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

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[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 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 aloff, anger, call, dreme, knif, lawe, take, for instance, were as integrated in common discourse as the French derivatives of age, chaunce, 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, cortasye, countenaunce, gentyle, nurture, are often set against far more abrasive, elemental worlds, expressed through Old English or Old Norse derivatives like aghlich, draveled, gryndel-tayk, 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], fiyre, hende, huff[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 talk that the trammes of tresoun there wroght… Ner slayn wyth the slete he slepted in his ynyes). 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:
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,

The Green Knight’s speech is characteristically full of parataxis (and…and…and…and), simple noun-verb-object formulations (thou haz tymed thi travayl…thou knowez the covenauntez) 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 wydle, and warly abides,
And he schunt for the scharp, and schulde haf arered;
A simple inventory of the tenses deployed in these passages (past, present, present, present, past, past, present, past, past; and 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.

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
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 godeomon 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 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.


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.
Sithen the sege and the assault watz seses at Troye,
The borgh britened and brencht 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 deprecéd provinces, and patrounes bicome
Welneghe of al the wele in the west iles.
Fro riche Romulus to Rome ricchis hym swythe,
With gret bobbance that burghhe he biges upon fyrst,
And nevenes hit his swe me, as hit new hat;
Tirius to Tuskan and teldes bigynnnes,
Langaberde in Lumbardie lyftes up homes,
And fer over the French flod Felix Brutus
On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez
with wynne;
Where werre and wrake and wonder
Bi sythez hatz wont therinne,
And oft both blysse and blunder
Ful skete hatz skyfted synne.

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 Bretaygne kynes,
Ay watz Arthur the heuest, 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 outraghe aventure of Arthurez wondererez.
If ye wyly lysten this lyte bot on little quile
I schal telle hit as-tit, as I in toune herde,
with tonge,
As hit is stad and stoken

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, Tirius 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 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 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 Guinevere 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; Bishop Bawdewyn abof biginez the table, And Ywan, Uryn son, ette with hymselfen. Thise were dight on the des and derworthly served, Thanne mony siker segge at the sidbordez. Then the first cors come with crakkyng of trumpes, Wyth mony baner ful bryght that therbi henged; 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, Foysoun 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 each; For unethe watz the noyce not a whyle sesan, And the fyrst coure in the court kyndely served, Ther hales in at the halle dor an aghlich muyster, 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 stregh, that stek on his sides,
A meré mantile abof, mensked withinne
With pelure pured aprit, the pane ful clene
With blythe blanumer 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 unter schankes there the schalk rides;
And all his vesture veryayl 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 ... 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 brawden 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 stirrup 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 highlic here that of his hed reches
Watz evesed al umbettere 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 alofe,
Ther mony bellez ful bryght of brende golde rungen.
Such a folke 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 dynteze dryghe.

Whether hade he no helme ne no hauberk 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 holyn 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
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 bifore 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 wyle 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;
But 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, iwyis, 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 scharm 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.'

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

'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 stendes,
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,
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 gisenrye ryche,
This ax, that is hevé innogh, to hondele as hym lykes,
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

NOTE

barlay;
And yet gif hym respite
A twelmonyth and a day;
Now hyghe, and let se tite
Dar any herinne oght say.

If he hem stouned upon fyrst, stiller were thanne
Alle the heredmen in halle, the hyghe and the lowe.
The renk on his rouncé hym ruched in his sadel,
And runisichly his red yghen he releed 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,

NOTE

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 grene, 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,

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 fe尔斯ly that other freke upon fote lyghtis. 
Now hatz Arhure his axe, and the halme grypez, 
And sturnely sturez hit aboute, that stryke wyth hit theght. 
The stif mon hym bifoere 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 countenauce dryghe he drogh donz 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 enclynye: 
'I beseche now with sayez sene  
This melly mot be myne. 
And ye shal sit 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.'

'Wolde ye, worthilych lorde,' quoth Wawan to the kyng,  
'Bid me bowe fro this benche, and stonde by yow there,  
That I wythoute vylyne myght voyde this table,  
And that my legge lady lyked not ille,  
I wolde com to your counseyl bifoere 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 talenttyf, to take hit to yowselfen, 
Whil mony so bolde yow aboute upon bench syttyn  
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 en I am only to prayse, 
No bounté bot your blod I in my bodé knowe; 

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 en I am only to prayse,  
No bounté bot your blod I in my bodé knowe;
And sythen this note is so nys that noght 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.'

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

Then commaunded the kyng the knyght for to ryse; 
And he ful radly upros, and ruchched hym fayre, 
Kneled doun bifo the kyng, and cachez that wepwen; 
And he lef lyfly hit hym laft, and lyfte up his honde 
And gef hym Goddez blessyng, and gladly hym biddles 
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 bede after.' Gawan gotz to the gome with giserne in honde, 
And he baldly bym bydez, he bayst never the helder.

Then carppez to Sir Gawan the knyght in the grene, 
'Refourme we oure forwardes, er we fyrre 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 hadde, 
That bede the this buffet, quat-so bifallez after, 
And at this tyme twelmonyth take at the an other 
Wyth what wepwen so thou wylt, and wyth no wygh ellez on lyve.'

That other onswarez agayn, 
'Sir Gawan, so mot I thrive, 
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 hast redily rehearsed, bi resoun ful trwe,
Clanly al the covenaunt 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 before this douthe rych.

