long as they pleased.
 Then with exquisite manners and many fine words,
 They stood and they lingered and spoke very soft,
 Kissed very graciously, then took their leave.
 With hosts of brisk servingmen and torches aglow,
 Each man was taken at last to a bed
 soft and quiet.
 But before they went to bed,
 The terms were sworn again.
 The lord, long of that house,
 Knew how to foster fun.

III

Ful erly bifore the day the folk uprysen,
 Gestes that go wolde hor gromez thay calden,
 And thay busken up bilyve blonkkez to sadel,
 Tyffen her takles, trussen her males,
 Richen hem the rychest, to ryde alle arayde,
 Lepen up lightly, lachen her brydeles,
 Uche wyghe on his way ther hym wel lyked.
 The leve lorde of the londe watz not the last
 Arayed for the rydyng, with renkkes ful mony;
 Ete a sop hastyly, when he hade herde masse,
 With bugle to bent-felde he buskez bylyve.
 By that any daylyght lemed upon erthe
 He with his hatheles on hyghe horses weren.
 Thenne thise cacheres that couthe cowpled hor houndez,
 Unclosed the kenel dore and calde hem theroute,
 Blwe bygly in buglez thre bare mote;
 Braches bayed therfore and brems noyse maked;
 And thay chastysed and charred on chasyng that went,
 A hundreth of hunteres, as I haf herde telle,
 of the best.
 To trustors vewters yod,
 Couples huntes of kest;
 Ther ros for blastez gode
 Gret rurd in that forest.

At the fyrst quethe of the quest quaked the wylde;
 Der drof in the dale, doted for drede,
 Highed to the hyghe, bot heterly thay were
 Restayed with the stablye, that stoutly ascryed.
 Thay let the hertez haf the gate, with the hyghe hedes,
 The brems bukkez also with hor brode paumez;
 For the fre lorde hade defende in fermysoun tyme
 That ther schulde no mon meve to the male dere.
 The hindez were halden in with hay! and war!

III

Before the day dawned, the household was up.
 The guests who were going called for their grooms,
 Who hastened to saddle horses at once,
 Prepare their equipment, and pack up their bags.
 The noblest get ready to ride, finely dressed;
 Nimble they mount, taking hold of their bridles,
 Each man riding out on the path he liked best.
 The loved lord of the region was not the last up
 To be ready for riding, with a great many men;
 He snatched a quick breakfast, when he'd heard mass.
 Bugles blowing, he eagerly makes for the fields of the hunt.
 By the time that the daylight had dawned upon earth,
 He and his men were mounted on horse.
 Experienced huntsmen coupled the hounds,
 Unlocked the kennel door and ordered them out,
 And blew on their bugles three single notes;
 Hounds bayed in response and made a fierce noise;
 Those that went straying were whipped and turned back
 By a hundred hunters, so I have been told,
 of the best.
 Keepers went to their posts,
 The huntsmen unleashed;
 Blasting horns spread
 Huge din in the woods.

At the first sound of baying, the wild creatures trembled.
 Deer fled from the valley, crazy with fear,
 Raced up the high ground – but were fiercely turned back
 By the ring of the beaters, who yelled at them savagely.
 They let the stags pass, with their high-antlered heads,
 And the fierce bucks as well, with their broad and flat horns;
 For the lord had forbidden that in the close season
 Any man interfere with any male deer.
 The hinds were held back with a 'hey!' and a 'whoa!'

The does dryven with gret dyn to the depe sladez.
 Ther myght mon se, as thay slypte, slenting of arwes –
 At uche wende under wande wapped a flone –
 That bigly bote on the broun with ful brode hede.
 What! thay brayen and blenden, bi bonkkez thay deyen,
 And ay rachches in a res radly hem folwes,
 Hunterez wyth hyghe horne hasted hem after
 Wyth such a crakkande kry as klyffes haden brusten.
 What wylde so atwaped wyghes that schotten
 Watz al toraced and rent at the resayt,
 Bi thay were tened at the hyghe and taysed to the wattres;
 The ledez were so lerned at the lowe trysters,
 And the grehoundez so grete, that geten hem bylyve
 And hem tofylched, as fast as frekez myght loke,
 ther-ryght.

The lorde for blys abloy
 Ful ofte con launce and lyght,
 And drof that day wyth joy
 Thus to the derk nyght.

Thus laykez this lorde by lynde-wodez evez,
 And Gawain the god mon in gay bed lygez,
 Lurkkez quyl the daylyght lemed on the woves,
 Under covertour ful clere, cortyned aboute;
 And as in slomeryng he slode, sleghly he herde
 A littel dyn at his dor, and dernly upon;
 And he hevez up his hed out of the clothes,
 A corner of the cortyn he caght up a lyttel,
 And waytez warly thiderwarde quat hit be myght.
 Hit watz the ladi, loflyest to beholde,
 That drow the dor after hir ful dernly and styлле,
 And bowed towarde the bed; and the burne schamed,
 And layde hym down lystyly and let as he slepte;
 And ho stepped stilly and stel to his bedde,
 Kest up the cortyn and creped withinne,
 And sat hir ful softly on the bed-syde,
 And lenged there selly longe to loke quen he wakened.
 The lede lay lurked a ful longe quyle,

NOTE

The does driven rowdily down the deep valleys.
 There you might see the rushing of arrows loosened from bows.
 At each turn in the wood, a shaft whistled by,
 Bit deep in their hides with its very broad head.
 How they scream and they bleed as they die on the slopes,
 And always the hounds are hard on their heels.
 The hunters with shattering horns race behind
 With such ear-splitting cries as if cliffs had collapsed.
 The beasts that escaped the men shooting at them
 Were all savaged and torn at the receiving points,
 Harried off from the high ground, driven down to the streams.
 So skilled were the men at the lower points
 And the greyhounds so big, that they caught them at once
 And tore them apart, fast as men could look on,
 right there.

The lord, filled with delight,
 On horseback, on foot,
 Spent the whole day in pleasure
 Till the dark of night fell.

So the lord has his sport by the woodland's edge
 And the good man Gawain lies in his fine bed,
 Lying snug while the daylight gleamed on the walls,
 Beneath a bright coverlet, with curtains all round.
 As he drifted and dozed, he drowsily heard
 A slight sound at his door, as it stealthily opened.
 He raised up his head from under the bedclothes,
 And lifted a corner of curtain a little,
 And glances out warily to see what it was.
 The lady it was, looking her loveliest,
 Who shut the door after her, careful and quiet.
 She came to the bed; the knight was embarrassed
 And laid back down lazily, pretending to sleep.
 She stepped very softly and stole to his bed,
 Lifted the curtain and crept there inside.
 She sat herself gently on the side of the bed
 And waited for ages to see when he woke.
 The knight shammed sleep for a very long while,

Compast in his concience to quat that cace myght
 Meve other mount - to mervayle hym thoght,
 Bot yet he sayde in hymself, 'More semly hit were
 To aspye wyth my spelle in space quat ho wolde.'
 Then he wakenende, and wroth, and to hir warde torned,
 And unlouked his yghe-lyddez, and let as hym wondered,
 And sayned hym, as bi his saghe the saver to worthe,
 with hande.

Wyth chyme and cheke ful swete,
 Both quit and red in blande,
 Ful lufly con ho lete
 Wyth lyppez smal laghande.

'God moroun, Sir Gawayn,' sayde that gay lady,
 'Ye ar a sleper unslyghe, that mon may slyde hider;
 Now ar ye tan as-tyt! Bot true uus may schape,
 I schal bynde yow in your bedde, that be ye trayst.'
 Al laghande the lady lanced tho bourdez.
 'Goud moroun, gay,' quoth Gawayn the blythe,
 'Me schal worthe at your wille, and that me we1 lykez,
 For I yelde me yenderly, and yeghe after grace,
 And that is the best, be my dome, for me byhovez nede':
 And thus he bourded agayn with mony a blythe laghter.
 'Bot wolde ye, lady lovely, then leve me grante,
 And deprece your prysoun, and pray hym to ryse,
 I wolde bowe of this bed, and busk me better;
 I schulde kever the more comfort to karp yow wyth.'
 'Nay, for sothe, beau sire,' sayde that swete,
 'Ye schal not rise of your bedde, I rych yow better.
 I schal happe yow here that other half als,
 And sythen karp wyth my knyght that I kaght have;
 For I wene wel, iwysse, Sir Wowen ye are,
 That alle the worlde worchipez quere-so ye ride;
 Your honour, your hedelayk is hendely praysed
 With lordez, wyth ladyes, with alle that lyf bere.
 And now ye are here, iwysse, and we bot oure one;
 My lorde and his ledez ar on lenthe faren,
 Other burnez in her bedde, and my burdez als,

Turned over in mind what the business might lead to
 Or mean – it seemed very strange to him,
 But he said to himself: 'It would be more fitting
 To find out by talking now just what she wants.'
 So he woke up and stretched and, turning towards her,
 Opened his eyes and pretended surprise,
 Crossed himself, as though gaining safety by this sign
 with his hand.

With lovely chin and cheek
 That blended white and red,
 She spoke most charmingly
 With dainty, laughing lips.

'Good morning, Sir Gawain,' the fair lady said,
 'What a careless sleeper, to let someone steal here.
 You're caught straight away. If we don't make a truce,
 I shall tie you to your bed, be sure of that!'
 Laughing merrily, the lady uttered the jest.
 'Good morning, dear lady,' Gawain said cheerfully,
 'You shall do as you wish with me – I'm very content.
 I surrender at once, and beg for your mercy,
 And that's for the best, I would judge, since I must.'
 So he joked in return with much happy laughter.
 'But if, lovely lady, you'd grant me your leave
 And set free your prisoner and ask him to rise,
 I'd get out of bed and dress myself properly
 And then take more pleasure in talking to you.'
 'No, indeed not, good sir,' said the beautiful lady,
 'You shan't leave your bed; my plan is better.
 I shall tuck you in here, on the other side too,
 And then talk with my knight whom I've caught.
 I know well, indeed, that you are Sir Gawain,
 Whom all the world honours wherever you go.
 Your good name and courtesy are most highly praised
 By lords and by ladies and all folk alive.
 You're now really here, and we are alone.
 My lord and his men have gone far away;
 Other men are in bed; my ladies are too.

'Bi Mary,' quod the menskful, 'me thynk hit an other;
 For were I worth al the wone of wymmen alyve,
 And al the wele of the worlde were in my honde,
 And I schulde chepen and chose to cheve me a lorde,
 For the costes that I haf knowen upon the, knyght, here,
 Of bewté and debonerté and blythe semblaunt,
 And that I haf er herkkened and halde hit here trwee,
 Ther schulde no freke upon folde bifore yow be chosen.'
 'Iwysse, worthy,' quoth the wyghe, 'ye haf waled wel better,
 Bot I am proude of the prys that ye put on me,
 And soberly your servaunt, my soverayn I holde yow,
 And yowre knyght I becom, and Kryst yow foryelde.'
 Thus thay meled of muchquat til mydmorn paste,
 And ay the lady let lyk as hym loved mych.
 The freke ferde with defence, and feted ful fayre;
 Thagh ho were burde bryghtest the burne in mynde hade,
 The lasse luf in his lode for lur that he soght
 bout hone –
 The dunte that schulde hym deve,
 And nedez hit most be done.
 The lady thenn spek of leve,
 He granted hir ful sone.

NOTE

Thenne ho gef hym god day, and wyth a glent laghed,
 And as ho stod, ho stonyed hym wyth ful stor wordez:
 'Now he that spendez uche spech this disport yelde yow!
 Bot that ye be Gawan, hit gotz in mynde.'
 'Querfore?' quoth the freke, and freschly he askez,
 Ferde lest he hade fayled in fourme of his castes;
 Bot the burde hym blessed, and 'Bi this skyl' sayde:
 'So god as Gawayn gaynly is halden,
 And cortaysye is closed so clene in hymselfen,
 Couth not lightly haf lenged so long wyth a lady,
 Bot he had craved a cosse, bi his courtayse,
 Bi sum towch of summe tryfle at sum talez ende.'
 Then quoth Wownen, 'Iwysse, worthe as yow lykez;
 I schal kysse at your comaundement, as a knyght fallez,
 And fire, lest he displese yow, so plede hit no more.'

'By Mary,' said the noble lady, 'I think it far different.
 If I were the worthiest woman alive,
 And all the wealth in the world was held in my hand,
 And could bargain and choose a lord for myself,
 The virtues I've seen in you, sir knight, here,
 Of good looks and courtesy, charming appearance –
 That I'd heard of before, and now know to be true –
 No man on earth would be picked before you.'
 'Indeed, noble lady,' said the man, 'you have chosen much better.
 Yet I'm proud of the regard that you hold me in;
 Your solemn servant, I deem you my queen,
 And I am your knight, and may Christ reward you.'
 So they chatted away till late in the morning,
 The lady acting always as if loving him much.
 The knight stayed on guard, behaving most courteously.
 Though she was the loveliest woman he could recall,
 Love played small part when he must face his ordeal
 very soon –
 The blow to strike him down,
 Assuredly must fall.
 She spoke of leaving then.
 The knight agreed at once.

So she wished him good day, and glanced at him laughing,
 And as she stood, stunned him with the strongest rebuke:
 'May He who blesses all speech repay you this pleasure,
 But that you are Gawain is hard to believe.'
 'But why?' said the knight, in very quick answer,
 Afraid he had made some breach of good manners.
 But the lady said 'bless you', and gave as her reason:
 'A man who's as good as Gawain is thought,
 In whom courtesy is so completely embodied,
 Could not easily have stayed so long with a lady
 Without begging a kiss, in all courtesy,
 Through a hint or suggestion at the end of their talk.'
 Then Gawain said: 'Indeed, let it be as you wish,
 I will kiss as you bid me, befitting a knight
 And lest I offend you, so urge it no more.'

Ho comes nerre with that and cachez hym in armez,
 Loutez luflych adoun and the leude kysses.
 Thay comly bykennen to Kryst ayther other;
 Ho dos hir forth at the dore withouten dyn more;
 And he ryches hym to ryse and rapes hym sone,
 Clepes to his chamberlayn, choses his wede,
 Boweze forth, quen he watz boun, blythely to masse;
 And thenne he meved to his mete that menskly hym keped,
 And made myry al day, til the mone rysed,
 with game.

Watz never freke fayrer fonge
 Bitwene two so dyngne dame,
 The alder and the yonge;
 Much solace set thay same.

And ay the lorde of the londe is lent on his gamnez,
 To hunt in holtez and hethe at hyndez barayne;
 Such a sowme he ther slowe bi that the sunne heldet,
 Of dos and of other dere, to deme were wonder.
 Thenne fersly thay flokked in folk at the laste,
 And quykly of the quelled dere a querré thay maked.
 The best bowed therto with burnez innoghe,
 Gedered the grattest of gres that ther were,
 And didden hem derely undo as the dede askez;
 Serched hem at the asay summe that ther were,
 Two fyngeres thay fonde of the fowlest of alle.
 Sythen thay slyt the slot, sesed the erber,
 Schaved wyth a scharp knyf, and the schyre knitten;
 Sythen rytte thay the four lymmes, and rent of the hyde,
 Then brek thay the balé, the bowelez out token
 Lystily for laucyng the lere of the knot;
 Thay gryped to the gargulun, and graythely departed
 The wesaunt fro the wynt-hole, and walt out the guttez;
 Then scher thay out the schulderez with her scharp knyvez,
 Haled hem by a lyttel hole to have hole sydes.
 Sithen britned thay the brest and brayden hit in twynne,
 And eft at the gargulun bigynez on thenne,
 Ryvez hit up radly ryght to the byght,

At that, she comes close, takes him in her arms,
 Bends graciously over and kisses the knight.
 They courteously commend each other to Christ;
 She goes out of the room without further word.
 He prepares to get up and hurries about,
 Calls for his chamberlain, chooses his clothes,
 And when he was ready, goes gladly to mass.
 Then he went to the meal that was properly waiting,
 And enjoyed the whole day till the moon rose,
 in games.

Never man was better welcomed
 By such a worthy pair:
 The older and the young one;
 Much pleasure did they share.

And still the lord of the land carries on with his sport,
 And hunts barren hinds through woodland and heath.
 The number he'd killed by the time the sun set,
 Of does and other deer, would be hard to imagine.
 And then at the finish, the men flocked in eagerly
 And quickly piled up the deer they had killed.
 The noblest came up with many attendants,
 Picked out the fattest of deer that were there
 And cut them up neatly, as ritual requires.
 Some of those testing them at the assay
 Found two inches of fat on even the leanest.
 They then slit the throat, grasped hold of the gullet,
 With a sharp knife scraped it, and knitted it shut.
 Next they cut off the four legs, ripped off the hide,
 Then opened the belly, and took out the bowels
 With care, so the cord of the knot would not then be loosened.
 They grabbed hold of the throat, and separated quickly
 The gullet from windpipe, and threw out the guts.
 Then they sheared off the shoulders with their sharp knives,
 Pulling them through a slit, to keep the sides whole.
 Next they cut the breast open and split it in two,
 And one of them starts again at the throat,
 Slits it swiftly right down to the fork of the forelegs,

Voydez out the avanters, and verayly thereafter
 Alle the rymez by the rybbez radly thay lance;
 So ryde thay of by resoun bi the rygge bonez,
 Evenden to the haunche, that hinged al samen,
 And heven it up al hole, and hwen hit of there,
 And that thay neme for the noumbles bi nome, as I trowe,
 bi kynde;
 Bi the byght al of the thyghes
 The lappez thay lance bihynde;
 To hewe hit in two thay hyghes,
 Bi the bakbon to unbynde.

Bothe the hede and the hals thay hwen of thenne,
 And sythen sunder thay the sydez swyft fro the chyne,
 And the corbeles fee thay kest in a greve;
 Thenn thurled they ayther thik side thurgh bi the rybbe,
 And hinged thenne ayther bi hoghes of the fourchez,
 Uche freke for his fee, as fallez for to have.
 Upon a felle of the fayre best fede thay thayr houndes
 Wyth the lyver and the lyghtez, the lether of the paunchez,
 And bred bathed in blod blende theramongez.
 Baldely thay blw prys, bayed thayr rachchez,
 Sythen fonge thay her flesche, folden to home,
 Strakande ful stoutly mony stif motez.
 Bi that the daylyght watz done the douthe watz al wonen
 Into the comly castel, ther the knyght bidez
 ful stille,
 Wyth blys and bryght fyr bette.
 The lorde is comen thertylle;
 When Gawayn wyth hym mette
 Ther watz bot wele at wylle.

Thenne comaunded the lorde in that sale to samen alle the meny,
 Bothe the ladyes on lowe to lyght with her burdes
 Bifore alle the folk on the flette, frekez he beddez
 Verayly his venysoun to fech hym byforne,
 And al godly in gomen Gawayn he called,

Throws out the offal, and expertly then
 They cut all the membranes away from the ribs.
 They clean them away from the back-bone correctly
 Right down to the haunches, so it all hung together.
 They lift it up in one piece, and lopped it off there –
 And to that they give the name ‘numbles’, I think,
 as is right.
 At the fork of the thighs
 They cut the loose skin.
 Then rush to split the carcass
 In two, along the spine.

Both the head and the neck they cut off next,
 Then rapidly part the sides from the chine,
 And the raven’s fee they throw in a thicket.
 Then they pierced each thick side through the ribs,
 Hanging them up by the hocks of the legs,
 Each man for his fee getting proper reward.
 On a fine beast’s skin, they put food for their hounds,
 The liver and lights, the stomach lining,
 And bread soaked in blood, all mixed together.
 They blazoned their capture, with the baying of hounds,
 Then took up their game and started for home,
 Blasting away with many loud notes.
 By the time day was done, they had all ridden back
 To the splendid castle, where the knight waits
 in quietness.
 With joy and bright fire kindled,
 The lord comes to his hall.
 When Gawayn met with him,
 There was unbridled joy.

