territory on the continent, John imposed extraordinary taxes on English barons and other nobles; the barons rebelled and forced the king to sign a document setting out the rights and obligations both of the nobles and of the king himself, and making explicit that the king was not to contravene these customary arrangements without consulting the barons. The document also reaffirmed the freedom of the English church, particularly the freedom from royal interference in the election of bishops or other officeholders. Under this "great charter" or Magna Carta, the power of the king was for the first time limited by the terms of a written document.

**The Thirteenth Century**

The year 1215 was momentous in medieval Europe. In addition to the signing of Magna Carta—whose ultimately far-reaching effects were at the time felt only in England—this year witnessed the Fourth Lateran Council, a major gathering of church leaders under the guidance of the energetic Pope Innocent III. Lateran IV represented an extraordinarily wide-ranging attempt to unify Christian practice and raise standards of Christian observance. The canons of the Council covered almost all aspects of Christian life, and their effects on both religious practice and religious instruction resounded through the rest of the Middle Ages. Christians from now on were required to confess their sins formally and receive Communion at least once a year, and the sacrament of the altar was officially declared to involve transubstantiation, meaning that the body and blood of Christ were actually present in, rather than merely represented by, the bread and wine consecrated at the Mass (a doctrine that became a matter of serious dispute, however, in later medieval England). A new network of regulation was put into place to govern marriages, with secret marriages prohibited and marriage itself declared a sacrament.

Associated with the increased emphasis on the importance of priests administering sacraments to the faithful were increased efforts to ensure that members of the clergy were educated and competent; one of the canons involved the maintenance of cathedral schools free to clerics. Bishops were required to preach in their dioceses or ensure that there were others who could do so in their stead, and clergy were forcefully reminded of the requirement of clerical celibacy. Individual Christians, for their part, were expected to be able to recite a small number of prayers, but there was no thought of encouraging widespread education of a sort that would enable the populace to read the word of God on their own. On the contrary, it was considered important to keep the Bible at a remove from the common people so that it could be safely interpreted to them through church intermediaries. The controversy that later developed over this issue would extend over several centuries and become a crucial concern for the Lollard or Wycliffite sect in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, as well as a central distinguishing point between the Roman Catholic Church and the various Protestant faiths in the Reformation.

As this suggests, the reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council aimed to strengthen the Christian community, but with a new emphasis on differentiating, excluding, and penalizing unorthodox believers and non-Christians. The canons include extensive commentary on the need to control and excommunicate heretics; they require Jews and "Saracens" (Muslims) to wear distinctive clothing lest they be mistaken for Christians; they prohibit Jews from holding public office; and they make provisions to encourage crusading against Muslim control of the Holy Land. The English joined wholeheartedly in the Crusades and the restrictions placed on Jews. There had already been massacres of Jews, particularly at York, by the late twelfth century; expulsions from various cities by the local lords became widespread as early as the 1230s; and in 1290 Edward I expelled all Jews from England. It is not surprising, in view of this, that anti-Jewish miracle stories became popular across Europe during this period; Chaucer's *Priest's Tale* is a later example of this genre. Heresy remained a concern throughout Europe, although in this period the persecutions were more severe in France and other parts of the continent than in England.

The Fourth Lateran Council was in part a response to increased lay devotion and interest in religion, which offered a challenge to the sometimes inadequate pastoral care provided by the clergy. In the early thirteenth century, for example, the records of the Bishop of Winchester show numerous priests being forced to
declare that they will learn the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins, and various other basic Christian doctrines within the space of a year, or pay a fine of forty shillings, a far from unusual instance which suggests that their preparation was not all that could have been wished. We may note, however, that some of the greatest works of Middle English religious literature survive in a closely related group of texts from around this same time: the *Ancrenw Riwe* (Rule for Anchoresses) and the saints’ lives and other spiritual-guidance texts that accompany it in the manuscripts testify to the presence of learned and committed religious men and women in early thirteenth-century England.

The new religious movements that arose in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—movements often instigated by the laity—were in some cases accepted by the church, though others were declared heretical; the growth in such movements was so great that the Council decreed that no new religious orders could be instituted after 1215, a decree that was largely observed. Among the new groups, the most significant, particularly for literary history, were the fraternal orders or friars (terms that derive from the Latin and French words for “brother”): the Augustinian hermits, Carmelites, and, especially, Dominicans and Franciscans. Like the monks of the early church, the members of these new movements embraced poverty and learning. Unlike previous monks of any era, however, they devoted themselves to carrying religion directly to the people, rather than living an enclosed life; their aim was to pursue the “vita apostolica,” the way of life of the Apostles. Founded in the first part of the thirteenth century, they spread with great rapidity, and had a substantial presence in the British Isles by around 1250.