'Where schulde I wale the?' quoth Gawain, 'Where is thy place?
I wot never where thou wonyes, bi hym that me wroght,
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 trawthe.'
'That is innogh in Nwe Yer, hit nedes no more,'
Quoth the gome in the grene to Gawain the hendes;
'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 forwardes holde;
And if I spends no speche, thenne spendez thou the better,
For thou may leng in thy londe and layt no fyre –
    bot slokes!
    Ta now thy grimm tole to the,
    And lat se how thou cnokez.'
    'Gladly, sir, for sothe,'
    Quoth Gawain: his ax he strokes.

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 doum lyghtly lyght on the naked,
That the scharp of the schalk schyndered the bones,
And schrank thurgh the schyire gree, 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 Gawain, ‘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 Gawain,
‘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 luflly 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.  
As non unhap had hym ayled, thagh hedlez he were  
in stedde.

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:

'Toke, Gawan, thou be graythe to go as thou hettez,  
And layte as lelly til thou me, lude, fynde,  
As thou hazt hette in this halle, herande thise knyghtes;  
To the grene chapel thou chose, I charge the, to fotte  
Such a dunt as thou hazt 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.  
Therfore com, other recreaunt be calde thou behoves.'  
With a runisich rout the raynez he tornez,  
Halled out at the hal dor, his hed in his hande,  
That the fyr of the flynt flaghe fro folo hoves.  
To quat kyth he becom knwe non there,  
Never more then thy 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 spurs 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.

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, Gawan,  
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
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.
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 Zephirus 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
And fly up high above the face of the 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 sprang 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 Dodinaval de Savage, the duc of Clarence,
Lancelot and Lionel, and Lucan the good,
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 deo1 driven in the sale
That so worthé as Wawan schulde wende on that ernde,
To dryve a delful dynt, and dele no more

But 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 bowered togerder,
Aywan and Errik, and other ful mony,
Sir Dodinaval 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 deo1 driven in the sale
That so worthé as Wawan schulde wende on that ernde,
To dryve a delful dynt, and dele no more
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 arnez, and alle were thay broght.
Fyrst a tulé tapit tyght over the flet,
And miche watz the gild gere that glent theraloft.
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 blauoner was bounden withinne.
Thenne set thay the sabatounz upon the segge fotez,
His legez lapped in stel with fullych greves,
With polaynez piched therto, policed ful clene,
Aboute his knez knaged wyth kotez of golde;
Queme quysseswes then, that coynlych closed
His thik thrawn thyghez, with thwonges to tachched;
And sythen the brawden bryné of bryght stel ryngez
Umbeweved that wygh upon wlonk stuffe,
And we1 bombyst 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 honourede at the heghe aueter.
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 latchet 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
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 apparyl of the payttrure and of the proude skyrtlez,
The cropore and the covertor, acordeyd wyth the arsoune;
And al watz rayled on red ryche golde naylez,
That al glytered and glent as gleem of the sune.
Thenne hentes he the helme, and hastily hit kysses,
It watz hyghe on his hede, hasped bihynde,
Wyth a lyghtly ursoun over the avenityle,
Enbrawden and bounden wyth the best gemmez
On brode sylkyn borde, and bryddez on semez,
As papjayez 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 umbeelypped 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 tytle 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 Englzych hit callen
Overal, as I here, the endeles knot.
Forthy hit acordez to this knyght and to his cler armez,
For ay faithful in fyve and sere fyve sythez

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,
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 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 ever any king such counsel to take
As knyghtez in cavelaciouz on Cristmasse gomnez!' 
We1 much watz the warme water that waltered of yghen,
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 theraboute, 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 straunce  
In mony a bonk unbene,  
His cher ful oft con chaunce  
That chapel er he myght sene.

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.

Mony klyf he overclambe in contrayez straunce,  
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 ... that wynter nas wors,  
When the colde cler water fro the cloudez schadde,  
And fes er hit falle myght to the fale ethe.  
Ner slayn wyth the slete he sleped in his yrnes  
Mo nyghtez then innoghe in naked rokkez,  
Ther as claterande fro the crest the colde borne rennez,  
And henged heghe over his hede in hard iisse-ikkles.  
Thus in peryl and payne and plytes ful harde  
Bi contrayez careyez this knyght, tyl Krystmasse even,  
al one;  
The knyght wel that tyde  
To Mary made his mone,  
That ho hym red to ryde  
And wyssse hym to sum wonne.
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 hagithorne were harled al samen,
With rogte 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 servys of that syre, that on that self nyght
Of a burde watz borne, our baret to quelle;
And therfore 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 cred.'