The lord then commanded the household to gather in hall
 And both of the ladies to come down with their maids.
 In front of the gathering, he orders the men
 To bring in his venison right there before him.
 In playful good-humour he called Gawayn over,

Techez hym to the tayles of ful tait bestes,
 Schewez hym the schyree grece schorne upon rybbes.
 'How payez yow this play? haf I prys wonnen?
 Have I thryvandely thonk thurgh my craft served?'
 'Ye, iwysse,' quoth that other wyghe, 'here is wayth fayrest
 That I sey this seven yere in sesoun of wynter.'
 'And al I gif yow, Gawayn,' quoth the gome thenne,
 'For by acorde of covenaut ye crave hit as your awen.'
 'This is soth,' quoth the segge, 'I say yow that ilke:
 That I haf worthyly wonnen this wonez wythinne,
 Iwysse with as god wylle hit worthez to yourez.'
 He haspez his fayre hals his armez wythinne,
 And kysses hym as comlyly as he couthe awyse:
 'Tas yow there my chevicaunce, I cheved no more;
 I wowche hit saf fynly, thagh feler hit were.'
 'Hit is god,' quoth the godmon, 'grant mercy therefore.
 Hit may be such hit is the better, and ye me breve wolde
 Where ye wan this ilk wele bi wytte of yorselven.'
 'That watz not forward,' quoth he, 'frayst me no more.
 For ye haf tan that yow tydez, trawe non other
 ye mowe.'
 Thay laghed, and made hem blythe
 Wyth lotez that were to lowe;
 To soper thay yede as-swythe,
 Wyth dayntés nwe innowe.

And sythen by the chymné in chamber thay seten,
 Wyghez the walle wyn wegged to hem oft,
 And efte in her bourdyng thay baythen in the morn
 To fylle the same forwardez that thay byfore maden:
 Wat chauce so bytydez hor chevysaunce to change,
 What nwez so thay nome, at naght quen thay metten.
 Thay acorded of the covenantez byfore the court alle;
 The beverage watz broght forth in bourde at that tyme,
 Thenne thay lovelych leghten leve at the last,
 Uche burne to his bedde busked bylyve.
 Bi that the coke hade crowen and cakled bot thryse
 The lorde watz lopen of his bedde, the leudez uchone;

And shows him the tally of beasts in their prime,
 And points out the white fat cut from the ribs.
 'So does this sport please you? Do I win your praise?
 Do I merit your thanks for my skills at the hunt?'
 'Yes indeed', Gawain said, 'this is the best meat
 That I've seen during winter for seven whole years.'
 'I give you it all, Gawain', said the man,
 'By the terms of our compact, you may claim it as yours.'
 'That is true,' said the knight, 'and I tell you the same:
 Whatever I've honourably won in this house
 Shall be yours, indeed, with the same good will.'
 He clasps the lord's strong, handsome neck in both arms
 And kisses him graciously – as much as he could.
 'There – take my winnings. I got nothing more.
 I give you it freely, would do were there more.'
 'This is good,' the lord said, 'and I thank you for that.
 It would be still better if you could inform me
 Where you won this rich prize by dint of your skills.'
 'That's not part of our pact,' he said, 'ask me no more.
 You've had what is due to you. Expect to receive
 nothing else.'
 They laughed and joked away
 In splendid talk,
 Then quickly went to eat
 On more new delicacies.

After, they sat by the fire in a room,
 And men kept on bringing the choicest of wines.
 Again in their jesting they agreed the next day
 To keep the same promise they'd made previously:
 Whatever befell them, to exchange what they won,
 Whatever new things they got, at night when they met.
 They renewed the agreement before the whole court –
 The pledge-cup was brought with jests at that time –
 Then they took courteous leave of each other at last,
 Each man going quickly up to his bed.
 By the time the cock crowed and cackled three times,
 The lord had leapt out of bed, and each of his men,

So that the mete and the masse watz metely delyvered,
The douthe dressed to the wod er any day sprenged,
to chace;

Hegh with hunte and hornez
Thurgh playnez thay passe in space,
Uncoupled among tho thornez
Rachez that ran on race.

Sone thay calle of a quest in a ker syde,
The hunt rehayted the houndez that hit fyrst mynged,
Wylde wordez hym warp wyth a wrast noyce;
The howndez that hit herde hastid thider swythe,
And fellen as fast to the fuyt, fourty at ones;
Thenne such a glaver ande glam of gedered rachchez
Ros that the rocherez rungen aboute;
Hunterez hem hardened with horne and wyth muthe.
Then al in a semblé sweyed togeder
Bitwene a flosche in that fryth and a foo cragge;
In a knot bi a clyffe, at the kerre syde,
Ther as the rogh rocher unrydely was fallen,
Thay ferden to the fyndyng, and frekez hem after;
Thay umbekesten the knarre and the knot bothe,
Wyghez, whyl thay wysten wel wythinne hem it were,
The best that ther breved watz wyth the blodhoundez.
Thenne thay beten on the buskez, and bede hym upryse,
And he unsoundly out soght seggez overthwert;
On the sellokest swyn swenged out there,
Long sythen fro the sounder that sighed for olde,
For he watz borelych and brode, bor alther-grattest,
Ful grymme quen he gronyed; thenne greved mony,
For thre at the fyrst thrast he thryght to the erthe,
And sparred forth good sped boute spyt more.
Thise other halowed hyghe! ful hyghe, and hay! hay! cryed,
Haden hornez to mouthe, heterly rechated;
Mony watz the myry mouthe of men and of houndez
That buskkez after this bor with bost and wyth noyse
to quelle.

Ful ofte he bydez the baye,

So that breakfast and mass were duly got through,
And long before daybreak, they had gone to the woods
for the chase.

The hunt's horns blaring,
They ride through the fields.
Unleashed among thorns
The hounds hurtle headlong.

Soon they bay at a scent by the edge of a marsh;
The huntsmen urged on the hounds that noticed it first,
Shouting wild words in bellowing tones.
The hounds that heard them raced there in haste,
Fell at once on the trail, forty together.
Such a babble and din from the gathering hounds
Then arose that the rocks round them rang.
The huntsmen encouraged with horn-blasts and shouts.
Then all in a pack they rushed off together
Between a pool in the wood and a towering crag.
On a knoll near a cliff by the edge of the marsh
Where rough rocks had fallen and scattered all over,
They ran to dislodge it, the men at their heels.
The huntsmen surrounded both the crag and the knoll
Until they were certain that it was in there,
The beast which had made the bloodhounds bay loud.
Then they beat on the bushes, called him to come;
And he broke out ferociously, straight for their line.
An incredible wild boar charged from his cover,
Long since gone from his herd because of his age.
He was savage, the very largest of boars.
His grunts terrified. Many were fearful;
He hurled three to the ground at his very first rush,
And raced fast away, without doing more harm.
The others yelled 'hi', 'hey hey', at the tops of their voices,
Put horns to their mouths, quickly blew the recall.
Many hunters and hounds gave out joyful cries,
Rushing after the boar with clamour and noise
for the kill.

He often stands at bay

And maymez the mute inn melle;
 He hurtez of the houndez, and thay
 Ful yomerly yaule and yelle.

Schalkez to shote at hym schowen to thenne,
 Haled to hym of her arewez, hitten hym oft;
 Bot the poyntez payred at the pyth that pyght in his scheldez,
 And the barbez of his browe bite non wolde;
 Thagh the schaven schafte schyndered in pieces,
 The hede hypped agayn were-so-ever hit hitte.
 Bot quen the dyntez hym dered of her dryghe strokez,
 Then, braynwod for bate, on burnez he rasaz,
 Hurtz hem ful heterly ther he forth hyghez,
 And mony arghed therat, and on lyte droghen.
 Bot the lorde on a lyght horce launces hym after,
 As burne bolde upon bent his bugle he blowez,
 He rechated, and rode thurgh ronez ful thyk,
 Suande this wylde swyn til the sunne schafted.
 This day wyth this ilk dede thay dryven on this wyse,
 Whyle oure luflych lede lys in his bedde,
 Gawayn graythely at home, in gerez ful ryche
 of hewe.

The lady noght forgate
 Com to hym to salue;
 Ful erly ho watz hym ate
 His mode for to remwe.

NOTE

Ho commes to the cortyn, and at the knyght totes.
 Sir Wawen her welcumed worthy on fyrst,
 And ho hym yeldez agayn ful yerne of hir wordez,
 Settez hir softly by his syde, and swythely ho laghez,
 And wyth a luflych loke ho layde hym thyse wordez:
 'Sir, yif ye be Wawen, wonder me thynkkez,
 Wyghe that is so we1 wrast alway to god,
 And connez not of compaynye the costez undertake;
 And if man kennes yow hom to knowe, ye kest hom of your mynde;
 Thou hatz foryeten yederly that yisterday I taght te

And maims the circling pack;
 He wounds some of the hounds
 That piteously yowl and yelp.

The men pressed forward to shoot at him then,
 Loosed arrows upon him, that many times struck.
 But points striking his shoulders were blunted by toughness,
 And not one could pierce through his bristling brow.
 Although the smooth shaft was shattered in pieces,
 The head bounced away wherever it struck.
 But when the hits hurt him with constant attacks,
 Then, maddened by baiting, he charges the men
 And gores at them savagely, charging out there.
 Many grew fearful, drew further away.
 But the lord on a swift horse gallops right after him,
 Like a bold huntsman, blowing his horn.
 He sounded the rally and rode through thick brushwood
 In chase of this boar, till the sun sank down low.
 They spend the day in this way, in the very same chase,
 While our gracious knight lies in his bed:
 Gawain, happy at home, under bed-covers rich and
 bright-hued.

The lady did not forget
 To come and greet him there.
 Early was she with him
 To try and change his mood.

She comes to the curtain, peeps in at the knight.
 Sir Gawain welcomes her politely at once,
 And she answers his greeting with most eager speech,
 Gently settles herself by his side, quickly laughs,
 And lovingly glancing his way, speaks these words:
 'Sir, if you're Gawain, I do find it strange
 That a man who's so strongly disposed to do good
 Cannot follow the rules of courteous behaviour,
 And if someone instructs him, lets them drop out of mind.
 You've quickly forgotten what I taught you just yesterday

Bi alder-trest token of talk that I cowthe.'
 'What is that?' quoth the wyghe, 'Iwysse I wot never;
 If hit be sothe that ye breve, the blame is myn awen.'
 'Yet I kende yow of kyssyng,' quoth the clere thenne,
 'Quere-so countenance is couthe quikly to clayme;
 That bicumes uche a knyght that cortaysy uses.'
 'Do way,' quoth that derf mon, 'my dere, that speche;
 For that durst I not do, lest I devayed were.
 If I were werned, I were wrang, iwysse, yif I profered.'
 'Ma fay,' quoth the meré wyf, 'ye may not be werned,
 Ye ar stif innoghe to constrayne wyth strenkthe, yif yow lykez,
 Yif any were so vilanous that yow devaye wolde.'
 'Ye, be God,' quoth Gawayn, 'good is your speche;
 Bot threte is unthryvande in thede ther I lende,
 And uche gift that is geven not with goud wylle.
 I am at your comaundement, to kysse quen yow lykez,
 Ye may lach quen yow lyst, and leve quen yow thynkkez,
 in space.'

The lady loutez adoun
 And comlyly kysses his face;
 Much speche thay ther expoun
 Of druryes greme and grace.

'I woled wyt at yow, wyghe,' that worthy then sayde,
 'And yow wrathed not therwyth, what were the skylle
 That so yong and so yepe as ye at this tyme,
 So cortayse, so knyghtly, as ye ar knowen oute –
 And of alle chevalry to chose, the chef thyng alosed
 Is the lel layk of luf, the letrure of armes;
 For to telle of this tevelyng of this trwe knyghtez,
 Hit is the tytelet token and tyxt of her werkkez;
 How ledes for her lel lufe hor lyvez han auntered,
 Endured for her drury dulful stoundez,
 And after wenged with her walour and voyded her care,
 And broght blysse into boure with bountees hor awen –
 And ye ar knyght comlokest kyd of your elde,
 Your worde and your worchip walkez ayquere,
 And I haf seten by yourself here sere twyes,

In the plainest of lessons I could give in words.'
 'What was that?' asked the knight, 'Indeed, I don't know.
 If you say what is true, the fault's wholly mine.'
 'But I taught you to kiss,' the sweet lady said,
 'Where a glance signals favour, to claim it at once;
 That becomes every knight who practises courtesy.'
 'Dear lady, don't say things like that', said the man,
 'I dare not do that, lest I were refused;
 If refused, I should have been wrong in my offer.'
 'On my word,' said the fair lady, 'you – be refused?
 You're powerful enough to compel, if you wished,
 Should a woman be churlish enough to reject you.
 'Yes indeed,' Gawain said, 'what you say is quite true,
 But force is ignoble in the land where I live,
 And so is each gift that is not freely given.
 I'm yours to command, to kiss when you please
 You may take when you wish, and stop as you like
 in due course.'

The lady bends over,
 And kisses him graciously,
 They talk a great deal
 Of love's anguish and joy.

'I would learn from you, sir,' the noble lady said,
 'If it doesn't annoy you – how can it happen
 That someone as young and as bold as you are,
 So courteous, so chivalrous, as you're known far and wide –
 To choose from all chivalry, the chief thing that's prized
 Is the true practice of love, the gospel for knights.
 In telling the quests and deeds of true knights,
 It's the title inscribed and the text of these works:
 How men for true love have ventured their lives,
 Endured grievous times for their longing in love,
 Then avenged through their valour, dispelling their cares,
 Bringing joy to their ladies through their personal merits.
 You are known as the finest knight of your time,
 Your fame and your honour are everywhere known.
 I have sat by you here on two separate occasions

NOTE

Yet herde I never of your hed helde no wordez
 That ever longed to luf, lasse ne more;
 And ye, that are so cortays and coynt of your hetes,
 Oghe to a yonke thynk yern to schewe
 And teche sum tokenez of trweluf craftes.
 Why, ar ye lewed, that alle the los weldez?
 Other elles ye demen me to dille your dalyaunce to herken?

For schame!

I com hider sengel, and sitte
 To lerne at yow sum game;
 Dos, techez me of your wytte
 Whil my lorde is fro hame.'

'In goud faythe,' quoth Gawayn, 'God yow foryelde!
 Gret is the gode gle, and gomen to me huge,
 That so worthy as ye wolde wynne hidere,
 And pyne yow with so pouer a man, as play wyth your knyght
 With anys kynnez countenaunce, hit keverez me ese;
 Bot to take the torvayle to myself to trwluf expoun,
 And towche the temez of tyxt and talez of armez
 To yow that, I wot wel, weldez more slyght
 Of that art, bi the half, or a hundreth of seche
 As I am, other ever schal, in erde ther I leve,
 Hit were a folé felefolde, my fre, by my trawthe.
 I wolde yowre wylnyng worche at my myght,
 As I am hyghly bihalden, and evermore wylle
 Be servaunt to yourselven, so save me Dryghtyn!
 Thus hym frayned that fre, and fondet hym ofte,
 For to haf wollen hym to woghe, what-so scho thoght ellez; **NOTE**
 Bot he defended hym so fayr that no faut semed,
 Ne non evel on nawther halve, nawther thay wysten
 bot blysse.

Thay laghed and layked long;
 At the last scho con hym kysse,
 Hir love fayre con scho fonge,
 And went hir waye, iwysse.

And heard from your lips not one solitary word
 Referring to love, in no way at all.
 And you, so courteous, so correct in your knightly vows,
 Should be eager to show a young creature
 And teach her some skills in the art of true love.
 Why, don't you know, who have such great fame?
 Or do you think me too stupid to hear your courtly talk?

For shame!

I come here alone, and sit
 To learn the games you play.
 Do teach me what you know
 While my husband is away.

'In good faith,' Gawain said, 'may God reward you.
 It gives me great gladness and pleases me hugely
 That one as noble as you should want to come here,
 Take pains with a nobody, sport with your knight
 With favours at all. That gives me delight.
 But to take on the task of expounding true love,
 Of treating its themes and stories of chivalry,
 To you – I know well – who have more expertise
 In that subject by far, than a hundred such men
 As I am or shall be, as long as I live on the earth –
 Would be absolute folly, dear lady, trust me.
 I'll fulfil your wishes with all my power
 As I'm duty bound to. I always will be
 Your own and true servant, may God keep me safe.'
 So the lady kept testing him, tempting him often,
 To bring him to mischief, whatever her aim.
 But he parried so well that no fault appeared,
 On neither side evil, nor did they feel anything
 but delight.

They laughed and bantered long,
 And then she kissed the knight,
 Politely took her leave
 And went off on her way.

Then ruthes hym the renk and ryses to the masse,
 And sithen hor diner watz dyght and derely served.
 The lede with the ladyez layked alle day,
 Bot the lorde over the londez launced ful ofte,
 Swez his uncely swyn, that swyngez bi the bonkkez
 And bote the best of his braches the bakkez in sunder
 Ther he bode in his bay, tel bawemen hit breken,
 And madee hym mawgref his hed for to mwe utter,
 So felle flonez ther flete when the folk gedered.
 Bot yet the styffest to start bi stoundez he made,
 Til at the last he watz so mat he myght no more renne,
 Bot in the hast that he myght he to a hole wynnez
 Of a rasse bi a rokk ther rennez the boerne.
 He gete the bonk at his bak, bigynez to scrape,
 The frothe femed at his mouth unfayre bi the wykez,
 Whettez his whyte tuschez; with hym then irked
 Alle the burnez so bolde that hym by stoden
 To nye hym on-ferum, bot neghe hym non durst
 for wothe;

He hade hurt so mony byforne
 That al thught thenne ful lothe
 Be more wyth his tusches torne
 That breme watz and braynwode bothe.

Til the knyght com hymself, kachande his blonk,
 Sygh hym byde at the bay, his burnez bysyde;
 He lyghtes luflych adoun, levez his corsour,
 Braydez out a bryght bront and bigly forth strydez,
 Foundez fast thurgh the forth ther the felle bydez.
 The wylde watz war of the wyghe with weppen in honde,
 Hef heghly the here, so hetterly he fnast
 That fele ferde for the freke, lest felle hym the worre.
 The swyn settez hym out on the segge even,
 That the burne and the bor were both upon hepez
 In the wyghtest of the water: the worre hade that other,
 For the mon merkkez hym wel, as thay mette fyrst,
 Set sadly the scharp in the slot even,
 Hit hym up to the hult, that the hert schyndered,

Gawain then stirs himself, dresses for mass;
 And afterwards, dinner was cooked and splendidly served.
 The knight was amused by the ladies all day,
 Whilst the lord galloped on and on over the fields,
 Chased his ill-fated boar crashing over the slopes,
 Biting the backs of the best of the hounds
 As he stood there at bay, till the bowmen broke it,
 Made him move to the open, despite all he could do.
 So thick flew the arrows when the hunters assembled.
 Yet he still made the bravest of them flinch at times
 Till at last, quite exhausted, he could run no more.
 As quick as he can, he gets to a hole
 On a ledge of rock with the stream running by.
 He gets the bank at his back, starts to scrape at the earth,
 The froth foaming foully at the sides of his mouth
 As he whets his white tusks. Then they grew weary –
 The hunters who stood all around him –
 Of goading from far; but none dared go near
 for the risk.

He'd hurt so many previously,
 That everyone felt loath
 To be torn by his tusks again,
 Fierce and maddened both.

Till the lord himself came, spurring his horse,
 Saw it standing at bay, his men all around.
 He nimbly dismounts, lets go his horse,
 Draws out a bright sword and strides boldly forward,
 Splashing fast through the stream where the boar stands at bay.
 The beast saw the man with his weapon in hand,
 Raised his bristles erect – so fiercely he snorted
 That they feared for the lord, lest he came off the worse.
 The boar charges out, going straight for the man,
 So that he and the beast were both in a heap
 Where the water ran swiftest. The boar had the worse:
 For the man aims with care as the two of them meet,
 And thrust the sword firmly straight in his throat,
 Drove it up to the hilt, so the heart shattered open,

And he yarrande hym yelde, and yedoun the water
ful tyt.