The friars’ considerable success and speedy growth derived in no small part from their practice of preaching and establishing foundations in urban centers. The tremendous growth in the European economy from the eleventh century onward had fostered the development of ever-larger towns and cities. Urban growth in turn made possible an increasing specialization of labor that is reflected in the rise of craft guilds and, in another sense, in the friars themselves. The religious and civic cultures that each represented were deeply entwined.

Guilds, which by this time were at the center of civic life, had patron saints and made religious fellowship a central part of their collective identities; their later sponsorship of the great cycle plays of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries was a natural outgrowth of this melding. And although St. Francis, the founder of the Franciscans, had entirely rejected his merchant background upon his conversion, the preachers of his order and others found the towns, with their concentrated populations and alleged moral turpitude, an ideal place for their work.
In the British Isles as elsewhere, the friars proved popular and controversial in almost equal measure; a fierce critique of them by the Irish bishop Richard FitzRalph (c. 1299–1360) survives in over seventy manuscripts from every part of Europe, and the friars’ influence at the University of Paris in the mid-thirteenth century so infuriated the other clerics there that the pope had to intervene. Their preaching was widely admired, however, perhaps especially by lay audiences, and while they quickly became part of the church and university hierarchies, they also claimed a particular affinity for pastoral work. Their mission thus promoted the translation and dissemination of religious teaching among the laity, and their energy in this activity made their writings an important influence on the development of literature in the vernacular languages of Europe, including England. Their emergence and quick expansion both coincided with and furthered the rise of lay involvement in religious life, whether this took the form of pilgrimage, spiritual reading or writing, attendance at sermons and church services, or devotion to saints’ cults, particularly that of the Virgin Mary. Nor were the friars the only force for increased religious education; English churchmen were particularly active in their response to the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council, and many works of spiritual instruction for the clergy or the laity, in Latin, Anglo-Norman, or English, attempted to disseminate the basic tenets of the faith. The Speculum Confessionis usually attributed to the learned Robert Grosseteste (c. 1170–1253), Bishop of Lincoln, is one example of the new works that responded to the requirement of yearly confession; another is the Anglo-Norman Manuel des Pechiez (c. 1270), the source for Robert Mannyng’s Handlyng Synne (1303), which aimed to give laypeople the knowledge they needed to live in accordance with Christian teaching. Just as the influence of the French aristocracy after the Norman Conquest brought French language and literature into the realm of English literary history, so the broader emphasis on basic Christian instruction in the thirteenth century and beyond made Latin works and church teachings increasingly available to vernacular audiences.

The growing lay participation in religion is reflected in the growth of certain characteristic literary genres. The exemplum, or illustrative short story, most famously characteristic of medieval sermons, often provided a narrative argument for avoiding particular sins or emulating certain virtues; the closely related form of the miraculum, or miracle story, aimed to impress the reader or hearer with a sense of wonder. In the later Middle Ages exempla and other short narratives were often especially associated with the preaching of the friars; such stories were thought to be appealing to laypeople, who might need help with the fine points of doctrine and would find narrative more accessible. These tales were sometimes criticized for being more entertaining than instructive, and indeed are not always very different from the genres of fable or fabliau—the latter being a “funny short story in verse,” often dealing with sexual or economic deception and valuing cleverness over morality. Popular in French, fabliaux are essentially non-existent in (written) English until Chaucer, whose Miller’s, Reeve’s, and Shipman’s Tales, among others, are based on this genre.

Saints’ lives, another widely popular literary form, are also one of the oldest genres in English literature; the Old English Martyrology of the ninth century is a particularly comprehensive example, but some of the earliest texts in Middle English are the lives of three virgin martyrs (Juliana, Katherine, and Margaret), all dating from the early thirteenth century. Intriguingly, lives of women martyrs of the early church were extremely popular in late-medieval England; Chaucer’s Second Nun’s Tale, which recounts the life of St. Cecilia, is another well-known (later) example. As with the Bible, even texts that do not center on the life or deeds of a saint may invoke the saints or briefly recount their miracles; they were part of the common knowledge of the time, and widely represented in art. Saints were regarded as protectors and intercessors, and the retelling of their lives was part of the effort to promote their cults and gain their assistance; their stories could provide points of contact with the sacred, particularly since they came from many walks of life.