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 embeteye mony tre mo then two myle.
That holde on that on syde the hathel ayved
As hit schemered and schon thurgh the schyre okez;
Thenna hatz he hendly of his helme, and heghly hethonkez
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 brought 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 walles wod in the water wonderly depe,
And eft a ful huge hight hit haled upon loft
Of harde hewen ston up to the tablez,
Enbanned under the abataylment in the best lawe;
And sythen garyzte 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 hygne,
Towres telded bytwene, trochet ful thik,
Fayre fylyolez that fyghed, and ferlyly long,
With corvon coprounez craftly sleghe.
Chalkwyht chymnees ther ches he immoghe
Upon baste1 rovez, that blenked ful quyte;
So mony pynakle paynted watz poudred ayquere,
Among the caste1 carnelez clambred so thik
That pared out of papure truly 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 why1 halday 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,
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 doun the grete draught and derely out yeden,
And kneled doun on her knees 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 rayzed rekenly, and rod over the brygge.
Sere segges hym sese by sadel, que1 he lyght,
And sythen stabled his stede stif men innoghe.
Knyghtez and swyerez kommen doun 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 haylseyd he ful hendly tho hathelez uchone,
And mony proud mon ther presed that pryncze to honour.
Alle hasped in his hegh wede to halle thay hym wonnen,
Ther fryre fyre upon flet fersly bremned.
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 wylle 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 hyghel eddee;
Brode, bryght, watz his berde, and al bever-hwed,
Sturne, stif on the stryththe on stalworth schonkez,
Felle face as the fyre, and fere of hys speche,
And wel hym semed, for sothe, as the segge thught,
To lede a lortschyp in lee of leudez ful gode.
The lorde hym charred to a chambr, and chefly cumaundez
To delyver hym a leude, hym lowly to serve;
And there were boun at his bode burnez innoghе,
That brought hym to a bright bourе, ther beddyng was noble,
Of cortynes of clerе sylk wyth cler golde hemmez,
And coverez ful curious with comlych panez
Of bryght blanneer above, embровaded bisydez,
Rudelez remenade on ropez, red golde ryngez,
Tapitez tyght to the wowe of tuly and tars,
And under fete, on the flet, of folyande sute.
Ther he watz dispoyled, wyth speches of myerthe,
The burne of his bruny ... fad renkkez hym broghten,
For to charge and to chaunge, and chose of the best.
Sone as he on hent, and happed therinne,
That sete on hym semly wyth saylande skyrtez,
The ver by his visage verayly hit semed
Welnegh to uche hathel, alle on hwes
Lowande and luflу alle his lymmez under,
That a comloker knyght never Kryst made,
Whethen in worlde he were,  Hit semed as he moght
Be prynce withouten pere  In felde ther fellе men foght.

A cheyer byfore the chemné, ther charcole brenned,
Watz grathed for Sir Gawan graythely with clothez,
Whyyssynes upon queldepoynetes that koynt wer bothe;
And themen a meré mantyle watz on that mon cast
Of a broun bleeaunt, enbrauded ful ryche
And fayre furred wythinne with fellez of the best,
Alle of ermine in erde, his hode of the same;
And he sette in that sette1 semlych ryche,
And achaufed hym cheflу, and themen his cher mended.
Sone watz telded up a tabil on trestez ful fayre,
Clad wyth a elene clothe that cler quyт schewed,
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 sleghhe 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 penance 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 Waven hymself that in that won syttez,  
Comen to that Kyrmesse, as case hym then lymped.  
When the lorde hade lerned that he the leude hade,  
Loudes laugh he therat, so lef hit hym thoight,  
And alle the men in that moten maden much joype  
To apere in his presense prestly that tyme,  
That alle prys and prowes and pured thewes  
Apendes to hys persoun, and prayed 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 speede is in speche unspurid may we lerne,  
Syn we haf fonged that fyne fader of nurture.  
God hatz given 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.  

Thenne was spyed and spured upon spare wyse  
Bi prevé poynetez 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 Waven hymself that in that won syttez,  
Comen to that Kyrmesse, as case hym then lymped.  
When the lorde hade lerned that he the leude hade,  
Loudes laugh he therat, so lef hit hym thoight,  
And alle the men in that moten maden much joype  
To apere in his presense prestly that tyme,  
That alle prys and prowes and pured thewes  
Apendes to hys persoun, and prayed 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  
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And then it will improve.'  
Gawain was full of mirth  
As wine went to his head.
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 niyght 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 coynly ho entrez.
Gawan glydez ful gay and gos theder some;
The lorde laches hym by the lappe and lendez hym to sytte,
And courtly hum knowez and callez hym his nome,
And sayde he watz the welcomest wyghte of the worlde;
And he hym thonked throly, and ayther halched other,
And seten soberly samen the servise quyle.
Thenne lyst the lady to looke 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;
Kerchofes of that on, wyth mony cler perlze,
Hir brest and hir bryght throte bare displayed,
Schon schyryrten then snawe that schedez on hillez;
That other wyth a gorget watz gered over the swyre,
Chymbled over hir blake chyn with chalkquyte vayles,
Hir frount folden in sylk, enfoubled ayquere,
Toreted and tresled with tryffles aboute,
That noght watz bare of that burde bot the blake browes,
The tweyne yghen and the nase, the naked lyppez,
And those were sour to se and sellyly blered;
A mensk lady on molde mon may hire calle,
for Gode!

Hir body watz schort and thik,
Hir buttokez balgh and brode,
More lykkerwys on to lyk
Watz that scho hade on lode.

When Gawayn glent on that gay, that graciously loked,
Wyth leve laight of the lorde he lent hem agaynes;
The alder he haylses, heldande ful lowe,
The loveloker he lapez a lyttel in armez,
He kysses hir comly, and knyghtly he melez.
Thay kalen hym of aquoyntaunce, and he hit quyk askez
To be hir servaunt sothly, if hemself lyked.
Thay tan hym bytwene hem, wyth talkyng hym leden
To chambre, to chemné, and chefly thay asken
Spycz, that unssparely men spede hom to bryng,
And the wynnelych wyne therwith uche tyme.
The lorde luflych aloft lepez ful ofte,
Mynned merthe to be made upon mony sythez,
Hent heghly of his hode, and on a spere henged,
And wayned hom to wynne the worship therof,
That most myrthe myght meve that Crystenmasse whyle:
'And I schal fonde, bi my fayth, to fylter wyth the beet
Er me wont the wende, with help of my frendez.'
Thus wyth laghande lotez the lorde hit tayt makez,
For to glade Sir Gawayn with gomnez in halle
that nyght,
Til that hit watz tyme
The lorde commaundet lyght;
Sir Gawain his leve con nyme
And to his bed hym dight.