A hundreth houndez hym hent,
That bremely con hym bite,
Burnez him broght to bent,
And doggez to dethe endite.

There watz blawyng of prys in many breme horne,
Heghe halowing on highe with hatelez that myght;
Brachetes bayed that best, as bidden the maysterez
Of that chargeaunt chace that were chef huntres.
Thenne a wyghe that watz wys upon wodcraftez
To unlace this bor lufly bigynnez.
Fyrst he hewes of his hed and on highe settez,
And sythen rendez him al roghe bi the rygge after,
Braydez out the boweles, brennez hom on glende,
With bred blent therwith his braches rewardez.
Sythen he britnez out the brawen in bryght brode cheldez,
And hatz out the hastlettez, as hightly bisemez;
And yet hem halchez al hole the halvez togeder,
And sythen on a stif stange stoutly hem henges.
Now with this ilk swyn thay swengen to home;
The bores hed watz borne bifore the burnes selven
That him forferde in the forthe thurgh forse of his honde
so stronge.

Til he seye Sir Gawayne
In halle hym thought ful longe;
He calde, and he com gayn
His feez ther for to fonge.

The lorde ful lowde with lote and laghter myry,
When he seye Sir Gawayn, with solace be spekez;
The goude ladyez were geten, and gedered the meyny,
He schewez hem the scheldez, and schapes hem the tale
Of the largesse and the lenthe, the lithernez also
Of the were of the wylde swyn in wod ther he fled.
That other knyght ful comly comended his dedez,

And snarling he gave up, and was swept through the water
downstream.

Seized by a hundred hounds
That fiercely rip his skin;
Men dragged him to the bank
And dogs do him to death.

The capture was sounded on many loud horns,
Halloos to the skies as loud as they could.
Hounds bayed at the beast, as bid by their masters
Who were the chief huntsmen of that tiring chase.
Then a man who was skilled in the arts of the wood
Expertly starts to cut up the boar.
First he hacks off his head and stakes it up high,
Then splits him all roughly along his backbone,
Pulls out the bowels, which are grilled on hot coals,
Rewarding his dogs with them, mixed up with bread.
Next he slices the brawn in broad, gleaming slabs
And pulls out the entrails, in the proper, right way.
The two sides he joins together intact
And then proudly hangs them from a very strong pole.
Now with the beast they gallop off home,
Bearing his head before the same man
Who had killed it in the stream by the force of his own
strong hand.

Until he saw Sir Gawain,
It seemed a tedious time;
He called, and Gawain came
To claim his due reward.

The lord, loudly talking and merrily laughing,
When he sees Sir Gawain, shouts with delight.
The good ladies were fetched, the household assembled;
He shows them the sides of the meat, and tells them the tale
Of its girth and its length, and the fierceness
Of fighting the beast in the wood where he'd fled.
The other knight warmly commended his deeds

And prayed hit as a gret prys that he proved hade,
 For suche a browne of a best, the bolde burne sayde,
 Ne such sydes of a swyn segh he never are.
 Thenne hondeled thay the hoge hed, the hende mon hit prayed,
 And let lodly therat the lorde for to here.
 'Now, Gawayn,' quoth the godmon, 'this gomen is your awen
 By fyn forwarde and faste, faythely ye knowe.'
 'Hit is sothe,' quoth the segge, 'and as siker trwe
 Alle my get I schal gif agayn, bi my trawthe.'
 He hent the hathel aboute the halse, and hendely hym kysses,
 And eftersones of the same he served hym there.
 'Now at we even,' quoth the hathel, 'in this eventide,
 Of alle the covenantes that we knyht, sythen I com hider,
 bi lawe.'
 The lorde sayde, 'Bi saynt Gile,
 Ye at the best that I knowe!
 Ye ben ryche in a whyle,
 Such chaffer and ye drowe.'

Thenne thay teldet tablez trestes alofte,
 Kesten clothez upon; clere lyght thenne
 Wakned by woves, waxen torches;
 Segges sette and served in sale al aboute;
 Much glam and gle glent up therinne
 Aboute the fyre upon flet, and on fele wyse
 At the soper and after, mony athel songez,
 As coundutes of Krystmasse and carolez newe,
 With al the manerly merthe that mon may of telle.
 And ever oure luflych knyght the lady bisyde,
 Such a semblaunt to that segge semly ho made
 Wyth stille stollen countenance, that stalworth to plese,
 That al forwondered watz the wyghe, and wroth with hymselfen,
 Bot he nolde not for his nurture nurne hir agaynez,
 Bot dalt with hir al in daynté, how-se-ever the dede turned
 towrast. **NOTE**
 Quen thay hade played in halle
 As longe as hor wylle hom last,
 To chambre he con hym calle,

And praised the great prowess that he had shown.
 So much brawn on a beast, the brave knight declared,
 Nor such flanks on a boar, he had never seen previously.
 They picked up the huge head; politely he praised it,
 Professing his horror, to honour the lord.
 'Now, Gawayn,' his host said, 'this quarry is yours
 By binding agreement, as you are aware.'
 'That is true,' said the man, 'and just as truly,
 I'll give you my gains in return, on my word.'
 He clasped the man round the neck, and kisses him graciously,
 Then a second time treats him in just the same way.
 'Now we're even,' the knight said, 'at the end of the day,
 In all the agreements we've made since I came,
 in due form.'
 The lord said, 'By St Giles,
 You're the best man I know;
 You'll be rich very soon
 If you keep trading so.'

Then the tables were set on top of the trestles
 And tablecloths spread; then sparkling light
 Came to life on the walls, from torches of wax.
 Men laid up the tables and served throughout hall.
 Much mirth and good cheer sprang up in the place
 Round the fire in the hall. And in different forms,
 At supper and afterwards, many fine songs
 Such as carols for Christmas and the newest ring-dances –
 All the fitting enjoyment that could be described.
 Our courteous knight sat by the lady throughout;
 Such a loving demeanour she showed to the man,
 With quiet, stolen glances to give him delight,
 That the man was astounded, and angry inside.
 But he could not rebuff her because of his manners
 And treated her courteously, however his actions might be
 misunderstood.
 When they'd played in the hall
 As long as they wished,
 To the fireside in his room

And to the chemné thay past.

Ande ther thay dronken, and dalten, and demed eft nwe
 To norne on the same note on Nwe Yerez even;
 Bot the knyght craved leve to kayre on the morn,
 For hit watz neghe at the terme that he to schulde.
 The lorde hym letted of that, to lenge hym resteyed,
 And sayde, 'As I am trwe segge, I siker my trawthe
 Thou schal cheve to the grene chapel thy charres to make,
 Leude, on Nw Yeres lyght, longe bifore pryme.
 Forthy thow lye in thy loft and lach thyn ese,
 And I schal hunt in this holt, and halde the towchez,
 Change wyth the chevisaunce, bi that I charre hider;
 For I haf fraysted the twys, and faythful I fynde the.
 Now 'thrid tyme throwe best' thenk on the morne,
 Make we mery quyl we may and mynne upon joye,
 For the lur may lach when-so mon lykez.'
 This watz graythely graunted, and Gawayn is lenged,
 Bliithe broght watz hym drynk, and thay to bedde yeden
 with light.

Sir Gawayn lis and slepes
 Ful stille and softe al night;
 The lorde that his craftez kepes,
 Ful erly he watz dight.

After messe a morsel he and his men token;
 Miry watz the mornyng, his mounture he askes.
 Alle the hateles that on horse schulde helden hym after
 Were boun busked on hor blonkkoz bifore the halle gatez.
 Ferly fayre watz the folde, for the forst clenged;
 In red rudende upon rak rises the sunne,
 And ful clere castez the clowdes of the welkyn.
 Hunteres unhardeled bi a holt syde,
 Rocheres roungen bi rys for rurde of her hornes;
 Summe fel in the fute ther the fox bade,
 Traylez ofte a traveres bi traunt of her wyles;
 A kenet kryes therof, a hunt on hym calles;

The lord took Gawain off.

There they drank and they talked, and decided again
 To repeat the arrangement on New Year's Eve.
 But the knight begged leave to depart the next day.
 It was near time the meeting that he had to keep.
 The lord held him back and urged him to stay
 Saying, 'As I'm a true man, I give you my word
 You will reach the Green Chapel to settle your business
 At dawn on New Year, well before nine.
 So lie in your room and be at your ease.
 I shall hunt in the forest, keep the terms we've agreed,
 Exchange winnings with you, when I return here.
 For I've tested you twice, and found you trustworthy.
 Now tomorrow remember, 'Third time, pays all';
 Let's feast while we can, think only of joy,
 For a man can find sorrow whenever he wants.'
 This was straightway agreed, and so Gawain stays.
 Drink was gladly brought to him, and they went to their beds,
 lights in hand.

Sir Gawain lies and sleeps
 Soft and still all night.
 The lord for his pursuits
 Was dressed before first light.

After mass, he and his men had a light bite to eat
 The morning was fine; he calls for his horse.
 All the men who would follow him after on horseback
 Were ready in saddle outside the hall doors.
 The earth looked so lovely, for the frost had clung.
 The sun rises fiery, through drifts of red clouds,
 And then in full brilliance, drives the rack from the sky.
 The hunters unleashed the hounds at the edge of a wood.
 Through the trees, the rocks rang with the blare of their horns.
 Some picked up the scent where the fox lay lurking,
 Weave over and over as they practise their wiles.
 A whippet yelps at the scent, the hunt calls him on;

His felawes fallen hym to, that fnasted ful thike,
 Runnen forth in a rabel in his ryght fire,
 And he fyskez hem byfore; thay founden hym sone,
 And quen thay seghe hym with syght thay sued hym fast,
 Wreghande hym ful weterly with a wroth noyse;
 And he trantes and tornayeez thurgh mony tene greve,
 Havalounez, and herkenez bi hegges ful ofte.
 At the last bi a littel dich he lepez over a spenne,
 Stelez out ful stilly bi a strothe rande,
 Went half wylt of the wode with wylez fro the houndes;
 Thenne watz he went, er he wyst, to a wale tryster,
 Ther thre thro at a thrich thrat hym at ones,
 al graye.

He blenched agayn bilyve,
 And stifly start on-stray,
 With alle the wo on lyve
 To the wod he went away.

Thenne watz hit list upon lif to lythen the houndez,
 When alle the mute hade hym met, menged togeder:
 Such a sorwe at that syght thay sette on his hede
 As alle the clamberande clyffes hade clatered on hepes;
 Here he watz halawed, when hathelez hym metten,
 Loude he watz yayned with yarande speche;
 Ther he watz threted and ofte thef called,
 And ay the titleres at his tayl, that tary he ne myght.
 Ofte he watz runnen at, when he out rayked,
 And ofte reled in agayn, so Reniarde watz wylé.
 And ye, he lad hem bi lagmon, the lorde and his meyny,
 On this maner bi the mountes quyle mid-over-under,
 Whyle the hende knyght at hom holsumly slepes
 Withinne the comly cortynes, on the colde morne.
 Bot the lady for luf let not to slepe,
 Ne the purpose to payre that pyght in hir hert,
 Bot ros hir up radly, rayked hir theder,
 In a mery mantyle, mete to the erthe,
 That watz furred ful fyne with fellez wel pured;
 No howez goud on hir hede bot the hagher stones

NOTE

NOTE

His fellows fall in with him, panting aloud,
 Run on in a rabble right on his track.
 He scampers ahead of them; they soon found his trail,
 And when they caught sight of him, followed him fast,
 Branding him clearly with furious noise.
 He dodges and twists through many dense thickets,
 Doubling back often, then listening by hedges.
 At last, by a ditch, he jumps over a fence,
 Creeps stealthily out by the edge of a marsh,
 To escape from the wood and the hounds by his wiles.
 Then he came, before knowing, to a well-placed station
 Where three savage hounds all at once flew at him in a rush,
 all grey.

He swerved away quickly,
 Undaunted, changed tack.
 With all the sorrow alive,
 He raced into the woods.

It was joy to the ear to hear all the hounds
 When the pack had discovered him, mingling together.
 At the sight of him, such curses they heaped down on his head
 As if towering cliffs were all crashing down.
 Here he was hallooed as hunters rode up,
 And loud was he greeted with curses and snarls;
 There he was threatened and often called thief,
 And always the hounds at his tail, so he couldn't delay.
 Many times he was set on as he made for the open,
 Many times doubled back, so cunning was Reynard.
 Yes, he strung them all out, the lord and his men,
 Cross the hills in this way till mid-afternoon,
 While the knight in the castle is soundly asleep
 Behind the fine curtains on this freezing morning.
 But the lady, for love's sake, did not let herself sleep
 Nor the purpose to weaken that was fixed in her heart.
 She quickly got up and went on her way
 In a beautiful robe that reached to the ground,
 That was finely fur-lined with well-trimmed skins.
 No modest coif on her head, but finely cut gems

Trased aboute hir tressour by twenty in clusteres;
 Hir thryven face and hir throte throwen al naked,
 Hir brest bare bifore, and bihhde eke.
 Ho comez withinne the chambre dore, and closes hit hir after,
 Wayvez up a wyndow, and on the wyghe callez,
 And radly thus rehayted hym with hir riche wordes,
 with chere:

'A, mon, how may thou slepe,
 This morning is so clere?'
 He watz in drowping depe,
 Bot thenne he con hir here.

In dregh droupyng of dreme draveled that noble,
 As mon that watz in morning of mony thro thoghtes,
 How that destiné schulde that day dele hym his wyrde
 At the grene chapel, when he the gome metes,
 And bihoves his buffet abide withoute debate more;
 Bot quen that comly com he kevered his wyttes,
 Swenges out of the swevenes, and swarez with hast.
 The lady luflych com laghande swete,
 Felle over his fayre face, and fetly hym kyssed;
 He welcumez hir worthily with a wale chere.
 He sey hir so glorious and gayly atyred,
 So fautles of hir fetures and of so fyne hewes,
 Wight wallande joye warmed his hert.
 With smothe smylyng and smolt thay smeten into merthe,
 That al watz blis and bonchef that breke hem bitwene,
 and wynne.

Thay lanced wordes gode,
 Much wele then watz therinne;
 Gret perile bitwene hem stod,
 Nif Maré of hir knyght mynne.

Fo that prynces of pris depresed hym so thikke,
 Nurned hym so neghe the thred, that nede hym bihoved
 Other lach ther hir luf other lodly refuse.
 He cared for his cortaysye, lest crathayn he were,

Arranged round her hair-fret in clusters of twenty.
 Her beautiful face and her throat were uncovered,
 Her breasts were exposed and her back was as well.
 She comes in the chamber and closes the door,
 Throws open a window and calls to the knight,
 And rouses him quickly with her ringing words,
 in play.

'Ah sir, how can you sleep?
 The morning is so bright.'
 Deep in his drowsiness,
 Her voice broke in his ear.

In the heaviness of dream, the nobleman muttered,
 Like a man overburdened with troubling thoughts,
 How destiny would deal him his fate on the day
 When he meets the man at the Green Chapel,
 And must suffer his blow without further debate.
 Yet the lady beside him, he came to his senses,
 Starts out of his dreaming, and hurriedly answers.
 She graciously comes to him, laughing sweetly,
 Bent over his handsome face, and gracefully kissed him.
 He welcomes her courteously in most pleasant manner;
 He saw her so radiant and beautifully dressed,
 So faultless in features, complexion so fine,
 That passionate joy welled up in his heart.
 Smiling gently and friendly, they playfully spoke
 So that all passed between them gave happiness, pleasure
 and joy.

They spoke friendly words,
 And there was great joy.
 Great peril stood between them
 Should Mary forget her knight.

For that noble princess pressed him so hard,
 Pushed him so close to the limit, that either he needs must
 Take her love then, or rudely refuse it.
 He was concerned to be courteous, lest he act like a boor,

And more for his meschef yif he schulde make synne,
 And be traytor to that tolke that that telde aght.
 'God schylde,' quoth the schalk, 'that schal not befalle!
 With luf-laghyng a lyt he layd hym bysyde
 Alle the spechez of specialté that sprange of her mouthe.
 Quoth that burde to the burne, 'Blame ye disserve
 Yif ye luf not that lyf that ye lye nexte,
 Bifore alle the wyghez in the worlde wounded in hert,
 Bot if ye haf a lemman, a lever, that yow lykez better,
 And folden fayth to that fre, festned so harde
 That yow lausen ne lyst – and that I leve nouthe;
 And that ye telle me that now trwly I pray yow,
 For alle the lufez upon lyve layne not the sothe
 for gile.'

The knyght sayde, 'Be sayn Jon,
 And smethely con he smyle,
 'In fayth I welde right non,
 Ne non wil welde the quile.'

'That is a worde,' quoth that wyght, 'that worst is of alle,
 Bot I am swared for sothe, that sore me thinkkez.
 Kysse me now comly, and I schal cach hethen,
 I may bot mourne upon molde, as may that much lovyes.'
 Sykande ho sweghe doun and semly hym kyssed,
 And sithen ho severes hym fro, and says as ho stondes,
 'Now, dere, at this departyng do me this ese,
 Gif me sumquat of thy gifte, thi glove if hit were,
 That I may mynne on the, mon, my mournyng to lassen.'
 'Now iwysse,' quoth that wyghe, 'I wolde I hade here
 The levest thing for thy luf that I in londe welde,
 For ye haf deserved, for sothe, sellyly ofte
 More rewarde bi resoun then I reche myght;
 Bot to dele yow for drurye that dawed bot naked,
 Hit is not your honour to haf at this tyme
 A glove for a garysoun of Gawaynez giftez;
 And I am here an erande in erdez uncouthe,
 And have no men wyth no males with menskful thingez;
 That mislykez me, ladé, for luf at this tyme,

More, the shame to himself, should he commit sin
 And treacherously betray the lord of the castle.
 'God forbid!' said the knight, 'that shall not occur.'
 With good-natured laughter he laid to one side
 All the loving expressions that fell from her mouth.
 The lady said to the knight, 'You ought to be blamed
 If you don't love the person you're lying beside,
 Who's more wounded in heart than anyone else in the world.
 Unless you've a lover, one who is dearer, who pleases you better,
 And you've given your promise, pledged it so firmly
 That you don't want to break it – that's now what I think.
 So tell if it's true now, I beg of you, please.
 For all the loves in the world, don't hide the truth
 in guile.'

The knight said, 'By St. John',
 And pleasantly smiled,
 'Indeed I have no one,
 And won't have for now.'

'Those are the words,' the lady said, 'that are worst of all.
 But I'm answered indeed, and grievously so.
 Kiss me now tenderly, and I'll hasten away.
 I'll spend my life mourning, as a woman who's deeply in love.'
 Sighing, she bent down and graciously kissed him.
 As she takes leave of him, she says, standing there:
 'My dear, at this parting, do me this kindness:
 Give me some small gift, if only your glove,
 To remember you by, and lessen my grief.'
 'Now indeed,' said the man, 'I wish I had here
 For your sake the dearest thing I own in the world,
 For you've truly deserved, innumerable times,
 More reward by right than I could repay.
 But to give a love-token that's worth very little –
 It's not worthy for you to take at this time
 A glove as a keepsake, a gift from Gawain.
 I'm here on a mission in unknown lands,
 Have no servants with bags of beautiful things.
 I'm sorry, my lady, for your sake at this time;

Iche tolke mon do as he is tan, tas to non ille
ne pine.'

'Nay, hende of hyghe honours,
Quoth that lufsum under lyne,
'Thagh I hade noght of yourez,
Yet schulde ye have of myne.'