The growing attention to pastoral care further stimulated the need for clerical education, and the worldly duties of the clergy—from the care of souls (including the writing of sermons) to administration of lands or finances—made studies in logic, rhetoric, and
other subjects beyond theology or canon law an important part of their training. At the same time, contact with Arab scholars made both Arabic learning and the writings of classical philosophers—Aristotle most influential among them—newly available in western Europe. The need to assimilate these traditions and bring them into accord with Christian teaching fostered the development of the scholastic method, or scholasticism, which gathered the evidence of various authorities and worked to synthesize it, usually by means of a debate form, into a single coherent authority. The structure of university study was quite different from its modern descendant, though not unrecognizably so. A student would first study the seven liberal arts, around which higher education was organized throughout the later Middle Ages: grammar, rhetoric, and logic (or dialectic), collectively known as the trivium, and arithmetic, music, astronomy, and geometry, called the quadrivium. Students who wished to continue could pursue further studies in theology, medicine, or law—roughly the equivalent of modern graduate schools.

Despite the intellectual flowering of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, education remained in essence a luxury for most of the population. Not only laborers, but many of the nobility and even some of the clergy never learned to read, although the widespread practice of reading or reciting aloud—both secular and religious works—and of course the experience of hearing sermons meant that those who could not read were not cut off from literate culture. Our own inevitable focus on the written sources that survive should not blind us to the ways in which those who could not themselves read or write still had considerable access to the great narratives and images of their culture.

The English Monarchy

The religious and cultural energy of the thirteenth century in England was not particularly reflected in its monarchs; the period’s important political developments tended to arise, as we have seen in the case of John and Magna Carta, from limitations on the king’s power rather than, as with William the Conqueror or Henry II, his exercise of that power. The reign of John’s son Henry III (1216–72) was long but not particularly successful; he came to the throne as a child and by the end of his reign his son held effective power. Under his rule the monarchy lost ground to both external and internal forces. The French dauphin Louis controlled the southern part of England upon Henry’s accession, but was expelled in 1217; later in the century, however, Henry had to sell most of his French possessions to pay war debts, and the English barons continually challenged the king’s authority, culminating in his effective deposition in 1264–65 by the forces led by the baron Simon de Montfort, who as regent convened a kind of proto-Parliament. Simon’s death in 1265 at the hands of Henry’s troops made him a martyr to many of the English, and both praise-poems and laments in his honor survive from the period. The most significant legacy of the barons’ increased power was the consolidation of the principle of the king’s limited rulership and the idea that the people of the realm (primarily the nobility) should take some part in its governance. The losses of French territory had contributed to a growing tendency for the ruling inhabitants of England to regard themselves as English (rather than Norman, Angevin, French, and so on); the broader participation in government in the course of the century may have solidified this tendency. By the early fourteenth century, language could be seen as a unifying force in the nation: “both the learned and unlearned man who were born in England can understand English,” asserts one commentator of the period.

Henry’s son Edward I, a much more successful ruler than his father, managed to mend the relationship between monarchy and people, in part by strengthening administrative structures related to law (Chancery), finances (the Exchequer), and governance (the Council); in this he built on the legacy of Henry II and the achievements of the baronial challenge, and the meetings of his Council were the first to bear the name of Parliaments. He also conquered Wales, which never fully regained its independence, although resistance to English rule continued. Like other English monarchs, however, he was unable to gain much control over Ireland, and despite diplomatic and military attempts, he never managed to conquer Scotland, which remained officially independent of England until the eighteenth century. A significant outcome of the ongoing English-
Scots conflict was the growth of a sense of national identity among the Scots at least as marked as that among the English; we see this in the declaration of Arbroath (1320), sent to the pope by the nobles of Scotland as a group, in which they declared that they were speaking for “the community of the realm” and that “for so long as one hundred men remain alive, we shall never under any conditions submit to the domination of the English.” Edward’s attempts to subdue Scotland demonstrated once more the political uselessness of legendary history: in putting forward the English claim on Scottish territory, he made reference to the historical assertions of Layamon’s Brut, the Middle-English translation of the legends gathered in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s History of the King of Britain.

The strong, if sometimes brutal, kingship of Edward I contrasts sharply with the troubled rule of his son Edward II (r. 1307–27), who was frequently at odds with his nobles and eventually was deposed by his French queen, Isabella, and her lover, Roger Mortimer, an English baron. Edward was succeeded by his son Edward III (r. 1327–77), whose long reign provided a certain stability but involved considerable losses for England. Edward III forcefully reasserted his claims to French territory through his French mother, and began the long-lasting conflict that came to be known as the Hundred Years’ War (1337–1453). This conflict displayed the ongoing contradictions of medieval English attitudes toward France: Edward’s embrace of a French-derived chivalric culture and claim to the French throne tended to link the nobility of both countries, who exchanged hostages and diplomatic missions, while at the same time the battles provided a focus for anti-French sentiment (which went back to the Norman Conquest) and for renewed claims for English as a valued national language. This was not, of course, a sudden development; already in the thirteenth century a writer could assert that “common men know no French, among a hundred scarcely one,” and similar claims become increasingly common in the fourteenth century. Despite considerable early success in the war, meanwhile, England’s French holdings dwindled almost to nothing by the time of Edward III’s death, and his continuing demand for funds to pursue his military projects put considerable strain on the economy, already weakened by the northern European famine of 1315–18.