Silk edged and latticed, with decorative details,
So that nothing appeared of her but the blackened brows,
The two eyes and the nose, and the naked lips
All repulsive to look at and terribly blered.
A fine lady indeed you could call her,
by God!

Her body squat and thick,
And buttocks bulging broad,
Sweeter to taste by far
Was the lady whom she led.

Gawain glanced at the beauty, who looked at him graciously.
With consent from the lord, he went over to them.
The older he greets and bows very low;
The lovelier he takes in his arms just a moment,
Kisses her graciously and courteously speaks.
They beg his acquaintance; he eagerly asks
To be their true servant, if that would please them.
They take him between them, and talk as they lead him
To a room with a fireplace. They immediately call
For spiced cakes, which men hastened to bring them in plenty,
With wonderful wine each time that they asked.
The lord many times jumps up courteously,
Repeatedly urging them all to make merry.
He snatched off his hood, hung it on a spear,
And urged them to win the honour of it,
Whoever could raise the most laughter that Christmas.
'I'll try, on my word, to compete with the best
Before I give up my hood, with the help of my friends.'
With such laughing words, the lord makes merry
To gladden Sir Gawain with games in his hall
that night,

Until the time had come
For the lord to order lights.
Sir Gawain took his leave
And went up to his bed.
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
Dif men upon dece drest of the best.
The olde auncian wyf heghest ho syttez,
The lorde luflly 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 poynet hit yet I pynd me paraventure.
Bot yet I wot that Wawen and the wale burde
Such comfort of her compaynyne 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 pyppyng 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 therafter;
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,
Daunensed 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.
Of the wynne worship that he hym wayved hade,
As to honour his hous on that hygh tyde,
And enbelyse his burgh with his bele chere.
'Iwysse, sir, quy! I leve, me worthez the better
That Gawayn hatz ben my gest at Goddez awen fest.'
'Grant merci, sir,' quoth Gawayn, 'in god fayth hit is yowrez,
Al the honour is your awen – the heghe kyng yow yelde!
And I am wyghe at your wylle to worch youre hest,
As I am holden thereto, in hyghe and in lowe,
bi right.'
The lorde fast can hym payne
To holde lenger the knyght;
To hyme answerez Gawayn
Bi non way that he myght.

Then frayned the freke ful fayre at himselven
Quat derve dede had hym dryven at that dere tyme
So kenly fro the kyngez kourt to kayre al his one,
Er the haldiayez holly were halet out of toun.
'For sothe, sir,' quoth the segge, 'ye sayn bot the trawthe,
A heghe ernde and a hasty me hade fro tho wonez,
For I am sumned myselfe to sech to a place,
I ne wot in the worlde whederwarde to wende hit to fynde.
I nolde bot if I hit negh myghton on Nw Yeres morne
For alle the londe inwyth Logres, so me oure lorde help!
Forthy, sir, this enquest I require yow here,
That ye telle me with trawthe if ever ye tale herde
Of the grene chapell, quere hit on grounde stondez,
And of the knyght that hit kepes, of colour of grene.
Ther watz stabled bi statut a steven us bitwene
To mete that mon at that mere, yf I myght last;
And of that ilk Nw Yere bot neked now vontez,
And I wolde loke on that lede, if God me let wolde,
Gladlok, bi Goddez sun, then any god welle!
Forthii, iwysse, bi youre wylle, wende me bihoves,
Naf I now to busy bot bare thré dayez
And me als fayn to falle feye as fayly of myyn ernde.'
Thenne laghande quoth the lorde, 'Now leng the byhoves,
NOTE

For the marvellous kindness that Gawain has shown
In honouring his house at that festival time
And gracing his castle with his amiable company.
'As long as I live, sir, indeed I’ll be better
For you being my guest on God’s own feast-day.’
‘All my thanks, sir’, said Gawain, ‘indeed it is yours,
All the honour is yours – may the High King reward you!
I am yours to command, to act on your bidding,
As I’m bound to in duty, in great things and small,
by right.’
Very hard the lord tried
To lengthen his stay.
But Gawain responded,
He could not delay.

Then the lord most politely enquired of the knight
What terrible business had forced him at Christmas
To leave the king’s court in such haste and alone,
Before holy days there had totally passed.
‘Indeed, sir,’ the knight said, ‘you are quite right to ask.
A great, pressing mission took me from that house.
I’m summoned in person to seek out a place
With no notion whatever where it might be found.
I would not fail to reach it New Year’s morning
For all the land that’s in England, so help me God.
So, sir, I ask this request of you now:
Tell me honestly if you’ve ever heard speak
Of a Green Chapel, whereabouts it might stand,
And the knight who protects it, who is coloured green.
An appointment was fixed by solemn agreement
To meet at that place, should I be alive.
There’s little time left before that New Year.
I’d rather search out that man, if God would allow,
More gladly, by God’s son, than come by great wealth.
With your leave, then, I must indeed go.
I’ve barely three days to finish my business,
And would rather die than fail in my quest.’
Then laughing the lord said, ‘Now you must stay.
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 wynne 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 lymp, lere other better.'