Ho raght hym a riche rynk of red golde werkez,
With a starande ston stondande alofte
That bere blusshande bemez as the bryght sunne –
Wyt ye wel, hit watz worth wele ful hoge.
Bot the renk hit renayed, and redyly he sayde,
'I wil no giftez, for God, my gay, at this tyme;
I haf none yow to norne, ne noght wyl I take.'
Ho bede hit hym ful bysily, and he hir bode wernes,
And swere swyfte by his sothe that he hit sese nolde,
And ho soré that he forsoke, and sayde thereafter,
'If ye renay my rynk, to ryche for hit semez,
Ye wolde not so hyghly halden be to me,
I schal gif yow my girdel, that gaynes yow lasse.'
Ho lacht a lace lyghtly that leke umbe hir sydez,
Knit upon hir kyrtel under the clere mantyle;
Gered hit watz with grene sylke and with golde schaped,
Noght bot arounde brayden, beten with fyngrez;
And that ho bede to the burne, and blythely bisoght,
Thagh hit unworthi were, that he hit take wolde.
And he nay that he nolde neghe in no wyse
Nauther golde ne garysoun, er God hym grace sende
To acheve to the chaunce that he hade chosen there.
'And therfore, I pray yow, displese yow noght,
And lettez be your businesse, for I baythe hit yow never
to graunte.

I am derely to yow biholde
Bicause of your sembelaunt,
And ever in hot and colde
To be your trwe servaunt.'

But we each must do as conditions allow; don't take offence
or be hurt.

'No, most honoured knight,'
Said the lovely lady then,
'Though I've no gift from you,
You shall have one from me.'

She held out a rich ring of finely worked gold,
With a glittering jewel standing up high
That flashed out a sparkle as bright as the sun.
Be sure, it was worth a great deal of money.
Yet the knight would not take it, and straightaway said:
'I want no gifts at this time, dear lady, I swear;
I've none to give you, and none will I take.'
She urged him to take it; he declines her request,
Quickly swears on his word that he will not accept.
She was grieved he refused it, and said to him then:
'If you've rejected my ring because you think it too precious,
And don't want to be so indebted to me,
I'll give you this girdle, that will profit you less.'
She straightway took hold of a belt wrapped round her waist,
Buckled over her gown, beneath the bright mantle.
It was made of green silk, and trimmed with gold,
Embroidered just at the edges, and worked by hand.
She offered him it, and sweetly implores him,
Despite its slight value, that he would accept.
But he said he would never on any account touch
Either gold or a gift, before God sent him grace
To finish the task to which he was sworn.
'And therefore, I beg you, don't be displeased,
But stop this insisting; for I'll never be brought
to consent.

I'm deeply in your debt,
For you have been so kind.
I will through thick and thin
For ever serve you true.'

'Now forsake ye this silke,' sayde the burde thenne,
 'For hit is symple in hitself? and so we1 hit semez.
 Lo, so hit is littel, and lasse hit is worthy;
 But who-so knew the costes that knit ar therinne,
 He wolde hit prayse at more prys, paraventure.
 For quat gome so is gorde with this grene lace,
 While he hit hade hemely halched aboute,
 Ther is no hathel under heven tohewe hym that myght,
 For he myght not be slayn for slyght upon erthe.'
 Then kest the knyght, and hit come to his hert
 Hit were a juel for the jopardé that hym jugged were:
 When he acheved to the chapel his chek for to fech,
 Myght he haf slypped to be unslayn, the sleght were noble.
 Thenne he thulged with hir threpe and tholed hir to speke,
 And ho bere on hym the belt and bede hit hym swythe –
 And he granted and hym gafe with a goud wylle –
 And bisoght hym, for hir sake, discever hit never,
 Bot to lelly layne fro hir lorde; the leude hym acordez
 That never wyghe schulde hit wyt, iwysse, bot thay twayne
 for noghte.

He thonkked hir oft ful swythe,
 Ful thro with hert and thoght.
 Bi that on thrynne sythe
 Ho hatz kyst the knyght so toght.

Thenne lachchez ho hir leve, and levez hym there,
 For more myrthe of that mon moght ho not gete,
 When ho watz gon, Sir Gawayn gerez hym sone,
 Rises and riches him in araye noble,
 Lays up the luf-lace the lady hym raghte,
 Hid hit ful holdely, ther he hit eft fonde.
 Sythen chevely to the chapel choses he the waye,
 Prevély aproched to a prest, and prayed hym there
 That he wolde lyste his lyf and lern hym better
 How his sawle schulde be saved when he schuld seye hethen.
 There he schrof hym schyrly and schewed his mysdedez,
 Of the more and the mynne, and merci besechez,
 And of absolucioun he on the segge calles;

'So do you refuse this belt,' the lady replied,
 'Because it's worth little? It may well seem so.
 See how tiny it is; still less is it worth.
 But anyone knowing the powers woven in it
 Would place a much higher price on it, perhaps.
 For whoever is buckled into this green belt,
 As long as it's tightly fastened around,
 There's no man on earth who can strike him down.
 He cannot be killed by any trick in the world.'
 The knight pondered then, and it flashed through his mind
 What a jewel this would be for the risk he must face
 When he got to the chapel to meet with his fate;
 Could he escape death, the trick would be splendid.
 So he bore with her pleading, allowed her to speak,
 And she pressed the belt on him and offered it earnestly –
 He consented and gave way with good grace –
 And she begged him for her sake never to reveal/tell of it
 But loyally hide it away from her husband. Gawain agrees
 That no one should know of it ever, but them alone,
 not for anything.

He gave her heartfelt thanks,
 Sincere in heart and mind.
 By then she has three times
 Kissed the valiant knight.

Then she takes her leave, and leaves him there.
 No further pleasure could be got from that man.
 When she was gone, Gawain quickly prepares,
 Gets up and dresses in splendid array,
 Puts the love-lace away that the lady had given him
 And carefully hides it to find it again.
 Then quickly to chapel he makes his way,
 Approached a priest privately, and prayed him
 To hear his confession, and teach him more clearly
 How his soul might be saved when he went from the world.
 He made full confession, admitted his sins,
 Both the great and the small, and begs for forgiveness,
 And calls on the priest to be absolved.

And he asoyled hym surely and sette hym so clene
 As domezday schulde haf ben dight on the morn.
 And sythen he mace hym as mery among the fre ladyes,
 With comelych caroles and alle kynnes joye,
 As never he did bot that daye, to the derk nyght,
 with blys.

Uche mon hade daynté thare
 Of hym, and sayde, 'Iwysse,
 Thus mery he watz never are,
 Syn he com hider, er this.'

Now hym lenge in that lee, ther luf hym bityde!
 Yet is the lorde on the launde ledande his gomnes.
 He hatz forfaren this fox that he folwed longe;
 As he sprent over a spenne to spye the schrewe,
 Ther as he herd the howndes that hasted hym swythe,
 Renaud com richchande thurgh a roghe greve,
 And alle the rabel in a res ryght at his helez.
 The wyghe watz war of the wylde, and warly abides,
 And braydez out the bryght bronde, and at the best castez.
 And he schunt for the scharp, and schulde hrf arered;
 A rach rapes hym to, ryght er he myght,
 And ryght bifore the hors fete thay fel on hym alle,
 And worried me this wyly wyth a wroth noyse.
 The lorde lyghtez bilyve, and lachez hym sone,
 Rased hym ful radly out of the rach mouthes,
 Haldez heghe over his hede, halowez faste,
 And ther bayen aboute hym mony brath houndez.
 Hunted hyghed hem theder with hornez ful mony,
 Ay rechatande aryght til thay the renk seyen.
 Bi that watz comen his compeyny noble
 Alle that ever ber bugle blowed at ones,
 And alle these other halowed that had no hornes;
 Hit watz the myriest mute that ever men herde,
 The rich rurd that ther watz rased for Renaude saule
 with lote.

Hor houndez thay ther rewarde,
 Her hedez thay fawne and frote,

He absolved him completely, and made him as clean
 As if Judgment Day were to fall the next morning.
 Then Gawain delights in the noble ladies,
 With charming dance-songs and all kinds of joy
 As he'd never felt before then, till darkness fell,
 happily.

Every one there was charmed
 By him, and said 'Indeed,
 He was never as happy
 Since he came here, till now.'

Let him stay in that haven, and love come his way!
 The lord is still in the field, enjoying his sport.
 He has killed off the fox he followed so long.
 As he jumped over a hedge to spy out the villain
 Where he heard that the hounds were chasing him fast,
 Reynard came racing through a rough thicket
 With the pack hard behind him, right on his heels.
 The lord saw the wild creature, and warily waits,
 Unsheathes his bright sword and strikes at the beast.
 He swerves from the blade and would have turned back
 But a hound rushes at him before he could turn,
 And right at the horse's feet, they fell on him all,
 And tore at this wily thing with fierce, angry cries.
 The lord quickly dismounts and grabs him at once,
 Snatched him suddenly up from the jaws of the dogs,
 Holds him high over head, hallooing loudly,
 Fierce hounds mill round him, and bay at him there.
 Hunters hurried towards him with many horns blowing,
 Rightly sounding the rally till the lord was in sight.
 When his noble company had gathered together,
 All who had bugles blew them at once,
 And all without horns gave out a great shout.
 It was the most splendid baying that man ever heard,
 The great noise that rang there for Reynard's soul,
 with their cries.

They then reward their hounds,
 Fondle and stroke their heads.

And sythen thay tan Reynarde
And tyrven of his cote.

And thenne thay helden to home, for hit watz niegh nyght,
Strakande ful stoutly in hor store hornez.
The lorde is lyght at last at hys lef home,
Fynde fire upon flet, the freke ther-byside,
Sir Gawayn the gode, that glad watz withalle,
Among the ladies for luf he ladde much joye.
He were a bleaunt of blwe that bradde to the erthe,
His surkot semed hym wel that softe watz forred,
And his hode of that ilke hinged on his schulder,
Blande al of blaunner were bothe al aboute.
He metez me this godmon inmyddez the flore,
And al with gomen he hym gret, and goudly he sayde,
'I schal fylle upon fyrst oure forwardez nouthe,
That we spedly han spoken, ther spared watz no drynk.'
Then acoles he the knyght and kysses hym thryes,
As saverly and sadly as he hem sette couthe.
'Bi Kryst,' quoth that other lmyght, 'ye cach much sele
In chevisaunce of this chaffer, yif ye hade goud chepez.'
'Ye, of the chep no charg,' quoth chefly that other,
'As is pertly payed the porchaz that I aghte.'
'Mary,' quoth that other man, 'myn is bihynde,
For I haf hunted al this day, and noght haf I geten
Bot this foule fox felle – the fende haf the godez!
And that is ful pore for to pay for suche prys thinges
As ye haf thryght me here thro, suche thre cosses
so gode.'
'Inogh,' quoth Sir Gawayn,
'I thonk yow, bi the rode';
And how the fox watz slayn
He tolde hym as thay stode.

With merthe and mynstralsye, wyth metez at hor wylle,
Thay maden as mery as any men moghten
With laghyng of ladies, with lotez of bordez.

And then they take Reynard
And strip him of his coat.

Then they set off for home, for it was near night,
Stridently blasting their mighty horns.
The lord arrives at last at his well-loved home,
Finds a fire in the hearth, and the knight there beside,
Sir Gawain the good, completely content,
Finding great pleasure in the ladies' affection.
He wore a blue mantle that reached to the ground;
His softly furred surcoat suited him well,
And his matching hood hung down on his shoulders,
Both trimmed with ermine along all the edges.
He meets his host in the middle of the hall,
Merrily greets him, and courteously said,
'First I'll fulfil our covenant now,
That we readily agreed when the wine flowed freely.'
He embraces the lord and gives him three kisses,
With as much feeling and relish as he could contrive.
'By God,' said the lord, 'you've had some good luck
In making this purchase, if you paid a good price.'
'The price doesn't matter,' the other said quickly,
'Since the gain I've obtained has been paid over openly.'
'By Mary', the other man said, 'mine is far less,
For I've hunted all day, and yet have got nothing
But this stinking fox skin – the devil take it! –
It's very poor payment for such precious things
As you've warmly pressed on me, three such kisses,
so good.
'Enough,' said Sir Gawain
'My thanks, by the Cross.'
And how the fox was killed
He heard as there they stood.

With mirth and with minstrelsy, all the food they could wish,
They made as much merriment as any men could
With laughter of ladies and joking remarks.

Gawayn and the godemon so glad were thay bothe
 Bot if the douthe had doted, other dronken ben other.
 Both the mon and the meyny maden mony japez
 Til the sesoun watz seghen that thay sever moste;
 Burnez to hor bdde behoved at the laste.
 Thenne lowly his leve at the lorde fyrst
 Fochchez this fre mon, and fayre he hym thonkkez:
 'Of such a selly sojorne as I haf hade here,
 Your honour at this hyghe fest, the hyghe kyng yow yelde!
 I gef yow me for on of youre, if yowreself lykez,
 For I mot nedes, as ye wot, meve to-morne,
 And ye me take sum tolke to teche, as ye hyght,
 The gate to the grene chapel, as God wyl me suffer
 To dele on Nw Yerez day the dome of my wyrdes.'
 'In god faythe,' quoth the godmon, 'wyth a goud wyllle
 Al that ever I yow hyght halde schal I redé'
 Ther asyngnes he a servaunt to sette hym in the waye,
 And coundue hym by the downez, that he no drechch had,
 For to ferk thurgh the fryth and fare at the gaynest
 bi greve.
 The lorde Gawayn con thonk,
 Such worchip he wolde hym weve.
 Then at tho ladyez wlonk
 The knyght hatz tan his leve.

NOTE

With care and wyth kyssyng he carpez hem tille,
 And fele thryvande thonkkez he thrat hom to have,
 And thay yelden hym agayn yeply that ilk.
 Thay bikende hym to Kryst with ful colde sykynggez.
 Sythen fro the meyny he menskly departes;
 Uche mon that he mette, he made hem a thonke
 For his servyse and his solace and his sere pyne,
 That thay wyth busynes had ben aboute hym to serve;
 And uche segge as soré to sever with hym there
 As thay hade wonde worthyly with that wlonk ever.
 Then with ledes and lyght he watz ladde to his chambre,
 And blythely broght to his bedde to be at his rest.
 Yif he ne slepe soundly say ne dar I,

Both Gawain and the lord were seized with such joy
 As if they'd gone crazy or drunk too much wine.
 Both the lord and his household played many tricks
 Till the time had arrived when they all had to part:
 Folk had to go to their beds in the end.
 The good man respectfully first takes his leave
 Of the lord, whom he graciously thanks,
 'For the wonderful stay that I have had here,
 Your welcome throughout this holy feast-time, may God give reward!
 I pledge you myself, if you'd lend one of your servants.
 I must needs, as you know, set out in the morning.
 Will you give me a guide, as promised, to show me
 The road to the Green Chapel, as God will allow me
 To face what fate has ordained on New Year's Day.'
 'In good faith,' said the lord, 'very willingly,
 Every promise I gave you, I'll readily keep.'
 He assigns him a servant to show him the way,
 Guide him over the hills, so he'd face no delay
 In riding through woodland and taking the most direct path
 through the trees.
 Gawain thanked the lord
 For the honours enjoyed.
 Then from the noble ladies
 He also took his leave.

With tears and with kisses, he speaks to them all,
 And begged them to take all his most heartfelt thanks;
 At once they responded in similar terms,
 Commending him to Christ with the saddest of sighs.
 Then from the household he takes courteous leave.
 Each man that he met, he gave them his thanks
 For the service and kindness and particular pains
 They had taken to serve him with care.
 Each man was as sorry to part from him there
 As if they'd spent their whole lives in honour with him.
 Then with men and with torches, he was led to his room,
 And cheerfully brought to his bed and his rest.
 How soundly he slept I dare not declare;

For he hade muche on the morn to mynne, yif he wolde,
in thoght.
Let hym lyghe there stille,
He hatz nere that he soght;
And ye wyl a whyle be styll
I schal telle yow how thay wroght.

He had much the next day to ponder, if he wished,
in his mind.
Let him lie there still.
He's close to what he sought;
If you will hush a while,
I'll tell you what occurred.

IV

Now neghez the Nw Yere, and the nyght passez,
 The day dryvez to the derk, as Dryghtyn biddez;
 Bot wylde wederez of the worlde wakned theroute,
 Clowdes kesten kenly the colde to the erthe,
 Wyth nyghe innoghe of the northe the naked to tene.
 The snawe snitered ful snart, that snayped the wylde;
 The werbelande wynde wapped fro the hyghe,
 And drof uche dale ful of dryftes ful grete.
 The leude lystened ful wel that ley in his bedde,
 Thagh he lowkez his liddez, ful lyttel he slepes;
 Bi uch kok that crue he knwe wel the steven.
 Deliverly he dressed up, er the day sprenged,
 For there watz lyght of a laumpe that lemed in his chambre;
 He called to his chamberlayn, that cofly hym swared,
 And bede hym bryng hym his bruny and his blonk sadel;
 That other ferkez hym up and fechez hym his wedez,
 And graythez me Sir Gawayn upon a grett wyse.
 Fyrst he clad hym in his clothez the colde for to were,
 And sythen his other harnays, that holdely watz keped,
 Bothe his paunce and his platez, piked ful clene,
 The rynggez rokked of the roust of his riche bruny;
 And al watz fresch as upon fyrst, and he watz fayn thenne
 to thonk.

He hade upon uche pece,
 Wypped ful wel and wlonk;
 The gayest unto Grace
 The burne bede bryng his blonk.

Whyle the wlonkest wedes he warp on hymselfen –
 His cote wyth the conysaunce of the clere werkez
 Ennurned upon velvet, vertuus stonez
 Aboute beten and bounden, enbrauded semez,
 And fayre furred withinne wyth fayre pelures –
 Yet laft he not the lace, the ladiez gifte,

IV

Now the New Year draws near and the night wears away.
 Dawn drives out the darkness, as heaven commands.
 But wild weather boils up in the country outside;
 The clouds keenly drive the cold down to the earth
 With enough biting northerlies to pain naked flesh.
 Snow sleeted down bitterly, stinging wild animals;
 The wind whistled down in gusts from the hills
 And drove the drifts deep in the valleys below.
 The knight lay in his bed, listening intently.
 Though his eyelids are closed, he sleeps very little;
 With each crow of the cock, he knows his appointment.
 He got up quickly before the day dawned;
 There was light from a lamp that burned in his room.
 He called to his servant, who answered him promptly,
 Bade him bring his mail-shirt and saddle his horse.
 The other gets up and brings him his clothes
 And gets Gawain ready in splendid attire.
 First he puts clothing on him to keep out the cold,
 Then the rest of his gear, all carefully kept,
 His stomach-armor and plate, polished so clean,
 And his fine coat of mail, the rings scraped of rust;
 All was spotless as new, for which he gladly
 gave thanks.

He put on each piece,
 Rubbed splendidly clean.
 The finest man on earth
 Ordered his horse to be brought.

While he dressed himself in his noblest clothes –
 His coat with its brightly embroidered badge
 Set upon velvet, with stones of magical power
 Inlaid and held round it, with embroidered seams,
 Finely lined on the inside with beautiful furs –
 He didn't omit the girdle, the gift from the lady:

That forgat not Gawayn for gode of hymselven.
 Bi he hade belted the bronde upon his balghe haunchez,
 Thenn dressed he his drurye double hym aboute,
 Swythe swethled umbe his swange swetely that knyght
 The gordel of the grene silk, that gay we1 bisemed,
 Upon that ryol red clothe that ryche watz to schewe.
 Bot wered not this ilk wyghe for wele this gordel,
 For pryde of the pendauntez, thagh polyst thay were,
 And thagh the glyterande golde glent upon endez,
 Bot for to saven hymself, when suffer hym byhoved,
 To byde bale withoute dabate of bronde hym to were
 other knyffe.

Bi that the bolde mon boun
 Wynnez theroute bilyve,
 Alle the meyny of renoun
 He thonkkez ofte ful ryve.