Even more significant than the famine was the great plague of 1348–49, the “Black Death,” which had a lasting impact on the demography, the economy, and ultimately the culture of Britain and of Europe more generally. It is believed that roughly one-third of western Europe’s population died in the plague, though not evenly across all areas; the population of London is estimated to have fallen by almost half, from perhaps 70,000 to about 40,000. In the wake of the plague, there was—not surprisingly—a severe labor shortage; this facilitated a certain amount of social mobility as people were able to take higher-paying work, and the countryside suffered further depopulation as laborers left for the towns. Some employers competed for scarce labor by improving wages or conditions of labor, but the Statute of Laborers of 1351 officially restricted both wages and labor mobility; it became a cause of long-standing friction between the working population of England and its large landholders. Some of that tension found violent expression early in the reign of Edward’s successor, his grandson Richard II (r. 1377–99), who inherited the throne at the age of only ten. (His father, the Black Prince, had died in 1376.) Severe taxation and limits on wages imposed in the wake of the Black Death caused considerable distress among the general populace, and helped to spark the Rising of 1381 (at which time the kingdom was still under the regency of John of Gaunt, Richard’s uncle), in which groups from all over the country challenged the legislative and fiscal policies of the nobility, although they declared their allegiance to King Richard. While this uprising was easily quelled, it was a tremendous shock to the political and cultural establishment and foreshadowed the struggles for legitimacy that continued throughout the early fifteenth century; it also left behind an unusually rich record of non-nobles’ views on the political economy of their day. The general unrest, exacerbated by Richard’s autocratic style and struggles with his nobles for control of the country, made the last quarter of the fourteenth century a politically fragile time in England. The king’s preference for his own favorites over other, more powerful lords led these “Lords Appellant,” as they called themselves, to challenge his
authority. Eventually, they succeeded in severely circumscribing his power—and, in 1388, in executing several of his closest advisors. A major source of the conflict between these lords and the king was Richard’s desire to make peace with France; the king did eventually succeed in instituting a truce in 1396 through his marriage to the French princess Isabella (his beloved first wife, Anne of Bohemia, had died in 1394). In his later years he regained much of his control, in part through the help of his uncle John of Gaunt, but became increasingly despotic and took harsh revenge on the lords who had threatened his power. The contest culminated in the usurpation of the throne in 1399 by the Lancastrian Henry Bolingbroke (Henry IV), who had earlier been banished from the kingdom; Henry took advantage of Richard’s absence in Ireland, where he was continuing his fruitless efforts to bring it under English control. Richard was later murdered in prison, echoing the fate of his deposed great-grandfather, Edward II.

Cultural Expression in the Fourteenth Century

Richard’s rulership may not have been a great success, but he is known, like Henry II, for his deep interest in artistic and cultural production and for the extraordinary literary output that took place during his reign—output that was, unlike that of Henry’s reign, as likely to be in English as in French. The writers of the period, some of the best-known figures of medieval English literature, include John Gower, Geoffrey Chaucer, the Gawain-poet, and William Langland; because they all thrived under Richard II they are sometimes referred to as the “Ricardian poets.” Despite their contemporaneity, however, their writings by no means reflect a unified literary culture. There are certainly overlaps and, in the case of Chaucer and Gower, even mutual references between some of their works, but the main thing they have in common apart from historical era is that they all wrote in English. As this overview has tried to suggest, this in itself is a striking fact; only at the end of the fourteenth century do we begin to see the major works of later-medieval English literature participating, often deliberately, in the project of making English a literary language considered worthy of taking its place alongside Latin and the illustrious continental vernaculars, particularly French and Italian, and of being accorded a position of renewed prominence and respect in its native country after a perceived period of neglect. At the same time, these authors were anything but removed from non-English influences. Gower composed works in Latin and French as well as English; Chaucer translated French and Italian works, and borrowings from continental and Latin traditions shape all his poetry; Langland’s Piers Plowman contains numerous lines in Latin and is strongly influenced by monastic Latin literary forms, while in its use of personification allegory it echoes a popular pan-European mode (also seen in the hugely influential French Romance of the Rose); in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the legendary history of Arthur is blended with borrowings from Celtic sources and Christian chivalric culture.