'Bi God,' quoth Gawayn 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, Thise lordez and ladyez, quyle that hem lyked; And sythen with Frenkysch fare and fele fayre lopez Thay stoden and stemed and styly spoken, Kysten ful comlyly and kagthen 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 covenauncez ofte; The olde lorde of that leude Cowthe we1 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.
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;
Nimbly 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 hedez. 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 Gawayn the god mon in gay bed lygez, Lurkze quyl the daylyght lemed on the wowes, Under covertour ful clere, certyned 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 wayt ez warly thiderwarde quat hit be myght. Hit watz the ladi, loflyest to beholde, That drod the dor after hir ful dernly and styly, And bowed towardle the bed; and the burne schamed, And layde hym doun lystyly and let as he slepe; 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,

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Compast in his conscience to quat that case 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 quhat ho wolde.'
Then he wakenende, and wroth, and to hir warde torned,
And unlouked his yghe-lydde, and let as hym wondered,
And sayned hym, as bi his saghe the sauer to worthe,
with hande.
Wyth chyme and cheke ful swete,
Both quit and red in blande,
Ful lufty con ho lete
Wyth lyppez smal laghande.

'God moroun, Sir Gawyn,' 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 Gawyn the blythe,
'Me schal worthe at your wille, and that me we1 lykez,
For I yerde me yenderly, and yeghe after grace,
And that is the best, be my dome, for me byhovez nede;
And thus he boured 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 kagt have;
For I wene we1, iwyssse, Sir Wowen ye are,
That alle the worlde worchip ez queyre-so ye ride;
Your honour, your hedelaky is hendely pryayed
With lordez, wyth ladyez, with alle that lyf bere.
And now ye are here, iwyssse, and we bot oure one;
My lorde and his ledez ar on lente the faren,
Other burnez in her bedde, and my burdez als,
The door’s shut and locked with a very strong bolt. Since I have in my house a man whom all love, I shall spent my time well, while it lasts, in talk. You’re welcome to me; Do just as you please. I must needs be Your servant, and I will.’

‘Truly,’ said Gawain, ‘you flatter me greatly, Though I’m hardly the man you’ve just spoken of. To merit such honour as you have described, I’m an unworthy man, I know very well. By God, I’d be glad if you thought it were proper To give myself up, with words or with service, To giving you pleasure – it would be a great joy!’ ‘In good faith, Sir Gawain,’ said the fair lady, ‘The worth and the gallantry everyone loves For me to slight and disparage, would scarcely be courteous. But a great many ladies would much rather now Have you in their hands, sir, as I have you now, To make pleasant play with your courteous words, To give themselves comfort, relieve all their cares, Than much of the treasure or gold that they have. But I thank the same Lord who rules all the heavens, I have all in my grasp what everyone yearns for, through his grace.’ She brought him such good cheer, And she so fair of face, The knight with purest words Answered her each remark.

‘Lady,’ the pleasant man said, ‘may Mary reward you, For I’ve found in you generosity indeed. For their deeds, many folk gain credit from others, But the respect they give me I do not deserve. That’s due to your honour, who know nothing but good.’
'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 knouwen 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 bifoire yow be chosen.'
Iwysse, worthy,’ quoth the wyghe, ‘ye haf waled we1 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 forylde.’
Ther schulde no freke upon folde bifoire yow be chosen.'
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.’
Thogh ho were burde bryghtest the burne in mynde hade, 
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.

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 clenly in hymselven, 
Couth not lightly haf lended so long wyth a lady, 
Bot he had craveyn a cosse, bi his courtayse, 
Bi sum touth of summe tryfel at sum talez ende.'
Then quoth Wowen, '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.'

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.'

SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT
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,  
Bowez forth, quen he watz boun, blythely to masse;  
And theym 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 thyth flokked in folk at the laste,  
And quykly of the quelled dere a querré thyth 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 summé that ther were,  
Two fyngeres thay fonde of the fowlest of alle.  
Sythen thyth slyt the slot, sesed the erber,  
Schaved wyth a scharp knyf, and the schyre knitten;  
Sythen rytte thyth the four lymmes, and rent of the hyde,  
Then brek thyth 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 thyth 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 therafter
Alle the ryme by the rybbez radly thay lance;
So ryde thay of by resoun bi the rygge bonez,
Evenden to the haunche, that henged 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 themne,
And sythen sunder thay the sydez swyft fro the chyne,
And the corbeles fee thay kest in a greve;
Thenn thurled they aytther thik side thurgh bi the rybbe,
And henged themne aytther 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 letter of the paunchez,
And bred bathed in bled blende theramongez.
Baldey 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 doutha watz al wonen
Into the comly castel, ther the kynght bidez ful stille,
Wyth blys and bryght fyr bette.
The lorde is comen thertylle;
When Gawain wyth hym mette
Ther watz bot wele at wylle.

Thenne comaundd the lorde in that sale to samen alle the meny,
Bothe the lades 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 Gawain he called,
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 hownde that hit herde hastid thider swythe,  
And felden as fast to the fuyt, fowrt at onces;  
Thenne such a glaever 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 cliffe, at the kerre syde,  
Ther as the rogh rocher unrydely was fallen,  
Thay ferdien to the fyndyng, and frekez hem after;  
Thay unbekesten the knarre and the knot bothe,  
Wygye, whyl thay wysten we1 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 unsoundyly 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 gyrmme quen he gronied; thenne greved mony,  
For thre at the fyrst thrust he thrystyd to the ethe,  
And sparred forth good sped boute spoit more.  
Thise other halowed hyghe! ful hygae, 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 hurl 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, hiten 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 schaffe 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 helerly 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,
Whyleoure luflych lede lys in his bedde,
Gawyn 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.