Thenne watz Gryngolet graythe, that gret watz and huge,
 And hade ben sojourned saverly and in a siker wyse,
 Hym lyst prik for poynt, that proude hors thenne.
 The wyghe wynnez hym to and wytez on his lyre,
 And sayde soberly hymself and by his soth swerez:
 'Here is a meyny in this mote that on menske thenkkez,
 The mon hem maynteines, joy mot thay have;
 The leve lady on lyve luf hir bityde;
 Yif thay for charyté cherysen a gest,
 And halden honour in her honde, the hathel hem yelde
 That haldez the heven upon hyghe, and also yow alle!
 And yif I myght lyf upon londe lede any quyle,
 I schuld rech yow sum rewarde redyly, if I myght.'
 Thenn steppez he into stirop and strydez alofte;
 His schalk schewed hym his schelde, on schulder he hit laght,
 Gordez to Gryngolet with his gilt helez,
 And he startez on the ston, stod he no lenger
 to prounce.

His hathel on hors watz thenne,
 That bere his spere and launce
 'This kastel to Kryst I kenne':

For his own good, he did not forget that.
 When he'd buckled the sword about his firm haunches,
 He then wound his love-token round himself twice;
 Quickly, he wrapped it round his waist, with delight.
 The belt of green silk suits the handsome knight well,
 Against that splendid red surcoat that stood out so fine.
 But the man did not wear the belt for its richness
 Nor from pride in its pendants, however they shone
 And the glittering gold gleamed at the edges,
 But to safeguard himself when he had to submit
 And not flinch at death, without sword for defence
 or a dagger.

The brave man was all ready
 And goes quickly outside.
 And all the noble household
 He thanks and thanks again.

Then Gringolet was ready – that great, huge horse –
 He'd been comfortably stabled, kept quite secure,
 And in such fine condition, he wanted to gallop.
 The knight goes up to him, looks at his coat,
 Murmurs quietly, and swears on his honour,
 'There are men in this castle who care about courtesy.
 The lord who looks after them – may he have joy!
 And may the dear lady be loved all her life!
 Whenever they care for a guest out of kindness,
 Dispense hospitality, may the Lord
 Who rules heaven repay them, and you all.
 And if I should live any long time on earth,
 I'd be glad to reward you, if I could.'
 Then he steps in the stirrups and climbs up on high.
 His servant gave him his shield, which he slung on his shoulder,
 And with his gilt spurs, strikes Gringolet's* flanks,
 Who springs forward on the paving, waiting no longer
 to prance.

His man was mounted then,
 And bore his spear and lance.
 'I commend this house to Christ,

He gef hit ay god chaunce.

NOTE

The brygge watz brayed doun, and the brode gategz
 Unbarred and born open upon bothe halve.
 The burne blessed hym bilyve, and the brede passed –
 Prayses the porter bifore the prynce kneled,
 Gef hym God and goud day, that Gawayn he save –
 And went on his way with his wyghe one,
 That schulde teche hym to tourne to that tene place
 Ther the ruful race he schulde resayve.
 Thay bowen bi bonkkez ther boghez at bare,
 Thay clomben bi clyffez ther clengez the colde.
 The heven watz uphalt, bot ugly ther-under;
 Mist mugged on the mor, malt on the mountez,
 Uche hille hade a hatte, a myst-hake1 huge.
 Brokez byled and breke bi bonkkez about,
 Schyre schaterande on schorez ther thay doun showved.
 Wela wylle watz the way ther thay bi wode schulden,
 Til hit watz sone sesoun that the sunne ryses
 that tyde.
 They were on a hille ful hyghe,
 The quyte snaw lay bisyde;
 The burne that rod hym by
 Bede his mayster abide.

'For I haf wonnen yow hider, wyghe, at this tyme,
 And now nar ye not fer fro that note place
 That ye han spied and spuryed so specially after;
 Bot I schal say yow for sothe, sythen I yow knowe,
 And ye are a lede upon lyve that I we1 lovy,
 Wolde ye worch bi my wytte, ye worthed the better.
 The place that ye prece to ful perelous is halden;
 Ther wonez a wyghe in that waste, the worst upon erthe,
 For he is stiffe and sturne, and to strike lovies,
 And more he is then any mon upon myddelerde,
 And his body bigger then the best fowre
 That ar in Arthurez hous, Hestor, other other.

May he bless it with good luck.?’

The drawbridge was lowered, and the broad gates
 Unbarred and pushed open on both of the sides.
 The knight at once crossed himself, rode over the planks,
 Praising the porter who knelt down before him,
 Who wished him good day, and begged God to save him,
 And went on his way with his single attendant
 Who would show him the way to that perilous place
 Where he had to receive the frightening blow.
 They rode up steep slopes where the branches are bare;
 They climbed up past rock-faces gripped by the cold.
 The clouds were high up, but dark underneath;
 Mist drizzled on moor, broke up on the hills.
 Each peak wore a hat, a huge cloak of mist.
 Streams boiled and splashed down the hillsides about,
 Breaking white against banks as they rushed swiftly down.
 The way twists and turns they must take through the wood,
 Till soon the hour came for the sunrise, at that time
 of year.
 They were high up on a hill,
 The snow lay white around.
 The man who rode beside
 Asked Gawain if he'd stop.

'I have brought you here, sir, on this day,
 And now you're not far from that well-known place
 That you've searched for and asked so specially after.
 But I'll tell you the truth – since I know who you are
 And you are a man indeed whom I cherish –
 If you'd take my advice, the better for you.
 The place where you're headed is thought very dangerous;
 A man lives in that wasteland, the worst in the world;
 He is powerful and grim, and loves striking blows;
 He's bigger than anyone else upon earth,
 And tougher in body than the four strongest men
 In the court of king Arthur, or Hector or any one else.

He chevez that chaunce at the chapel grene,
 Ther passes non bi that place so proude in his armes
 That he ne dynggez hym to dethe with dynt of his honde;
 For he is a mon methles, and mercy non uses
 For be hit chorle other chaplayn that bi the chapel rydes,
 Monk other masseprest, other any mon elles,
 Hym thynk as queme hym to quelle as quyk go hymselfen.
 Forthy I say the, as sothe as ye in sadel sitte,
 Com ye there, ye be kyllled, I may the knyght rede;
 Trawe ye me that trwely, thagh ye had twenty lyves
 to spende.

He hatz wonyd here ful yore,
 On bent much baret bende,
 Agayn his dyntez sore
 Ye may not yow defende.

NOTE

'Forthy, goude Sir Gawain, let the gome one,
 And gotz away sum other gate, upon Goddez halve!
 Cayrez bi sum other kyth, ther Kryst mot yow spede,
 And I schal hygh me hom agayn, and hete yow fyrre
 That I schal swere bi God and alle his gode halwez,
 As help me God and the halydam, and othez innoghe,
 That I schal lelly yow layne, and lance never tale
 That ever ye fondet to fle for freke that I wyst.'
 'Grant merci,' quoth Gawain, and gruchyng he sayde,
 'We l worth the, wyghe, that woldez my gode,
 And that lelly me layne I leve wel thou woldez.
 Bot helde thou hit never so holde, and I here passed,
 Founded for ferde for to fle, in fourme that thou tellez,
 I were a knyght kowarde, I myght not be excused.
 Bot I wyl to the chapel, for chaunce that may falle,
 And talk wyth that ilk tulk the tale that me lyste,
 Worthe hit wele other wo, as the wyrde lykez
 hit hafe.

Thaghe he be a sturn knape
 To stightel, and stad with stave,
 Ful we l con Dryghtyn schape
 His servauntez for to save.'

He brings it to pass that, at the Green Chapel,
 No-one comes by there, however valiant in arms,
 That they're not struck to death by a blow from his hand.
 He's a pitiless man, who never shows mercy.
 Be it peasant or chaplain who rides by his chapel,
 Or monk or mass-priest, or anyone else,
 It's as pleasant to kill them as be living himself.
 So I tell you, as sure as you sit in your saddle,
 You go there to die, I warn you, sir knight.
 Believe that for certain, though you have twenty lives
 to lose.

He's lived there an age
 And caused severe strife.
 Against his brutal blows
 You can't defend yourself.'

'So good Sir Gawain, let the man be.
 For God's sake leave now on some different path!
 Ride off to some other land, where Christ be your help.
 I'll make my way home again, and further I promise
 That I'll swear by God and all his good saints –
 So help me God, holy relics, and many more oaths –
 That I'll faithfully keep your secret, and not breathe a word
 That you ever ran off from a man that I knew.'
 'Many thanks,' Gawain said, and answered annoyed,
 'Good luck to you, sir, who wishes me well –
 That you'd keep safe my secret, I truly believe.
 But however closely you kept it, if I passed this by,
 Ran away out of fear, in the way you suggest,
 I'd be a coward of a knight, could not be excused.
 So I'll go to the chapel, whatever may chance,
 And say to that man whatever I wish,
 Whether good or ill come of it, as fate's pleased
 to decide.

Though he's a grim fellow
 To deal with, club in hand,
 The Lord can well protect
 His servants in defence.'

'Mary!' quoth that other man, 'now thou so much spellez
 That thou wylt thyn awen nye nyme to thyselven,
 And the lyste lese thy lyf, the lette I ne kepe.
 Haf here thi helme on thy hede, thi spere in thi honde,
 And ryde me doun this ilke rake bi yon rokke syde,
 Til thou be broght to the bothem of the brem valay;
 Thenne loke a littel on the launde, on thy lyfte honde,
 And thou schal se in that slade the self chapel,
 And the borelych burne on bent that hit kepez.
 Now farez wel, on Godez half, Gawayn the noble!
 For alle the golde upon grounde I nolde go wyth the,
 Ne bere the felaghschip thurgh this fryth on fote fyrr.'
 Bi that the wyghe in the wod wendez his brydel,
 Hit the hors with the helez as harde as he myght,
 Lepez hym over the launde, and levez the knyght there
 al one.

'Bi Goddez self,' quoth Gawayn,
 'I wyl nauther grete ne grone;
 To Goddez wylle I am ful bayn,
 And to hym I haf me tone.'

Thenne gyrdez he to Gryngolet, and gederez the rake,
 Schowvez in bi a schore at a schawe syde,
 Ridez thurgh the roghe bonk ryght to the dale;
 And thenne he wayted hym aboute, and wylde hit hym thoght,
 And seye no syngne of resette bisydez nowhere,
 Bot hyghe bonkkez and brent upon bothe halve,
 And rughe knokled knarrez with knorned stonez;
 The skwez of the scowtes skayned hym thoght.
 Thenne he hoved, and wythhylde his hors at that tyde,
 And ofte chaunged his cher the chapel to seche:
 He seye non suche in no syde, and selly hym thoght,
 Save, a lyttle on a launde, a lawe as hit were;
 A balgh berw bi a bonke the brymme bysyde,
 Bi a forgh of a flode that ferked thare;
 The borne blubred therinne as hit boyled hade.

'Mary!' the other man cried, 'since you've practically said
 That you want to do harm to yourself,
 If you're pleased to meet death, I won't hinder you.
 Put on your helmet, your spear in your hand,
 And ride down that track by the side of that rock
 Till you come to the bottom of the wild valley.
 Then look just to your left, across in the glade,
 And you'll see in the valley the chapel itself
 And the giant of a man who guards the place there.
 And so noble Gawain, farewell, in God's name,
 For all the gold in the world, I would not go with you,
 Or stay with you one further step through this wood.'
 With that, the man at his side jerks at his bridle,
 Spurred his horse with his heels as hard as he could,
 Gallops over the fields and leaves the knight there,
 all alone.

'In God's name,' said Gawain,
 'I won't weep or moan;
 I'll follow God's will;
 I'm committed to Him.'

He strikes spurs to Gringolet and picks up the path,
 Pushes in down a slope by the edge of a wood,
 Rides down the rough hillside right to the valley,
 And then looked about him – it seemed a wild place –
 He saw no sign of building about, anywhere,
 But high and steep hillsides on either side,
 And rough, rugged crags of jagged stone,
 The jutting rocks grazing the clouds, so it seemed.
 Then he halted, and reined back his horse,
 Turned round and about to look for the chapel.
 Nothing like it he saw anywhere, which seemed strange,
 Except, a little way off in a glade, a kind of a mound,
 A rounded knoll by a slope at the edge of some water,
 Near the course of a stream that tumbled down there;
 The burn bubbled in it as if it were boiling.

The knyght kachez his caple and com to the lawe,
 Lightez doun luflyly, and at a lynde tachez
 The rayne and his riche with a roghe braunche.
 Thenne he bowez to the berwe, aboute hit he walkez,
 Debatande with hymself quat hit be myght.
 Hit hade a hole on the ende and on ayther syde,
 And overgrowen with gresse in glodes aywhere,
 And al watz holw inwith, nobot an olde cave,
 Or a crevisse of an olde cragge, he couthe hit noght deme
 with spelle.

'We, lode!' quoth the gentyle knyght,
 'Whether this be the grene chapelle?
 Here myght aboute mydnyght
 The dele his matynnes telle!'

'Now iwysse,' quoth Wowayn, 'wysty is here;
 This oritore is ugly, with erbez overgrowen;
 We1 bisemez the wyghe wruxled in grene
 Dele here his devocioun on the develez wyse.
 Now I fele hit is the fende, in my fyve wyttez,
 That hatz stoken me this steven to strye me here.
 This is a chapel of meschaunce, that chekke hit bytyde!
 Hit is the corsesdest kyrk that ever I com inne!
 With hegh helme on his hede, his launce in his honde,
 He romez up to the roffe of the rogh wonez.
 Thene herde he of that hyghe hil, in a harde roche
 Biyonde the broke, in a bonk, a wonder breme noyse:
 Quat! hit clatered in the clyff, as hit cleve schulde,
 As one upon a gryndelston hade grounden a sythe.
 What! hit wharred and whette, as water at a mulne;
 What! hit rusched and ronge, rawthe to here.
 Thenne 'Bi Godde,' quoth Gawayn, 'that gere, as I trowe,
 Is ryched at the reverence me, renk, to mete
 bi rote.

Let God worche! "We loo"
 Hit helppez me not a mote.
 My lif thagh I forgoo,
 Drende dotz me no lote.'

NOTE

The knight urges his horse and comes to the mound,
 Nimbly dismounts, and loops to a tree
 His fine horse's reins along a rough branch.
 Then he goes to the mound and walks all around,
 Wondering to himself what it might be.
 It had a hole at one end and one on each side,
 And was covered all over with patches of grass,
 All hollow inside; an old cave, nothing but,
 Or a fissure in an ancient crag: he couldn't say
 which one it was.

'Ah Lord!' the noble knight said,
 'Is this the Green Chapel?
 Here right at midnight might
 The devil say matins.'

'Now truly,' said Gawain, 'it's desolate here.
 This chapel looks evil, with grass overgrown;
 It would well suit the man dressed all in green
 To perform his devotions, in devilish ways.
 All my senses now tell me that Satan himself
 Has forced this meeting on me, to strike me dead here.
 It's a chapel of doom, may ill-luck befall it!
 It's the most accursed church I was ever inside.'
 With high helmet on head, his lance in his hand,
 He climbs to the roof of the rough, rocky dwelling.
 Then he heard up the hillside, behind a great rock
 On the slope past the stream, a shattering noise.
 Crash – it clattered through cliffs, as though splitting them,
 As if on a grindstone someone sharpened a scythe.
 Crash – it whirred and it whetted, like a stream at a mill.
 Crash – it screeched and it rang, frightening to hear.
 'By God,' said Gawain, 'these things, I suppose,
 Are done in my honour, to welcome a knight
 as is fit.

God's will be done. To cry "Alas"
 Will help not a jot.
 Even should I die,
 No noise will make me fear.'

Thenne the knyght con calle ful hyghe,
 'Who stightlez in this sted me steven to holde?
 For now is gode Gawayn goande ryght here.
 If any wyghe oght wyl, wynne hider fist,
 Other now other never, his nede to spende.'
 'Abyde,' quoth on on the bonke aboven his hede,
 And thou schal haf al in hast that I the hyght ones.'
 Yet he rusched on that rurde rapely a throwe,
 And wyth quettyng awharf, er he wolde lyght;
 And sythen he keverez bi a cragge, and comez of a hole,
 Whyrlande out of a wro wyth a felle weppen,
 A denez ax nwe dyght, the dynt with to yelde,
 With a borelych bytte bende bi the halme,
 Fyled in a fylor, fowre foot large –
 Hit watz no lasse, bi the lace that lemed ful bryght –
 And the gome in the grene gered as fyrst,
 Bothe the lyre and the leggez, lokkez and berde,
 Save that fayre on his fote he foundez on erthe,
 Sette the stele to the stone, and stalked bysyde.
 When he wan to the watter, ther he wade nolde,
 He hypped over on hys ax, and orpedly strydez,
 Bremly brothe on a bent that brode watz aboute,
 on snawe.

Sir Gawayn the knyght con mete,
 He ne lutte hym nothyng lowe;
 That other sayde, 'Now, sir swete,
 Of steven mon may the trowe.'

'Gawayn,' quoth that grene gome, 'God the mot loke!
 Iwysse thou art welcom, wyghe, to my place,
 And thou hatz tyled thi travayl as truee mon schulde,
 And thou knowez the covenantez kest uus bytwene:
 At this tyme twelmonyth thou toke that the falled,
 And I schulde at this Nwe Yere yeply the quyte.
 And we ar in this valay verayly oure one;
 Here are no renkes us to rydde, rele as uus lykez.
 Haf thy helme of thy hede, and haf here thy pay.

Then the knight shouted out at the top of his voice,
 'Who's the master of here, to keep his appointment?
 For true to his word, Gawain's waiting right here.
 If anyone wants something, come out here fast,
 Either now or never, to settle his business.'
 'Wait,' someone said on the hillside above,
 'And you'll very soon get all I promised you once.'
 Yet he kept briskly on with that whirring a while,
 Turned back to his whetting before coming down.
 He makes his way through the rocks, bursts out of a hole,
 Whirling out of a gap with a grisly weapon –
 A Danish axe newly made, for dealing the blow,
 A massive blade curving back on the shaft,
 Honed on a whetstone, four feet across –
 It measured no less, by the thong that gleamed very bright.
 And the man in the green, dressed as at first,
 Both his face and his legs, his hair and his beard,
 Save that, firm on his feet, he strode over the ground,
 Set the shaft on the stones and stalked alongside.
 When he came to the water, not wanting to wade,
 He vaulted across on his axe, and aggressively strides
 Fierce and grim, to a clearing that stretched wide about,
 in the snow.

Sir Gawain met the knight
 Gave him the merest bow.
 The other said, 'Good sir,
 A man can trust your word.'

'Gawain,' the green man said, 'may God keep you safe!
 You are indeed welcome, sir, to my place.
 You've timed your journey as an honest man should.
 You know the agreement that we made together:
 A twelvemonth ago. You took what befell you,
 And I this New Year was to promptly repay you.
 We're by ourselves in this valley, quite alone;
 No men here will part us; we can fight as we like.
 Take off your helmet, and now take your dues.

Busk no more debate then I the bede thenne
 When thou wypped of my hede at a wap one.'
 'Nay, bi God,' quoth Gawayn, 'that me gost lante,
 I schal gruch the no grwe for grem that fallez.
 Bot styghtel the upon on strok, and I schal stonde stylle
 And warp the no wernyng to worch as the lykez,
 nowhere.'

He lened with the nek, and lutte,
 And schewed that schyre al bare,
 And lette as he noght dutte;
 For drede he wolde not dare.