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 goes 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, 'Iwyssse I wot never;
If hit be soth that ye breve, the blame is myn awen.'
'Yet I kende yow of kyssyng,' quoth the clere thenne,
'Que-re-so countenaunce is couthe quickly 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, iwyssse, yif I proffered.'
'Ma fay,' quoth the merê 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 Gawyn, 'good is your speche;
Bot threte is unthryvande in thede ther I lende,
And uche gift that is gwen not with goud wylle.
I am at your comauedmement, to kyssen yow yow lykez,
Ye may lach quen yow lyst, and leve quen yow thankkez, in space.'
The lady loutez adoun
And comlyly kyses 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 courtayse, so knyghtly, as ye ar knownen oute –
And of alle chevalry to chose, the chef thynge alosed
Is the lel layk of luf, the lettrure of armes;
For to telle of this tevelyng of this trwe knyghtez,
Hit is the tytelet token and tyxt of her werkze;
How ledes for her lel lufe hor lyvez han auntered,
Endured for her drurye dulfe stoundez,
And after wengoed with her walour and voyded her care,
And broght blyssse into bourre with bountees hor awen –
And ye ar knyght comlokest kyd of your elde,
Your worde and your worship 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 knyght 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
Yet herde I never of your hed helde no wordez
That ever longed to luf, lasse ne more;
And ye, that are so cortayes 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 powr a man, as play wyth your knyght
With anyskynnez countenaunce, hit keverez me ese;
Bot to take the torvayle to myself to trweluf expoun,
And towche the temez of tyxt and talez of armez
To yow thay, I wot wel, weldez more slyght
Of that art, bi the hal, 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 wyle
Be servaunt to yourselven, so save me Dryghtyn!’
Thus hym frayned that fre, and fondet hym ofte,
For to haf wonnen hym to woghe, what-so scho thoght ellez;
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, iwyssy.

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 rysethe 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 swynegez bi the bonkkez  
And bote the best of his braches the bakkez in sunder  
Ther he boide in his bay, tel bawemen hit breken,  
And madez hym mawgref his hed for to mwe utter,  
So selle flonez ther flete whe the folk gedered.  
Bot yet the styffest to start startz 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.

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 fouly 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.

Til the knyght com hymself, kachande his blok,  
Sygh hym byde at the bay, his burnez bysyde;  
He lyghtes luflych adoun, levez his corsour,  
Braydez out a bryght bront and bigly forth srydez,  
Foundez fast thurgh the forth ther the felle bydez.  
The wyld z war of the wyghe with weppen in honde,  
Hef heghly the here, so hetherly he fnast  
That felle 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.
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 mony breme horne,
Heghe halowing on highe with hathelez that myght;
Brachetes bayed that best, as bidden the maysterez
Of that chargaunt chase that were chef huntez.
Thenne a wyghe that watz wys upon wodcræf zinc
To unlac this bor lufly bigynnez.
Fyrst he hedes of his hed and on highe settez,
And sythen rendez him al roghbi the rygge after,
Braydez out the boweles, brennez hom on glende,
With bred blent therwith his braches rewardez.
Sythen he brintnez out the brawn 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 bifo the burnes selven
That him forferde in the forthe thurgh forse of his honde so stronge.
Til he seye Sir Gawayne
In halle hym thoght ful longe;
He calde, and he com gayn
His feez ther for to fonge.

The lorde ful lowde with lote and laighter 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 alse
Of the were of the wylde swyn in wod ther he fled.
That other knyght ful comly comended his dedez,
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, Gawain,’ 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 thyne ese,
And I schal hunt in this holt, and halde the towchez,
Chauge 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 Gawain is lenged,
Blithe broght watz hym drynk, and thay to bedde yeden with light.
Sir Gawayne 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 hatheles that on horse schulde helden hym after
Were boun busked on hor blonkkoz bifore the halle gateez.
Ferly payre watz the folde, for the forst clenged;
In redrudende 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 horns;
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 fsyeze 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 tornayeze thrugh mony tene greve,  
Havilounez, and herkenez bi hegges ful ofte.  
At the last bi a littel dich he lepez over a spenne,  
Stelze 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,  
He blenchd 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 cluyfes 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 hagheer stones
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 chambrere 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 thoughtes, 
How that destiné schulde that day dele hym his wyrde 
At the grene chapell, 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 glorius and gayly atyredd, 
So faultes 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 peril bitwene hem stod, 
Nif Maré of hir knyght mynne.

Fo that prynces of pris depresed hym so thickke, 
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 agh.

'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 diserve

Yif ye luf not that lyf that ye lye nexte,  
Bifore alle the wyghez in the worlde wounded in hert,

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.'

SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

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 watw 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 bodw wernes, And swere swyfte by his sothe that he hit sese nolde, And ho soré that he forsoke, and sayde therafter, ‘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.’

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 praye at more prys, paraventure.
For quat gone 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 sleight 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, discover hit never,
Bot to jelly 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 hazt kyst the knyght so toght.

Thenne lachezz ho hir leve, and levez hym there,
For more myrthe of that mon moght ho not gete,
When ho watz gon, Sir Gawyn 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,
Prevely aproched to a prest, and prayed hym thare
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 schyryly 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 spreent over a spenne to spye the schrews,
Ther as he herd the howndes that hasted hym swythe,
Renaud com richchande thrughg a roghre 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 byght 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 bifoire the hors fete thy 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.
Huntes hyghed hem theder with hornz 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 thise other halowed that had no hornes;
Hit watz the myriest mute that ever men herde,
The rich rurd that ther watz raysed 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, halloowing 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 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 fulfill 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.
Gawain 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 at 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 yourez, if youreself 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 wylle
Al that ever I yow hyght halde schal I redé'
Ther asynghes 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.