Then the gome in the grene graythed hym swythe,
 Gederez up hys grymme tole Gawayn to smyte;
 With alle the bur in his body he ber hit on lofte,
 Munt as maghtyly as marre hym he wolde;
 Hade hym dryven adoun as dregh as he atled,
 Ther hade ben ded of his dynt that doghty watz ever.
 Bot Gawayn on that giserne glyfte hym bysyde,
 As hit com glydande adoun on glode hym to schende,
 And schranke a lytel with the schulderes for the scharp yrne.
 That other schalk wyth a schunt the schene wyththaldez,
 And thenne repreved he the prynce with mony prowde wordez:
 'Thou art not Gawayn,' quoth the gome, 'that is so goud halden,
 That never arghed for no here by hylle ne be vale,
 And now thou fles for ferde er thou fele harmez!
 Such cowardise of that knyght cowthe I never here.
 Nawther fyked I ne flaghe, freke, quen thou myntest,
 Ne kest no cavelacioun in kynggez hous Arthor.
 My hede flagh to my fote, and yet flagh I never;
 And thou, er any harme hent, arghez in hert.
 Werfore the better burne me burde be called
 therfore.'

Quoth Gawayn, 'I schunt onez,
 And so wyl I no more;
 Bot thagh my hede falle on the stonz,
 I con not hit restore.

And no more resistance than I offered you
 When you slashed off my head with a single stroke.'
 'No, by God,' said Gawayn, 'who gave me a soul,
 I'll bear you no grudge, whatever hurt comes about.
 But take only one stroke; I'll stand still
 And won't stop you doing whatever you like
 at all.'

He bent his neck and bowed,
 Showing the flesh all bare,
 Behaved as unafraid.
 He would not cower in fear.

Then the man dressed in green quickly got ready,
 Lifts up his grim weapon to strike Gawayn down.
 With all the strength in his body, he heaved it on high,
 And swung it as fiercely as if meaning to kill.
 Had he brought the axe down with the force that he meant,
 The ever-brave Gawayn would have died from the blow.
 But Gawayn glanced sideways as the battle-axe swung,
 As it came gliding down to the ground to destroy him,
 And hunched his shoulders a little against the sharp steel.
 The man with a jerk pulls up the bright blade,
 Rebuking the prince with words of disdain:
 'You cannot be Gawayn,' said the man, 'who's reputed so good,
 Who never shrunk from an army, on valley or hill.
 You're flinching for fear before you feel pain!
 I never heard of such cowardice shown by that knight.
 I neither flinched, sir, nor fled, when you struck your own blow,
 Nor raised an objection in king Arthur's court.
 My head fell at my feet, but I never fled.
 But before you are hurt, you're shaking inside,
 So I should be reckoned the better man
 for that.'

'I flinched once,' said Gawayn,
 I shan't do it twice.
 If my head falls on the stones,
 I can't put it back.'

'But busk, burne, bi thi fayth, and bryng me to the poynt.
 Dele to me my destiné, and do hit out of honde,
 For I schal stonde the a strok, and start no more
 Til thy ax have me hitte: haf here my trawthe.'
 'Haf at the thenne!' quoth that other, and hevez hit alofte,
 And waytez as wrothely as he wode were.
 He myntez at hym maghtyly, bot not the mon rynez,
 Withhelde heterly his honde er hit hurt myght.
 Gawayn graythely hit bydez, and glent with no membre,
 Bot stode styll as the ston, other a stubbe auther
 That rathelid is in roché grounde with rotez a hundreth.
 Then muryly efte con he mele, the mon in the grene,
 'So, now thou hatz thi hert holle, hitte me bihovs.
 Halde the now thy hyghe hode that Arthur the raght,
 And kepe thy kanel at this kest, yif hit kever may.'
 Gawayn ful gryndelly with greme thenne sayde:
 'Wy! thresch on, thou thro mon, thou thretez to longe;
 I hope that thi hert arghe wyth thyn awen selven.'
 'For sothe,' quoth that other freke, 'so felly thou spekez,
 I wyl no lenger on lyte lette thin ernde
 right nowe.'
 Thenne tas he hym strythe to stryke,
 And frounzez bothe lyppe and browe,
 No mervayle thagh hym myslyke
 That hoped of no rescowe.

He lyftes lyghtly his lome, and let hit down fayre
 With the barb of the bitte bi the bare nek;
 Thagh he homered heterly, hurt hym no more
 Bot snyrt hym on that on syde, that severed the hyde.
 The scharp schrank to the flesche thurgh the schyre grece,
 That the schene blod over his schulderes schot to the erthe;
 And quen the burne sey the blode blenk on the snawe,
 He sprit forth a spenne-fote more then a spere lenthe,
 Hent heterly his helme, and his hed cast,
 Schot with his schulderes his fayre schelde under,
 Braydez out a bryght sworde, and bremly he spekez –

'But hurry up, man, by your faith, and come to the point.
 Deal out my fate, and do it at once.
 I'll stand a blow from you, and not move again
 Till your axe has hit me, I pledge you my word.'
 'Let's have you then!' said the other, and raises it up,
 Glaring as fiercely as if he were mad.
 He swings at him savagely, without touching the man,
 Checked his hand suddenly before it could harm.
 Gawain waits for it, steadfast, not moving a limb,
 Standing still as a stone, or the stump of a tree
 Entwined in hard ground by hundreds of roots.
 Then the man in green spoke again, mockingly:
 'Now your courage is back, it's time for the blow.
 May the order of knighthood given by Arthur*
 Save your neck from this stroke, if that can be done!'
 Gawain, enraged, replied with full fury,
 'Strike away, you wild man, you waste time in threats;
 I think you have made your own heart afraid.'
 'Indeed,' the other man said, 'you talk so aggressively,
 I'll no longer delay or hinder your business
 at all.'
 He takes his stance to strike
 And puckers lips and brow;
 No wonder Gawain dreads;
 No hope of rescue now.

He lifts his axe swiftly and brings it down straight,
 With the edge of the blade over Gawain's bare neck.
 But though he struck fiercely, he hurt him no more
 Than to nick him one side, cutting open the skin.
 The blade sank in the flesh through the white fat
 So that bright blood shot over his shoulders to earth.
 When the knight saw his blood gleam on the snow
 He kicked forward with both feet, more than spear's length,
 Snatched up his helmet, slammed it down on his head,
 Jerked his shoulders to swing his splendid shield down,
 Draws out a bright sword, and aggressively speaks –

Never syn that he watz burne borne of his moder
 Watz he never in this worlde wyghe half so blythe –
 'Blynne, burne, of thy bur, bede me no mo!
 I haf a stroke in this sted withoute stryf hent,
 And if thow rechez me any mo, I redyly schal quyte,
 And yelde yederly agayn – and therto ye tryst –
 and foo.

Bot on stroke here me fallez –
 The covenaunt schop so,
 Fermed in Arthurez hallez –
 And thefore, hende, now hoo!"

The hathel heldet hym fro, and on his ax rested,
 Sette the schaft upon schore, and to the scharp lened,
 And loked to the leude that on the launde yede,
 How that doghty, dredles, dervely ther stondez
 Armed, ful aghles: in hert hit hym lykez.
 Thenn he melez muryly wyth a much steven,
 And with a rynkande rurde he to the renk sayde:
 'Bolde burne, on this bent be not so gryndel.
 No mon here unmanerly the mysbodsn habbez,
 Ne kyd bot as covenaunde at kyngez kort schapod.
 I hyght the a strok and thou hit hatz, halde the wel payed;
 I relece the of the remnaunt of ryghtes alle other.
 Iif I deliver had bene, a boffet paraunter
 I couthe wrotheloker haf waret, to the haf wrought anger.
 Fyrst I mansed the muryly with a mynt one,
 And rove the wyth no rofe-sore, with ryght I the profered
 For the forwarde that we fest in the fyrst nyght,
 And thou trystyly the trawthe and trwly me haldez,
 Al the gayne thow me gef, as god mon schulde.
 That other munt for the morne, mon, I the profered,
 Thou kyssendes my clere wyf – the cosses me raghtez.
 For bothe two here I the bede bot two bare myntes
 boute scathe.

Trwe mon trwe restore,
 Thenne thar mon drede no wathe.
 At the thrid thou fayled there,

Never since he'd been born of his mother
 Had he ever on earth felt half as relieved –
 'Sir, stop your violence, don't try it again.
 I've borne a blow in this place without any resisting;
 If you give me another, I'll quickly repay it
 And give it back promptly – be certain of that –
 with force.

One single blow is due;
 That was the contract we
 Confirmed in Arthur's court.
 So, good sir, hold your hand.'

The man stood back, and rested on his axe,
 Set the shaft to the ground and leant on the blade,
 And gazed at the man in the glade,
 How bravely, bold and undaunted he stood,
 Armed, without fear; deep down, the sight pleased him.
 Then he speaks to him cheerfully, in a loud voice,
 And in ringing tones, he said to the man:
 'Brave knight, don't be so fierce in this place.
 No one's misused you improperly here,
 Nor done but as promised before the king's court.
 I pledged you a blow, which you've had; you've been paid very well.
 You're freed from the rest of all other claims.
 Had I been nimbler, a more vicious blow
 I perhaps could have dealt you, to have roused you to anger.
 First I threatened you playfully with a feinted blow only,
 Avoiding a gash. What I gave you was just,
 Because of the compact we made the first night
 When you faithfully, truly, kept your sworn word,
 Gave me all of your winnings, as an honest man should.
 The second feint, sir, I gave for the following day.
 You kissed my fair wife, and gave me those kisses.
 For both these occasions, I gave you just two feinted blows
 without harm.

True man must pay back truly,
 He then need fear nothing.
 The third time you failed there

And therefore that tappe ta the.

'For hit is my wende that thou werez, that ilke woven girdel,
 Myn owen wyf hit the weved, I wot wel for sothe.
 Now know I wel thy cosses, and thy costes als,
 And the wowyng of my wyf: I wroght it myselven.
 I sende hir to asay the, and sothly me thynkkez
 On the fautlest freke that ever on fote yede;
 As perle bi the quite pese is of prys more,
 So is Gawayn, in god fayth, bi other gay knyghtez.
 Bot here yow lakked a lyttel, sir, and lewté yow wonted;
 Bot that watz for no wylyde werke, ne wowyng nauther,
 Bot for ye lufed your lyf; the lasse I yow blame.'
 That other stif mon in study stod a gret whyle,
 So agreved for greme he gryed withinne;
 Alle the blod of his brest blende in his face,
 That al he schranke for schome that the schalk talked.
 The forme worde upon folde that the freke meled:
 'Corsed worth cowarddyse and covetyse bothe!
 In yow is vylany and vyse that veftue disstryez.'
 Thenne he kaght to the knot, and the kest lawsez,
 Brayde brothely the belt to the burne selven:
 'Lo, ther he falssyng, foule mot hit falle!
 For care of thy knokke cowardyse me taght
 To acorde me with covetyse, my kynde to forsake,
 That is larges and lewté that longez to knyghtez.
 Now am I fawty and falce, and ferde haf ben ever
 Of trecherye and untrawthe: bothe bityde sorwe
 and care!

I biknowe yow, knyght, here styлле,
 Al fawty is my fare;
 Letez me overtake your wyлле
 And efte I schal be ware.'

NOTE

The loghe that other leude and luflyly sayde,
 'I halde hit hardily hole, the harme that I hade.
 Thou art confessed so clene, beknowen of thy mysses,

And so bore that blow.

'For it's my belt you're wearing, that same woven girdle;
 My wife gave it you, I know that for sure.
 I know all about your kisses, and also your conduct,
 And my wife's wooing: I planned it myself.
 I sent her to test you, and truly you seem to me
 One of the most perfect men who ever has lived.
 Just as pearls are more valued than snow-white peas,
 So is Gawain, in truth, than other fair knights.
 Only here you were somewhat at fault, sir. You lacked faithfulness;
 But not for greed of fine workmanship, or love-making either,
 But because you wanted to live: so I blame you the less.'
 The other brave man stood silent in thought, a long while,
 So crushed with remorse, he shuddered inside.
 All the blood from his heart rushed up to his face
 That he shrank back for shame at what the man said.
 The very first words that the knight uttered there
 Were, 'A curse on cowardice and avarice, too!
 You breed weakness and vice that both destroy virtue.'
 Then he snatched at the knot and undoes the fastening,
 Flung the belt angrily straight at the man:
 'There it is, the false thing, the devil can take it.
 For fear of your blow, cowardice taught me
 To give in to avarice, be false to my nature,
 The generosity, loyalty, expected of knights.
 Now I'm false and unworthy – and I've always dreaded
 Betrayal and falsehood – may sorrow and grief come
 to both!

I humbly confess, sir,
 My conduct is vile.
 Let me regain your good trust.
 Henceforth I'll be on guard.

Then the other man laughed and graciously said:
 'The wrong that you did me you've entirely put right;
 You've so fully confessed and admitted your faults

And hatz the penaunce apert of the poynt of myn egge,
 I halde the polysed of that plyght, and pured as clene
 As thou hadez never forfeget sythen thou watz fyrst borne;
 And I gif the, sir, the gurdel that is golde-hemmed;
 For hit is grene as my goune, Sir Gawain, ye maye
 Think upon this ilke threpe, ther thou forth thryngez
 Among prynces of prys, and this a pure token
 Of the chaunce of the grene chapel at chevalrous knyghtez.
 And ye schal in this Nwe Yer agayn to my wonez,
 And we schyn revel the remnaunt of this ryche fest
 ful bene.'

Ther lathed hym fast the lorde
 And sayde, 'Wyth my wyf, I wene,
 We schal yow wel acorde,
 That watz your enemy kene.'

'Nay, for sothe,' quoth the segge, and sesed hys helme,
 And hatz hit of hendely, and the hathel thonkkez,
 'I haf sojourned sadly; sele yow bytyde
 And he yelde hit yow yare that yarkkez al menskes!
 And comaunde me to that cortays, your comlych fere,
 Bothe that on and that other, myn honoured ladyez,
 That thus hor knyght wyth hor kest han koyntly bigyled.
 Bot hit is no ferly thagh a fole madde,
 And thurgh wyles of wymmen be wonen to sorwe,
 For so watz Adam in erde with one bygyled,
 And Salamon with fele sere, and Samson eftsones –
 Dalyda dalt hym hys wyrde – and Davyth thereafter
 Watz blended with Barsabe, that much bale tholed.
 Now these were wrathed wyth her wyles, hit were a wynne huge
 To luf hom wel and leve hem not, a leude that couthe.
 For thes wer forne the freest, that folwed alle the sele
 Excellently of alle thyse other, under hevenryche
 that mused;

And alle thay were biwyled
 With wymmen that thay used.
 Thagh I be now bigyled
 Me think me burde be excused.

And done honest penance at the point of my blade.
 I deem you cleansed of offence and washed just as clean
 As though you'd not sinned from the day you were born.
 And I give you here, sir, my gold-bordered belt,
 Which is green like my clothes; Sir Gawain, you may
 Think on this meeting when you go forth and mingle
 With princes of rank: it will be a fine token
 Of the adventure at the Green Chapel among chivalrous knights.
 And at this New Year, you'll come back to my home
 And enjoy what remains of this high feast
 in pleasure.

The lord pressed him to come
 And said, 'We will, I know,
 Reconcile you with my wife.
 She was your keen foe.'

'No, indeed,' said the knight, and seizing his helmet,
 He takes it off courteously and gives the lord thanks.
 'I have stayed long enough; good fortune be with you,
 May he who ordains every honour reward you in full!
 Commend me to that gracious lady, your lovely wife,
 Both her and the other, those honourable ladies
 Who so cleverly blinded their knight with their trick.
 No wonder it is if a fool acts insanely
 And is brought to sorrow by womanly wiles;
 For so was Adam beguiled by one, while on earth,
 Solomon by many, and then again Samson –
 Delilah dealt him his fate – and afterwards, David
 Was blinded by Bathsheba, and suffered much grief.
 Since these were wrecked by their wives, it would be a huge gain
 To adore but not trust them, if a man could know how.
 For these were the noblest of old, remarkably blessed
 By good fortune above all others who lived
 under heaven.

And they were all beguiled
 By women that they knew.
 Since I have been deceived,
 Perhaps I'll be forgiven.

'Bot your gordel,' quoth Gawayn, 'God yow foryelde!
 That wyl I welde wyth goud wylle, not for the wynne golde,
 Ne the saynt, ne the sylk, ne for syde pendaundes,
 For wele ne for worchyp, ne for the wlonk werkkez,
 Bot in syngne of my surfet I schal se hit ofte,
 When I ride in renoun, remorde to myselven
 The faut and the fayntyse of the flesche crabbed,
 How tender hit is to entyse teches of fylthe;
 And thus, quen pryde schal me pryk for prowes of armes,
 The loke to this luf-lace schal lethe my hert.
 Bot on I wolde yow pray, displeses yow never:
 Syn ye be lorde of the yonder londe her I haf lent inne
 Wyth yow wyth worschyp – the wyghe hit yow yelde
 That uphaldez the heven and on hygh sittez –
 How norne ye yowre ryght nome, and thenne no more?'
 'That schal I telle the trwly,' quoth that other thenne,
 'Bertilak de Hautdesert I hat in this londe.
 Thurgh myght of Morgne la Faye, that in my hous lenges,
 And koyntyse of clergie, bi craftes wel lerned,
 The maystrés of Merlyn mony hatz taken –
 For ho hatz dalt drwry ful dere sumtyme
 With that conable klerk, that knowes alle your knyghtez
 at hame.
 Morgne the goddes
 Therefore hit is hir name:
 Weldez non so hyghe hawtesse
 That ho ne con make ful tame –

'Ho wayned me upon this wyse to your wynne halle
 For to assay the surquidré, yif hit soth were
 That rennes of the grete renoun of the Rounde Table.
 Ho wayned me this wonder your wyttez to reve,
 For to have greved Gaynour and gart hir to dyghe
 With glopnyng of that ilke gome that gostlych speked
 With his hede in his honde bifore the hyghe table.
 That is ho that is at home, the auncian lady;

'But for your belt,' Gawain said, 'God reward you.
 That I'll willingly keep, not for its marvellous gold,
 Nor the girdle itself, nor the silk, nor the long pendants,
 Nor its value, nor the honour it gives, nor its fine workmanship.
 But I'll gaze at it often as a sign of my failing;
 As I ride out in triumph, recall with remorse
 The faults and the frailties of erring flesh,
 How likely it is to catch blotches of sin.
 And so when pride stirs me for prowess of arms,
 A glance at this love-lace will humble my heart.
 But one thing I ask of you: don't take offence.
 As you're lord of that land where I stayed
 And was honoured by you – and may he reward you
 Who holds up the heavens, sitting on high –
 What's your true, proper name? then no more questions.
 'I'll tell you that honestly,' the other man said,
 'Bertilak of Hautdesert I'm called in this land.
 Through the power of Morgan le Fay, who lives in my house,
 And her skills of learning, well taught in magic,
 She has mastered many of Merlin's secret arts.
 For she, in the past, had most intimate dealings of love
 With that fine man of learning, as all your knights know
 at home.
 Morgan the goddess
 Is therefore her name.
 No-one has such massive pride
 That can't be tamed by her.

'She sent me like this to your splendid court
 To test its pride, to judge the truth
 Of what's said of the Round Table's great renown.
 She sent this marvel to drive you insane,
 To terrify Guinevere and cause her to die
 From fear at the man who spoke like a phantom
 With his head in his hand before the high table.
 That's her in my home, the very old lady

Ho is even thyn aunt, Arthurez half-suster,
 The duches doghter of Tyntagelle, that dere Uter after
 Hade Arthur upon, that athel is nowthe.
 Therefore I ethe the, hathel, to com to thyn aunt,
 Make myry in my hous; my meny the loviae,
 And I wol the as wel, wyghe, bi my faythe,
 As any gome under God for thy grete traathe.'
 And he nikked hym naye, he nolde bi no wayes.
 Thay acolen and kyssen and kennen ayther other
 To the prynce of paradise, and parten ryght there
 on coolde;
 Gawayn on blonk ful bene
 To the kynggez burgh buskez bolde,
 And the knyght in the enker-grene
 Whiderwarde-so-ever he wolde.

Wylde wayez in the worlde Wowen now rydez
 On Gryngolet, that the grace hade geten of his lyve;
 Ofte he herbered in house and ofte al theroute,
 And mony aventure in vale, and venquyst ofte,
 That I ne tyght at this tyme in tale to remene.
 The hurt watz hole that he hade hent in his nek,
 And the blykkande belt he bere therabout
 Abelef as a bauderyk bounden by his syde,
 Loken under his lyfte arme, the lace, with a knot,
 In tokenyng he watz tane in tech of a faute.
 And thus he commes to the court, knyght al in sounde.
 Ther wakned wele in that wone when wyst the grete
 That gode Gawayn watz comen; gayn hit hym thought.
 The kyng kysses the knyght, and the whene alce,
 And sythen mony syker knyght that soght hym to haylce,
 Of his fare that hym frayned; and ferlyly he telles,
 Biknowez alle the costes of care that he hade,
 The chaunce of the chapel, the chere of the knyght,
 The luf of the ladi, the lace at the last.
 The nirt in the neck he naked hem schewed
 That he laght for his unleuté at the leudes hondes
 for blame.

Who's really your aunt, Arthur's half-sister,
 The duchess of Tintagel's daughter, by whom noble Uther
 Fathered afterwards Arthur, who now is king.
 So I urge you, good sir, to visit your aunt,
 Make merry in my house: my servants all love you,
 And so do I too, sir, on my honour,
 As any man upon earth, for all your integrity.'
 But Gawain refused; on no account would he.
 They embrace and kiss, and commend each other
 To the Prince of Paradise, and parted right there
 in the snow.
 Gawain, on his fine horse,
 To the king's court hastens back,
 And the knight in brilliant green
 Goes wheresoever he might choose.

Wild ways through the world Gawain now rides
 On Gringolet, once his life has been mercifully spared.
 He sometimes finds lodging, but sleeps often outside,
 Has many adventures, many victories too,
 Which I don't mean to tell at this time.
 The wound he'd received in his neck was healed,
 And round it he wore the shining belt
 Diagonally across like a baldric, secured at his side.
 The girdle was tied with a knot beneath his left arm,
 A sign he'd been caught in the guilt of a fault.
 And so, safe and sound, he arrives at the court.
 Joy spread through the castle when the nobles discovered
 The good Gawain had come; they thought it miraculous.
 The king kisses the knight, as does the queen,
 Then many true knights who came up to greet him
 And ask how he'd fared; and he tells of the marvels,
 Confesses the hardships that he had endured,
 The events at the chapel, the Green Knight's behaviour,
 The lady's affection, and lastly the belt.
 He lay bare his neck to show them the scar
 He'd received for dishonesty at the hands of the lord,
 in rebuke.

He tened quen he schulde telle,
 He gromed for gref and grame;
 The blod in his face con melle,
 When he hit schulde schewe, for schame.

'Lo, lorde,' quoth the leude, and the lace hondeled,
 'This is the bende of this blame I bere in my nek,
 This is the lathe and the losse that I laght have
 Of cowardise and covetyse that I haf caght thare,
 This is the token of untrawthe that I am tane inne,
 And I mot nede hit were wyle I may last;
 For mon may hyden his harme, bot unhap ne may hit,
 For ther hit onez is tachched twynne wil hit never.'
 The kyng confortez the knyght, and alle the court als
 Laghen loude therat, and luflyly acorden
 That lordes and ladis that longed to the Table,
 Uche burne of the brotherhede, a bauderyk schulde have,
 A bende abelef hym aboute of a bryght grene,
 And that, for sake of that segge, in swete to were.
 For that watz acorded the renoun of the Rounde Table,
 And he honoured that hit hade evermore after,
 As hit is breved in the best boke of romaunce.
 Thus in Arthurus day this aunter bitidde,
 The Brutus bokez therof beres wyttensesse;
 Sythen Brutus, the bolde burne, bowed hider fyrst,
 After the segge and the asaute watz sesed at Troye,
 iwysse,
 Mony aunterez here-biforne
 Haf fallen suche er this.
 Now that bere the croun of thorne
 He bryng uus to his blysse! AMEN.

HONY SOYT QUI MAL PENCE.

NOTE

Tortured by his tale,
 He groaned with grief and pain,
 The blood rushed to his face
 When he showed the shameful cut.

'Look, my lord,' the knight said, touching the girdle,
 'Here's the sign of the guilt that I bear on my neck;
 Here's the injury and damage that I have received
 For the cowardice and avarice to which I fell prey.
 Here's the token of treachery that I was caught in,
 And now I must wear it as long as I live.
 A man may conceal his offence, but cannot undo it.
 Once it's attached, it will never depart.
 The king comforts the knight, and all the court
 Laughs loudly about it, and kindly agrees
 That the lord and the ladies who belonged to the Table,
 Each brotherhood member, should wear such a belt,
 A band of bright green put crosswise about,
 To be worn just like Gawain, for the sake of the man.
 The baldric was granted the Round Table's approval;
 He was honoured who wore it, evermore after,
 As is told in the finest books of romance.
 So in Arthur's time, this adventure took place,
 Which the chronicles of Britain record;
 Since the brave hero Brutus first arrived here,
 After the siege and assault were ended at Troy,
 indeed.
 Many adventures in past times
 Have happened like this.
 May he who wore the crown of thorns
 Now bring us to his bliss: AMEN.

HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE.

NOTES

The following notes address particular problems of translation or meaning arising in the text. Click on [RETURN](#) to go back to the relevant line of text.

- 3-5 **The tulk... / Was tried for his tricherie, the trewest on erthe. / Hit watz Ennias**
As many commentators have pointed out, the rich ambiguity of the poem is immediately apparent in its opening lines. Although the general subject matter of the first stanza is clear – the legendary history of the founding of Britain by Brutus, the great-grandson of Aeneas and ancestor of Arthur and Gawain – the nominal references have occasioned much debate. On one view, *the tulk* refers to Aeneas, who in one version of the legend betrayed Troy to the Greeks, with the clause *hit watz* simply referring back to *tulk*. On another, the traitorous *tulk* is Antenor, with *hit watz* referring forward and Aeneas clearly presented as a great warrior-prince. Few editors have noted any force in the adverb *sithen* repeated from line 1 ('It was princely Aeneas...who *then* conquered kingdoms'), even though it clearly separates two periods of time, and thereby Aeneas from *the tulk*. The phrase *trewest on erthe* has also generated debate. A minority view sees it in apposition to *tulk* (i.e. the man was 'the most famous on earth' despite, or because of, his treachery). But a more plausible interpretation places it in apposition to the immediately preceding *tricherie* (the treason was the plainest/surest/most obvious that there could be). *Tried* has occasionally been translated as 'marked out, distinguished for, famous for', but seems more easily interpreted in the obvious legal sense of 'judged in a court of law' – in other words, as one event in the sequence of many that crowd into this opening stanza, rather than as a condition of personality. In combination, these ambiguities give the first hint of the network of ironies, contrasts, subverted structures, that are to haunt the poem, in both moral and linguistic terms. [RETURN](#)

NOTES

- 31-2 **in toun herde, / with tonge**
The phrase is almost certainly a conventional appeal to a wider authority, rather than any literal reference to an actual telling or recitation. The phrase *with tonge* clearly emphasises the oral nature of the telling, although the very next lines highlight, rather, the written and 'seen' nature of the story. *In toun* can carry a more general sense of 'among people', 'in court', or 'in company', rather than the specifically urban denotation 'in town'. [RETURN](#)
- 34-5 **In stori stif and stronge, / With lel letteres loken**
These phrases constitute two of the most condensed and problematic lines in the entire poem. It is clear that the opening and concluding lines of this particular 'wheel' are concerned to establish the long-established authority of the written story (*As hit is stad and stoken.../In londe so hatz ben longe*). But the intervening lines are more ambiguous. *Loken* ('fastened' or 'linked') seems to refer to the *stori* rather than to the *letteres*, though the *letteres* themselves could be either the literal signs of the alphabet or the more general text they make up. *Lel* has a connotation of 'correct' or 'exact', in the sense of 'fitting' or 'truthful', rather than 'loyal' or 'faithful'; but the fitness might comprise the appropriateness of the words to the subject matter, or the matching of repeated initial letters in the alliterative scheme. Indeed, there has been substantial debate whether or not the phrases allude to the alliterative sound patterns that generate so much of the poem's rhythmic energy. All these uncertainties, combined with the compression of the lines, have led, unsurprisingly, to some very different renderings: 'linked with true letters' (Anderson), 'the letters all interwoven' (Harrison), 'made fast in truthful words' (Winny), 'enshrined in true syllables' (Andrew and Waldron), 'linked in measures meetly' (Borroff), 'with letters linking truly' (Stone). The contrived diction evident in such versions is not easily avoided, and the translation offered here may scarcely escape similar criticism. [RETURN](#)
- 43 **caroles**
The word carries a considerably broader meaning in the fourteenth century than today, denoting a round- or ring-dance accompanied by singing. It also bears the even wider sense of 'diversion, entertainment, merry-making', where dancing is a major element. [RETURN](#)

- 66-8 **to reche hondeselle, / Yeghed yeres giftes on high, yelde hem bi hond, / Debated busyly**
The lines depict both the giving of presents at New Year and the playing of a game such as handy-dandy. Some commentators have argued for a clear distinction between *hondeselle* (presents given to servants or subordinates) and *giftes* (given to equals), although Arthur himself is later characterised as having received a figurative *hondeselle* (491). The game appears to involve the knights hiding their gifts in their hands. The ladies who guess which hand correctly receive the present; those who guess wrongly pay the forfeit of a kiss. In the mention of games, forfeits and kisses, of course, key motifs in the poem are introduced. **RETURN**
- 71 **the mete tyme**
Although there may be a residual implication in *mete* of ‘fitting, proper, appropriate’, the primary sense is ‘food, feast’. ‘Meat’ carries a substantially broader meaning in fourteenth-century English than in contemporary usage. **RETURN**
- 137 **On the most on the molde on mesure hyghe**
On (‘one’) here is used, in a common medieval construction, to strengthen the superlative. Thus, ‘the very tallest in height’ or ‘quite the tallest in height’, rather than ‘one of the tallest’. **RETURN**
- 267 **in fere**
The phrase normally means ‘in company’ or, in military contexts, ‘with a company of fighting men’. By a process of continual application to troops of fighters and soliders, the phrase also accrued an extended sense of ‘in martial fashion’, ‘warlike’. The Green Knight seems to embrace both senses in his hypothesis: had he sought a fight, he would a) not have come alone and b) not be without his armour for battle. The following phrase *in feghtyng wyse* may be rather tautological, but it serves to emphasise the Knight’s peaceable claims of intent. **RETURN**
- 277 **batayl bare**
Bare here could be construed as ‘without armour’, ‘unarmed’, and is used in this sense in 290 (*And I schal bide the fyrst bur as bare as I sitte*). But it also carries the sense of ‘single’, as in the later reference to *thre bare mote* (‘three single notes’, 1141). Overall, ‘single combat’ seems a preferable reading. **RETURN**

- 296 **barlay**
A word of uncertain origin and meaning, *barlay* is usually associated with the modern dialect *barley*, a term used by children to call a temporary truce in games, or to stake a first claim upon something. Since he has already offered to take the first blow, the Green Knight’s claim, clearly, is that he should be allowed to return the blow when he makes his claim. **RETURN**
- 307 **coghed**
It has been argued that a cough is too discreet a sound for so fierce a character as the Green Knight, and that *coghed* should be translated as ‘shouted’, ‘crowed’, or ‘cried out aloud’. In medieval English, certainly, the verb can cover a wide range of vocal sounds. But the court is already completely hushed (301-2), and in the petrified silence, the Green Knight’s conscious mockery in coughing loudly would focus attention even more forcibly. **RETURN**
- 347 **to your counseyl**
The phrase has often been translated as ‘to advise you’, ‘to offer you counsel’, even though, as Barron points out, such an address is scarcely ‘in keeping with Gawain’s punctilious deference to the king’, particularly in front of his court. A more appropriate rendering might be ‘to discuss’ or ‘to confer with you’. **RETURN**
- 360-1 **And if I carp not comlyly, let alle this cort rych / bout blame**
There has been considerable debate whether *rych* is an adjective or a verb. If an adjective, the sense of the line is ‘Even if I speak improperly, may all this noble court not bear the blame’. In this construction, *rych* after *cort* follows a noun + adjective pattern already established by *this burn rych* (20) and *the sale riche* (243), and later repeated in *this douthe ryche* (397). But a verb has to be supplied before the ‘bob’, and a question remains about why Gawain should think Arthur might blame the court if *he* speaks improperly. If *rych* is construed as a verb (cf. ‘*Ye schal not rise of your bedde, I rych yow better*’, 1223), the sense is ‘counsel/direct/decide’: ‘If I speak improperly, let all the court decide without giving offence’. This latter interpretation is the one adopted in this translation, with the slightly enlarged meaning of ‘judge freely, judge for itself’. **RETURN**

- 409 **may thou frayst my fare**
The phrase has generated several different interpretations: ‘try my behaviour’, ‘see what I will do’ (Davis), ‘enquire after my welfare’ (Barron), ‘pay me a visit’ (Winny), ‘learn where I live’ (Harrison), ‘ask how I am getting on’ (Andrew and Waldron). The conscious irony of the Green Knight’s statement is appropriately rendered by ‘then you can ask how I am’. **RETURN**
- 493-4 **Thagh hym wordes were wane when thay to sete wenten, / Now ar thay stoken of sturne werk, stafful her hond.**
The pronouns *hym*, *thay*, *thay*, and *her* have an ambiguous referent. A frequent rendering relates *thay* to the courtiers and *hym* either to the court or specifically to Arthur. Anderson, however, suggests that all the pronouns could refer to Arthur and Gawain together, with the sentence as a whole expressing a traditional contrast between ‘words’ and ‘works’, talk and action. *Stafful* (‘as full as a hand is when holding a staff’) resonates ironically with the Green Knight’s axe in Gawain’s hands. **RETURN**
- 547 **to telle yow tenez therof, never bot trifel**
The phrase *never bot trifel* has been variously translated: ‘and the small details’ (Harrison), ‘they’re nothing but a trifle’ (Anderson), ‘it would only be a waste of breath’ (Barron), ‘except for a small point/saving one small point’ [i.e. that he must now take his leave] (Davis/Winny). Overall, *trifel* seems more plausibly related to the preceding *tenez* than to the topic of the following line, which is scarcely a ‘trifle’. Hence, the translation here: ‘to trouble you with them; they’re nothing but details’. **RETURN**
- 558 **derne doel**
The manuscript may be read either as *derne* (‘private’, ‘secret’) or as *derve* (‘bitter’, ‘painful’). Both variants have distinctive strengths and limitations, with the psychological and alliterative force of ‘secret sorrow’ perhaps tipping the balance in favour of *derne*. **RETURN**
- 560-1 **and dele no more / wyth bronde**
The phrase *no more* is open to two different interpretations: ‘*never more* brandish his sword’ and ‘*never* brandish his sword *in return*’. The former is clearly a more fatalist rendering, but it may translate the court’s actual feelings more accurately. They

- grieve for Gawain’s seemingly certain death, rather than for the proscription against him returning the blow. **RETURN**
- 626 **trawthe**
A richly complex and multi-layered term, which carries a much wider meaning than its modern equivalent, even though ‘truth’ may remain a reasonable translation. *Trawthe* embraces qualities of honour, faithfulness, loyalty, honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity. The notion of wholeness is particularly important, as the application of the word to the pentangle makes clear. Just as the pentangle is one continuous, unbroken totality, so *trawthe* is fundamental, seamless, and entire. Once Gawain breaks one element of *trawthe* (see 2366, where the Green Knight accuses him of lacking *lewté*), his entire moral universe collapses, at least in his own eyes. **RETURN**
- 630 **the endeles knot**
Despite the poet’s claim that the phrase is known all over England, this is its only recorded use in medieval literature – a manifest case of poetic licence. **RETURN**
- 654 **pité**
The loose, even tenuous, relationship between the five virtues mentioned in 652-4 and Gawain’s character and later adventure has often been noted. What is presented here is much more a detached, impersonal ideal than an articulation of Gawain’s individual psychological virtues, as they are revealed in the subsequent narrative. The supreme virtue of *pité* combines the sense of both ‘pity’ and ‘piety’ in medieval English, and is most closely rendered by the word ‘compassion’. **RETURN**
- 711 **His cher ful oft con change**
Some interpreters (Davis and Winny, for example) read the line as ‘he turned from side to side’ or ‘he turned this way and that’. Others see it as an authorial comment, ‘his mood changed many times’. Andrew and Waldron view it as a play upon words, ambiguously embracing both meanings. On balance, the most plausible interpretation may be to consider the line an authorial projection into the future: i.e. ‘his mood *would* often change/*Before* he saw that chapel’ (see also the note to 883). **RETURN**

864-70 **Sone as he on hent...hem thocht**

The syntax here is noticeably compacted, even tortuous, with several shifts of visual and authorial perspective. Part of the difficulty may be due to some corruption and errors in the manuscript. [RETURN](#)

883 **his cher mended**

Cher combines the sense both of outer facial expression and of inner frame of mind: 'the mind's construction in the face'. No single word seems able now to convey this duality completely, though 'spirits' is a reasonable translation. [RETURN](#)

1066 **bot bare three dayes**

The error in dating, which may be due to a scribal omission between lines 1022 and 1023, has often been noted. It is now St John's Day (27 December), leaving four days before New Year's Day, not three. There is likely to have been some reference immediately after line 1022 to the feast of the Holy Innocents on 28 December, thus aligning the three days of hunting with the last three days of the year. [RETURN](#)

1182-3 **sleghly he herde / A little dyn at his dor**

Although it is possible to relate *sleghly* with *dyn* ('heard a little stealthy sound'), an equally plausible rendering is to translate *sleghly* as an adverb meaning 'faintly, half-consciously, drowsily'. This sense strengthens the connection with the immediately preceding phrase *as in slomeryng he slode*. [RETURN](#)

1237-8 **Ye ar welcum to my cors, / Yowre awen won to wale**

One of the most celebrated 'knots' of translation in the entire poem: is the lady's reference to *my cors* an explicit sexual invitation ('You are welcome to my body'), or a periphrasis for 'me' ('You are welcome to me' in the sense of a polite social formula 'I'm pleased to see you here')? Although such a periphrasis is not uncommon in medieval English, and although that is the courtly meaning Gawain chooses to understand in his reply (1241-7), the ambiguity remains powerfully suggestive. It seems sustained, even enhanced, by her following invitation to *wale...yowre awen won* (literally, 'take your own course'). The rendering 'You're welcome to me/Do just as you please' preserves something of the tension between innocent welcome and explicit invitation. As ever, the inflexions of the spoken

voice or the merest body gesture could convey any position between the two extremes. [RETURN](#)

1265-7 **And other ful much of other folk fongen hor dedez
Bot the daynté that thay delen, for my disert nys ever –
Hit is the worchyp of yourself, that nocht bot wel connez.'**

Either manuscript corruptions, or the convoluted tactfulness of Gawain's speech, or a combination of both, make these lines elliptical, to say the least. Several editors have sought to clarify the sense by adding prepositions after *fongen*, and by emending the manuscript's *nysen* (last word in 1266) to *nys even* or *nys ever*. Beneath the surface obscurities, however, the basic meaning is still discernible. Gawain affirms three related things: i) many people gain respect from others for what they do; ii) I've gained such respect, but I don't deserve it; iii) yet I must accept it because you, *that nocht bot wel connez* ('who know nothing but good'), have given it. [RETURN](#)

1283-7 **Thagh ho were burde...hit most be done**

The first line of the manuscript here actually reads *thagh I were burde bryghtest the burde in mynde hade*, which would translate as "'even if I were the most beautiful of women", the lady thought...' The difficulties of this rendering, though, are twofold: first, the sudden narrative shift to the lady's perspective (and equally abrupt return to the narrator's in 1287); second, the clear awareness she would then show about Gawain's impending ordeal, of which she has in fact no knowledge. The emendation accepted here follows that of many editors: *thagh ho were burde bryghtest the burne had mynde hade* ('though she was the loveliest woman he could recall'). The unlikely repetition of *burde* is avoided, as are the problems of shifting narrative perspective noted above. [RETURN](#)

1474 **was hym ate**

There is a nice ambiguity in the phrase (literally 'was at/with him'), meaning either 'in his bedroom' or 'bothering him' – or indeed both. [RETURN](#)

1513 **the lel layk of luf, the luttrure of armes**

Lettrure has a deep and serious connotation: learning, lore, central doctrine, even (with an adjective) holy scripture. For the lady to propose that *the lel layk of luf* ('the true/faithful practice of love') is the core of knighthood and chivalry shows something

of the cultural force expressed in the tradition of ‘courtly love’.