With care and wyth kyssyng he carpeze 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 sykyngez.
Sythen fro the meyny he menskly departes;
Uche mon that he mette, he made hem a thonke
For his servysse 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 worthlyy with that wlonk ever.
Then with ledes and lyght he watz ladde to his chambre,
And blythely brought to his bedde to be at his rest.
Yif he ne slepe soundlyy 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 stylle
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.
Now nehez the Nw Yere, and the nyght passez, The day dryvez to the derk, as Dryghtyn biddez; Bot wylde wederz 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 daile ful of dryftes ful grete. The leude lystened ful we1 that ley in his bedde, Thagh he lowkez his liddez, ful lyttel he slepes; Bi uch kok that crue he knwe we1 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 Gawyn 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 elene, The ryngez rokked of the roust of his riche bruny; And al watz fresch as upon fyirst, and he watz fayn themne to thonk. He hade upon uche pecze, Wypped ful we1 and wlonk; The gayest unto Grace The burne bede bryng his blonk.

While the wlonke werez he warp on hymselven – 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,
That forgat not Gawyn 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 bisedem,
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 they 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 poynyt, 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 summ rewarde redlyly, 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 prance.

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.
He gef hit ay god chaunce.

The brygge watz brayed doun, and the brode gatez
Unbarred and born open upon bothe halve.
The burne blessed hym bilyve, and the brede passed –
Prayses the porter biforn the pryncy kneled,
Gef hym God and goud day, that Gawayn he save –
And went on his way with his wyghhe one,
That schulde teche hym to tourne to that tene place
Ther the rufel race he schulde resayve.
Thay bowen bi bonkke 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, mait on the mountez,
Uche hille hade a hatte, a myst-hakel huge.
Brokez byled and breke bi bonkkez about,
Schyre schaterande on schorez ther doun showved.
Wela wylle watz the way ther thay bi wode schulden,
Til hit watz sone sesoun that the sunne rysez
that tyde.
Thay were on a hille ful hyghhe,
The quyte swaw lay bisyde;
The burne that rod hym by
Bede his mayster abide.

‘For I haf wonnen yow hider, wyghhe, 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 weI lovye,
Wolde ye worch bi my wytte, ye worthed the better.
The place that ye prece to ful perilous is halden;
Ther wonez a wyghhe in that waste, the worst upon erthe,
For he is stiffe and surne, 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 that 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 dyneze hym to deth 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 kylyed, 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 dynteze sore
Ye may not yow defende.

‘Forthy, goude Sir Gawayn, 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 lhygh me hom agayn, and hete yow fyre
That I schal swere bi God 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 fonde to fle for freke that I wyster.’
‘Grant merci,’ quoth Gawayn, and gruchyng he sayde,
‘Wel 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,
Worthye hit wel other wo, as the wyrede lykez
hit hafe.
Thaghe he be a sturn knape
To stightel, and stad with stave,
Ful wel con Dryghtyn schape
His servauncez 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 Gawayn, 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 sper 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 fyrre.' 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, Rizez thurgh the roghe bonk ryght to the dale; And thanne 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 stonze; The skwez of the scowtes skayneyd 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 fode that ferked thare; The borne blubred therinne as hit boyled hade.

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 hill.sides on either side, And rough, ruggd 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 knob 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.

‘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.’
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 nedez to spende.' 'Abyde,' quoth on on the bonke aboven his hede, And thou shal 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 gone 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 hazt tymed thi fote he foundez on erthe, And thou knowez the covenautez kest uus bytwene: At this tyme twelmonyth thou toke that the falled, And I schulde at this Nwe Yere yepyly the quyte. And we ar in this valay verayly oure one; Here are no renkes us to rydle, rele as uus lykez. Haf thy helme of thy hede, and haf here thy pay.

‘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 stytle
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.

And no more resistance than I offered you
When you slashed off my head with a single stroke.'
'No, by God,' said Gawain, ‘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 gome in the grene grayathed hym swythe,
Gederez up hys grymme tole Gawayn to smyte;
With alle the bur in his body he ber hit on loftle,
Munt as maghtyly as marre hym he wolde;
Hade hym dryyen 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 scheene wythhaldez,
And theme repreved he the prynces 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 kyngez hous Arthor.
My hede flagh to my fote, and yet flagh I never;
And thou, er any harme hent, arghez in hert.
Wherfore 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 stonez,
I con not hit restore.

Then the man dressed in green quickly got ready,
Lifts up his grim weapon to strike Gawain 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 Gawain would have died from the blow.
But Gawain 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 Gawain,’ 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 Gawain,
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 Till thy ax have me hitte: haf here my trawthe.' 'Haf at the thenne!' quothe 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 hetyly his honde er hit hurt myght. Gawayn graythely hit bydez, and glent with no membre, Bot stode stylye as the sion, other a stubbe auther That ratheled is in roché grounde with rotez a hundreth. Then muryly efte con he mele, the mon in the grene, 'So, now thou hazt thi hert holle, hitte me bihovs. Halde the now thy hydge hode that Arthur the raghth, And kepe thy kanel at this kest, yif hit kever may.' Gawayn ful gryndelil with grene thenne sayde: 'Wy! thresch on, thou thro mon, thou thretez to longe; I hope that thi hert arghie wyth thyw awen selven.' 'For sothe,' quothe 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 frounsez bothe lyppe and browe, No mervayle thagh hym myslyke That hoped of no rescowe. He lyfes lyghtly his lome, and let hit doun fayre With the barb of the bitte bi the bare nek; Thagh he homered heterly, hurt hym no more Bot snyrty hym on that on syde, that severed the hyde. The scharp schrank to the flesche thrugh the schyre grece, That the schene blod over his schulderes schot to the erthe; And quen the burne sey the blode blekn on the sawe, He spirt 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 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 redly schal quyte,
And yelde yederly agayn – and thereto 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 shore, 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 murly 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 mysbodsh habbez,
Ne kyd bot as covenaunde at kyngesz kort schapod.
I hyght the a strok and thou hit hatz, halde the we1 payed;
I relece the of the remnaunt of ryghtes alle other.
If I deliver had bene, a boffet parunter
I couthe wrotheloker haf ware, to the haf wroght anger.
Fyrst I mansed the murlyly 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 trystly the trawthe and trwly me haldez,
Al the gayne thou 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 thore,
And threfore that tappe ta the.

‘For hit is my wende that thou werez, that ilke woven girdel, 
Myn owen wyf hit the weved, I wot we1 for sothe. 
Now know I wel thy cosses, and thy costes als, 
And the wowyng of my wyf: I wroght it myselfen. 
I sende hir to asay the, and sothly me thynkkez 
On the fautoff 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 agrewed 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: 
‘Corseyd worth cowardyse and covetyse bothe! 
In yow is vylany and vyse that vefteue diistryez.’ 
Thenne he kagh to the knot, and the kest lawsez, 
Brayde brotherly the belt to the burne selven: 
‘Lo, ther he falssyng, foule mot hit falle! 
For care of thy knokke cowardyse me taught 
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 stylle, 
Al fawty is my fare; 
Letez me overtake your wylle 
And efte I schal be ware.’

The loghe that other leude and luufly sayde, 
‘I halde hit hardily hole, the harme that I had. 
Thou art confessed so clene, bekownen 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 hatt the penaunce apert of the poynt of myn egge,
I halde the polysed of that plyght, and pured as clene
As thou hadez never forfeted sythen thou watz fyrst borne; And I gif the, sir, the gurdel that is golde-hemmed;
For hit is grene as my goune, Sir Gawyn, ye maye
Thenk upon this ikle threpe, ther thou forth thryngez
Among prynces of prys, and this a pure token
Of the chaunce of the grene chapel at chevalrous knygthez.
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 enmy kene.'   'Nay, for sothe,' quoth the knight, and seizing his helmet,
He takes it off courteously and gives the lord thanks.

And ye schal in this Nwe Yer agayn to my wonez,
And we schyn revel the remnaunt of this ryche fest
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He takes it off courteously and gives the lord thanks.

And ye schal in this Nwe Yer agayn to my wonez,
And we schyn revel the remnaunt of this ryche fest
ful bene.'
'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

'Bot your gordel,' quoth Gawayn, 'God yow foryelde! That wyly I welde wyth goud wylle, not for the wyinne golde, Ne the saynt, ne the sylk, ne for syde pendaundes, For wele ne for worchyp, ne for the wlonk werkkeze, Bot in synge of my surfet I schal se hit ofte, When I ride in renoun, remorde to myselfen 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 praw, 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 norme 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. Thyrgh myght of Morgne la Faye, that in my hous lenges, And koyntyse of clergye, 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 Therfore 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 spoked With his hede in his honde bifore the hyghe table. That is ho that is at home, the auncian 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.  
Therfore I ethe the, hathel, to com to thyn aunt,  
Make myry in my hous; my meny the lovies,  
And I wol the as wel, wyghte, bi my faythe.  
As any gome under God for thy grete traute.'  
And he nikked hym naye, he nolde bi no wayes.  
Thay acolen and kyssen and kennen ather other  
To the prynce of paradise, and parten ryght there  
on coole;  
Gawayn on blonk ful bene  
To the kyngez burgh buskez bolde,  
And the knyght in the enker-grene  
Whiderwarde-so-ever he wold.

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 tymge in tale to remene.  
The hurt watz hole that he hade hent in his nek,  
And the blykkande belt he bere theraboute  
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 commen; gayn hit hym thoght.  
The kyng kysses the knyght, and the whene alce,  
And synthen mony syker knyght that soght hym to haylce,  
Of his fare that hym frayned; and ferly 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.
He tened quen he schulde telle,
He groned 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 bend of this blame I bere in my nek,
This is the lathe and the losse that I laught have
Of cowardise and covetyse that I haf caght thare,
This is the token of untrawthe that I am tane inne,
And I mot nedez 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
Lagh en loude therat, and luflly acorden
That lordes and ladis that longed to the Table,
Uche burne of the brotherhede, a baueryk schulde have,
A bende abelof 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 wyttenesse;
Syth en Brutus, the bolde burne, bowed hider fyrst,
After the segge and the asaute watz sased at Troye,

Mony aunterez here-biforne
Haf fallen suche er this.
Now that bere the croun of thorne
He bryng uus to his blyssse! AMEN.

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,

Many adventures in past times
Have happened like this.
May he who wore the crown of thorns
Now bring us to his bliss: AMEN.
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

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 stud 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 letters, though the letteres themselves could be either the literal signs of the alphabet or the more general text they make up. Let 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
NOTES

66-8 to reche hondeselle, / Yeghed yeres giftes on high, yelde hem bi hond, / Debated busily
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 soldiers, 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 three bare mote (‘three single notes’, 1141). Overall, ‘single combat’ seems a preferable reading. RETURN

NOTES

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
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’. 

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.

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’.

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.

and dele no more / wyth broné

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
Sone as he on hent...hem thoght
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

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

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

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

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

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 noght 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 noght bot wel connez (‘who know nothing but good’), have given it.  RETURN

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

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

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’. RETURN

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

1955-6 Gawyn 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’
NOTES

(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

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 Dodinell 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

Dodinell 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.).

Zephrus, 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:


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.


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