RETURN

1550 **to haf wonnen hym to woghe**

It is uncertain whether *woghe* here is a noun, meaning ‘sin, wrong’ (or less forcefully ‘harm, injury’), or a verb, meaning ‘to woo’. The two senses are not of course unassociated in this particular context. Winny nicely captures the ambiguity with ‘mischief’. **RETURN**

1662-3 **how-se-ever the dede turned / towrast**

Towrast is probably the past participle of the verb *towrest*, ‘wrested away [from what is right], twisted, awry’, with *turned* perhaps bearing some implication of ‘pervert, distort, misapply’, as well as ‘become’. Here, the major sense is ‘even though his actions might be misconstrued’. **RETURN**

1729 **he lad hem bi lagmon**

The *lagmon* was the ‘last man’ in a line of reapers advancing across a field, with the hunters therefore ‘strung out’. The emphasis is clearly upon the fox’s skills in forcing such a tactic upon the lord and his followers. **RETURN**

1730 **quyle myd-over-under**

Of the three elements in this compound, only *myd* has an unambiguous meaning. *Over* may denote either ‘after’ or ‘through’, and *under* has been variously interpreted, from ‘the third hour’ (i.e. 9 a.m.) to ‘mid-day’. The entire compound has been translated as mid-morning, mid-day, afternoon, and mid-afternoon. In the light of the subsequent detail that it is *niegh nyght* when the fox is killed (1922), the last two of these renderings seem the more plausible. As Davis points out, there is none of the usual ceremony at Reynard’s death. He is quickly skinned and the hunt heads for home because it is nearly night. **RETURN**

1838 **chosen**

As with the word *lettrure* above (1513), *chosen* here may carry deep implications. The word is generally translated as ‘set out for’ or ‘undertaken’. But in the light of the religious reference in the previous line (*er God hym grace sende*, 1837), the term may well suggest, as Barron argues, ‘to dedicate or devote oneself to’.

‘Choice’, in other words, is a fundamental decision of supreme significance, here rendered as ‘to which he was sworn’. **RETURN**

1955-6 **Gawayn and the godemon so glad were thay bothe / Bot if the douthe had doted other drunken ben other**

After the phrase *so glad*, the natural syntactic comparison would be ‘as if’, rather than *bot if*, meaning ‘unless’. If *bot if* is retained, the intended sense would be ‘they could only have been happier had the company gone crazy or got drunk’. Yet this seems a forced and implausible reaction on the part of Gawain and the lord. *Bot if* may be best, and most simply, construed as a scribal error or corruption for ‘as if’. **RETURN**

2068 **‘He gef hit ay god chaunce!’**

The *he* here could refer either to Gawain or, if the speech marks are taken to the end of the ‘wheel’, to Christ – in which case the sense is ‘may He give it lasting good fortune’. **RETURN**

2111 **[I] may the knyght rede**

The manuscript does not contain the first person pronoun; and without it, the phrase would indicate ‘if the knight has his way/his will’. As several editors have pointed out, however, such a meaning would then be inconsistent with the previous line, both in the guide’s sudden impersonality (addressing Gawain as ‘thee’ in 2110 and then ‘knyght’ in 2111), and in the implication that Gawain has some chance of avoiding death when everything the guide says suggests the reverse. A more plausible reading supplies the ‘I’ and punctuation, to read *I may the, knyght, rede* (‘I warn you, knight’ or ‘I can advise you, knight’). **RETURN**

2206-7 **‘Is ryched at the reverence me, renk, to mete / bi rote’**

A convoluted, and possibly corrupt, text. The simplest sense seems to be ‘is intended in my honour, to meet a knight with due ceremony’. More complexly, *mete* could carry the meaning of ‘to measure, mark out’, and *renk* its other meaning of ‘a field of combat’. The overall sense would then be ‘is intended in honour of marking out the field of combat for me, with due ceremony’. Overall, the simpler sense seems the more plausible. **RETURN**

2387 **‘letes me overtake your wylle’**

A line that has produced some very different renderings: ‘let me win your good will’ (Davis); ‘let me understand your pleasure [with respect to penance]’ (Barron); ‘let me regain your trust’

(Winny); ‘what would you have me do’ (Harrison). In the context of Gawain’s confession that precedes this line, the notion of *regaining* or getting *back* something that has been lost seems significant. ‘Let me regain your good trust’ seems a reasonable translation. [RETURN](#)

[2531] **Hony soyt qui mal pence**

As several commentators have pointed out, it is not easy to see the relevance here of the motto of the Order of the Garter (‘Evil be to him who evil thinks’). The motto, which is added in the manuscript in a different hand, may have been intended to associate the poem with that order, even though crucial details (such as the Garter’s blue sash and the Round Table’s green sash) are different. But in a general sense, there may be a loose relationship between the fellowship and collective responsibility embraced by the Garter, and the communal response of Arthur’s court in the last stanza. [RETURN](#)

GLOSSARY

The list below offers brief contextualisations for the names of people, places, events and objects that occur in the poem.

Adam, 2416

According to *Genesis*, the first man, beguiled by Eve to eat the fruit of the tree in the Garden of Eden, in disobedience of God’s command. Adam is a natural choice to head the list of Old Testament figures who were deceived by women – a conventional topic in medieval homilies.

Aeneas, 5

the legendary founder of Rome, who was associated in some medieval accounts with the traitor Antenor in plotting with the Greeks against Troy. Whether he is characterised more by princely virtues or by treachery is ambiguous (see notes to ll. 3-5).

Agravain, 110

Agravain a la Dure Main (‘of the hard/strong hand’) was Gawain’s brother, and a familiar figure in Arthurian romance. His father was King Lot of Orkney and his mother Arthur’s half-sister Anna.

All Saints’ Day, 536

1 November, otherwise known as All Hallows’ Day. The day was one of the five in the year (the others were Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost, and Christmas) when Arthur held court and wore his crown. Gawain leaves the following morning, which is All Souls’ Day, the day in the Christian calendar dedicated to the commemoration of the dead.

Anglesey, 698

the large island very close to the north-west coastline of Wales. Gawain keeps Anglesey on his left hand as he travels eastwards towards the Wirral (q.v.). The other, smaller islands are presumably Holy Island (to the west of Anglesey) and Puffin Island (to the east).

Arthur, 26, 85, 250, 275, 309, 330, 467, 491, 537, 904, 2102, 2275, 2297, 2329, 2464, 2466, 2522

the central and most famous figure in medieval mythology, as well as before and after. In one tradition, he is a Welsh or British chieftain of the fifth or sixth century; in another, a magical and immortal king of a supernatural world. Renowned for his chivalry, youthfulness, courtesy, and passion, he takes on the mantle of a national hero, the guardian of its core values and beliefs. He is the son of Uther Pendragon (q.v.), and Gawain's uncle.

Ave, 757

the first word of the Latin 'Hail Mary'. Together with the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, the 'Hail Mary' was a central text for the medieval Christian.

Baldwin, Bishop, 112

a figure of Celtic origin (in the Welsh stories of *The Mabinogion*, Arthur's bishop is called Bedwini), he is the highest-ranking cleric in the story and, at the Christmas feast, sits in the place of honour on Arthur's right.

Bathsheba, 2419

the wife of Uriah who was spied on by King David (q.v.) as she bathed, and who was then seduced by him, bearing him a child. The event is described in 2 *Samuel*: 2-6.

Bedevere, Sir, 554

brother of Lucan (q.v.), he is the knight who is the only survivor of Arthur's last battle, and who, at the end of Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, is charged with casting Arthur's magical sword Excaliber into the lake.

Bertilak of Hautdesert, 2445

the Green Knight's everyday name. *Hautdesert* has occasionally been rendered as 'the high hermitage', and as an allusion to Bertilak's confessional role in his relationship with Gawain. But more often, the word has been interpreted as meaning 'the high wilderness' or 'the high solitary place', with a clear application to Bertilak's castle, from which it is natural that he should take his name. It is noteworthy that Bertilak's wife is not named at all.

Bors, Sir, 554

a knight of the Round Table, brother of Lionel (q.v.).

Brutus, 13, 2524

great-grandson of Aeneas (q.v.), he was the legendary founder of Britain which, according to tradition, derived its name from him. It is presumably as the founder of a country that he is characterised as *felix*, 'happy, blessed, fortunate'. Arthur and Gawain were descended from him.

Camelot, 37

the legendary home of Arthur's court, variously sited in Cornwall, Somerset, Winchester, South Wales, and as far north as Carlisle, although its actual location is unknown. Given the wildness of the terrain that Gawain meets on his journey to the Wirral (q.v.), a location in South Wales seems the most plausible.

Clarence, Duke of, 552

named Galeshin, he was according to one account the cousin, according to another the brother, of Dodinel the Fierce (q.v.).

Creed, 758

the core statement of Christian faith ('I believe in God the Father almighty') and, together with the Lord's Prayer and Ave Maria, the central texts for the medieval Christian.

David, 2418

the legendary king of Israel, famed in the Old Testament for numerous victories against his enemies, such as the defeat of Goliath. His positive achievements, however, scarcely include his initial seduction of Bathsheba (q.v.) and subsequent killing of her husband.

Delilah, 2418

the celebrated lover of Samson (q.v.), who elicits from him the source of his great strength and who then betrays him to his Philistine enemies. The events are related in *Judges* 16: 4-20.

Dodinal the Fierce, 552

Dodinel le or *de Sauvage* derives his name from his love of hunting in wild forests. He is one of the lesser-known figures in Arthurian legend,

although his named presence at Gawain's departure signals his eminence in the court.

Eric, 551

son of Lac, he is the hero of a romance by Chrétien de Troyes entitled *Erec et Énide*. He is there said to be second in rank to Gawain, with Lancelot of the Lake (q.v.) occupying the third position.

Felix Brutus, 13

see under **Brutus**.

Five Joys [of Mary], 646

these are usually said to be Mary's joys in the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the Assumption, and were a frequent subject of medieval devotional literature.

Five Wounds [of Christ], 642

these are the nail-wounds in the hands and feet of Christ, and the spear-wound in his side. As with the Five Joys of Mary (q.v.), they were a frequent subject of devotion and meditation in medieval religious writing. The Apostles' Creed does not in fact refer to the five wounds as the poet claims, although it does to the crucifixion.

French Sea, the, 13

the English Channel.

Gawain, Sir, passim

son of King Lot of Orkney and Arthur's half-sister, Gawain is in the earlier stages of Arthurian legend pre-eminent among knights, renowned for his outstanding chivalry, fearlessness, prowess and courtesy, as here. In later versions of the legend, his reputation for chastity and success in battle diminishes, and his standing is eclipsed by other knights such as Lancelot. His name is variously spelt in the poem (Gawan, Gawayn, Gawayne, Wawan, Wawen, Wowayn, Wowen, Gavan, Gavayn), indicating the probable influence of Welsh and French antecedents.

Giles, Saint, 1644

a Provençal saint associated with travellers and hunters, and greatly popular during the Middle Ages. He is said to have been crippled by an arrow while protecting a hind from huntsmen. His feast day, 1

September, was celebrated by fairs at which buying and selling took place – hence a possible reason for his mention in this context.

Gringolet, 597, 748, 777, 2047, 2062, 2160, 2480

probably of Celtic origin, *Gringolet* is a traditional name for Gawain's horse in French Arthurian romances.

Guinevere, 74, 109, 339, 945, 2460

Arthur's queen, she bears the name Gwenhwyvar in Welsh romance. She is later rescued from death by Lancelot (q.v.), who becomes her lover.

Hector, 2102

the legendary hero of classical times, who commanded the Trojan army and inflicted numerous defeats upon the Greeks until he was killed by Achilles outside the walls of Troy.

Holyhead, 700

not securely identified as a place on modern maps, it appears to be the fording-place at which Gawain crossed the river Dee. It may be associated with what is now called Holywell, near Basingwerk Abbey.

interlude, 472

a term denoting short pageants or dramatic entertainments that took place between the courses of a feast.

John, Saint, 1788

by tradition, the apostle supremely dedicated to celibacy.

John's Day, Saint, 1022

27 December (for the problems of timescale, see note to 1066).

Julian, Saint, 774

the patron saint of travellers and hospitality.

Lancelot, 553

son of King Ban of Benwick, he gathers fame and status, as the Arthurian legend develops, to become the chief knight of Arthur's court. He also becomes the lover of Guinevere, Arthur's wife.

Langobard, 12

the legendary ancestor of the Lombards, and founder of Lombardy. In one account, he is also a cousin of Brutus (q.v.).

Lionel, 553

the cousin of Lancelot (q.v.), and brother of Bors (q.v.).

Lucan, 553

not elsewhere characterised as 'the good', Lucan was Arthur's butler. In Malory, he is known as 'Sir Lucan the Butlere'.

Mador of the Gate, 555

Mador de la Port is consistently so styled, both in French romance and in Malory. He was presumably the chief gatekeeper of Arthur's castle.

Matins, 2188

matins, the first of the canonical hours, were generally sung well before daybreak in monasteries, though the reference to 'aboute mydnyght' may be more appropriate to 'the dele' than to the actual hour of the service.

measuring-rod, 210

a measuring-rod, or ell-rod, was 45 inches long.

Merlin, 2448

the celebrated wizard of Arthur's court, with bardic and prophetic powers, he is credited with having made the Round Table (q.v.), as well as devising the sword-in-the-stone test for determining Arthur's successor. His supernatural powers are widely attested in medieval literature. Having fallen in love with Morgan (q.v.), he was persuaded to teach her all his magic arts.

Michaelmas, 532

the feast of St Michael falls on 29 September. The 'Michaelmas moon', better known now as the harvest moon, marked the first signs of the wintry weather to come.

Morgan le Fay, 2446 ff.

daughter of the Duchess of Tintagel (q.v.), Morgan learned her magical powers from Merlin (q.v.), and became a powerful, dark figure, often depicted as an ugly old woman dressed in black. She is frequently presented as hostile to the members of Arthur's court, and as bearing a

particular hatred towards Guinevere (q.v.), who once exposed her affair with the knight Guiomar. The claim by the Green Knight (2459-62) that Morgan instructed him to terrify Guinevere to death has often been considered entirely implausible motivation.

Pater, 757

the first word in Latin of the Lord's Prayer.

Pentangle, 620, 623 ff., 636 ff.

the five-pointed star whose origins are variously claimed, despite its associations with Solomon (q.v.). It is sometimes interpreted as a mystic symbol, especially of unity, wholeness or perfection, with the power to ward off evil spirits. The unbroken unity of its design is shown in the illustration below. This is, however, the first appearance of the word in English, and the term is not used elsewhere, either in reference to Gawain's arms or to those of any other knight.

Peter, Saint, 813

the keeper of the gates of heaven, and patron saint of gatekeepers.

raven's fee, 1355

a piece of gristle from the end of the breast-bone, which was traditionally thrown up into the trees for the crows and ravens.

Reynard, 1916, 1920

the traditional name given to a fox in medieval and later literature.

Romulus, 8

abandoned as a child on the banks of the Tiber, and famously suckled by a she-wolf, Romulus, together with his twin brother Remus, is said to have been the founder of Rome.

Round Table, 39, 313, 538, 905, 2458, 2515, 2519

reputedly round so that all who sat at it should be deemed equal, it was in one account of the tradition made by Merlin (q.v.). It had originally belonged to Uther (q.v.), and was brought to Arthur (q.v.) by Guinevere (q.v.) as part of her dowry.

Samson, 2417

famed in the Old Testament narrative for his massive strength, he eventually reveals its source to Delilah (q.v.), who then betrays him to the Philistines. He is blinded by them, but eventually is avenged by destroying the temple with his enemies inside.

Solomon, 625, 2417

son of David (q.v.) and Bathsheba (q.v.), and king of Israel, he was famed for his wisdom and reputedly designed the first pentangle (q.v.). He is claimed to have had three hundred wives and seven hundred concubines, but to have complained that he had never found a good woman – a misogynist view adopted by Gawain in his formulaic denunciation of women's wiles (2414-28).

Tharsia, 77, 571, 858

probably mentioned more to evoke a general oriental exoticism than to indicate a precise geographical place, Tharsia can be loosely interpreted as located around present-day Turkey and Turkestan.

Tintagel, Duchess of, 2465

the mother of Arthur, who begot him by Uther Pendragon (q.v.). Her daughter by her first husband, the Duke of Tintagel, was Morgan le Fay (q.v.)

Tirius, 11

very probably the legendary founder of Tuscany.

Toulouse [silk], 77, 858

as with the reference to Tharsia (q.v.), Toulouse may indicate the specific city in southern France, or it may be a more generalised allusion, designed to evoke a rare, exotic place.

Troy, 1, 2525

a rich, well-fortified city on the coast of Asia Minor near the Hellespont, the western narrows of the waterway from the Black Sea to the Aegean. After the death of Hector (q.v.), it fell to the Achaeans under Achilles.

Urien, 113

father of Ywain (q.v.), he is said in one account to have lived in the 6th century AD, and to have ruled over a part of South Wales (he is called king of Gorre [Gower] by Malory).

Uther, 2465

Uther Pendragon, king of Britain, was the father of Arthur, whom he begot by Ingraine or Igern, the Duke of Tintagel's wife (q.v.).

Wirral, 701

the district between the Dee and Mersey estuaries in Cheshire. In the 14th century, the forest of the Wirral was a notorious hiding-place for outlaws.

Ywain, 113, 551

probably one of the Welsh kings, Ywain was the hero of Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*. He was the son of Urien (q.v.) and, in one French account, of Morgain la Fée (q.v.).

Zephyrus, 517

in classical mythology, the west wind, noted for its mild, gentle breezes.

FURTHER READING AND LINKS

Further Reading

For those who want to explore further the original text of the poem, the following are helpful:

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, ed. J.J. Anderson. London: J.M. Dent, 1996.

The Poems of the Pearl Manuscripts, ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, rev. ed. 1996.

Pearl, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. A.C. Cawley. London: J.M. Dent, 1962.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, rev. ed. Norman Davis. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.

There are a number of translations, in both verse and prose, and expressing a verbal and imaginative strength in varying degrees. The most significant analysis of the issues in translating the poem is offered by Winny, below.

Barron, W.R.J. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974, rev. 1998 [accurate prose version on *recto* pages, with original text opposite].

Borroff, Marie *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967 [translation only].

Harrison, Keith *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [translation only].

FURTHER READING AND LINKS

Raffel, Burton *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. New York: Mentor, 1970 [translation only].

Silverstein, Theodore *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Comedy for Christmas*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974 [translation only].

Stone, Brian *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1959, rev. 1974 [translation only].

Tolkien, J.R.R. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Sir Orfeo*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1975 [translation only].

Vantuono, William *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, rev. ed. 1999 [original on *verso* pages, with translation opposite].

Winny, James *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1992 [original on *verso* pages, with imaginative translation opposite].

Links

Out of numerous sites devoted to Gawain, Arthurian legend, and medieval literature in general, two sites are especially worth visiting for their interest and coverage of the poem:

<http://alliteration.net/Pearl.htm>

<http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/gawaintx.htm>