This brings us to an important point about medieval writers—one that applies to almost all of them, but that is usefully demonstrated by the Ricardian poets: they did not regard originality in the modern sense as an essential component of a literary work’s value. While a medieval poet or preacher or chronicler certainly aimed to tell their story or convey their message in the best possible way, he or she would willingly draw on, combine, borrow from, translate, and rewrite the work of previous authors or storytellers. (The same could, of course, be said of Shakespeare.) Indeed, a link to authoritative sources—which could be written or oral—is often a crucial component of a medieval composition’s own claims to authority. The increasing availability of Latin works, through preaching or written translation into the vernacular, or French ones, through performance or translation into English, along with Welsh, Breton, and Irish story material and works in other continental vernaculars, thus provided a rich trove from which Middle English authors constructed their writings.

The tendency of the “big four” Ricardian poets to attract so much attention can overshadow their debts to, and continuity with, the century that preceded them. Sir Gawain is part of a substantial tradition of Middle English romance—Arthurian and other—that includes Sir Orfeo, Sir Launfal, and the Alliterative and Stanzaic Morte Arthure, among many others. These vary in form
SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Little is known about *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* apart from what the poem itself tells us. Its author is anonymous. The work is preserved in a single manuscript copy that was originally bound up with three other poems, *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience*, which are generally regarded as having the same author. Like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* they are written in alliterative verse. The collection is known to have belonged to a private library in Yorkshire during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It came to light in the nineteenth century, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was edited and printed for the first time in 1839. By the middle of the twentieth century the great interest and imaginative power of the poem had been generally acknowledged, and had attracted an increasing number of scholarly studies and commentaries.

The poem is written in a regional dialect characteristic of northwestern England at the time of its probable composition during the last quarter of the fourteenth century. That would mean that the Gawain-poet was a contemporary of Chaucer, who died in 1400; but even a brief comparison of their work shows how widely they were separated linguistically and culturally.

In the northern country reflected in the wintry landscapes of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, an older literary language seems to have persisted, relatively unmarked by French, a language which the poet associates with the elaborately courtly manners displayed by Gawain and his hostess. In Chaucer a reader may gain the impression that the English and French components of his language have formed a comfortable liaison, so much so that he uses both indifferently and without reserving either for particular tasks. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* creates a different impression: that the two elements have not yet reached an accommodation, and that the poet and his audience are sufficiently alive to the nuances of words still novel and alien to their regional culture that French words tend to be used for distinctive purposes.

The poem is composed in a unique stanza form, made up of a varying number of long alliterative lines followed by a “bob and wheel”: five short lines rhyming *ababa*, of which the first consists of only two syllables. The number of stressed alliterative words in each long line also varies, the norm being three.

Evidently it suits the poet’s purposes to present himself as a simple popular entertainer whose occasional comments to his audience—“I schal telle yow how thay wroght”—and explanatory remarks about incidents in the story—“Wyt ye wel, hit watz worth wele ful hoge”—create an impression of the close relationship that a storyteller must maintain with his listeners. In oral narration such remarks would arise spontaneously, but here they are contrived as part of a deliberate purpose. It is not difficult to understand why the poet should have adopted the manner of an oral tale in a written work. Alliterative poetry is addressed to the ear, not to the eye, and its effects are not fully realized unless what Chaucer called the “rum-ram-ruf” of its pounding consonants is heard. Until displaced by rhyming verse it was also the established form of English poetry, and it seems evident from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* that its author felt a strong attachment to native tradition and culture. That may explain why he adopted the persona of a popular storyteller in addressing his audience, when the tale itself—particularly the three episodes in Gawain’s bedchamber—prove him unusually cultivated and well acquainted with the literature of courtly manners and ideals.

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* represents the close fusion of three separate stories which may have been individually familiar to the poet’s audience, but which have not survived in any similar combination in England or any other country. The first is the legend of the beheading game, which provides the opening and closing episodes of the poet’s story. The second is the “exchange of
winnings’ proposed by Gawain’s host in the central episodes of his adventure, which overlaps with the third motif, the sexual testing of Gawain. Combining these three elements into a single romance was not in itself a remarkable feat. The poet’s achievement lies in having amalgamated them in such a way that while they appear unrelated, the outcome of one is determined by Gawain’s behavior in the quite separate circumstances of the other.

In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight the story takes substantially the same form as in Fled Bricrend (see Context below), but with many changes of detail. The giant is no longer terrifying and ugly but physically attractive, splendidly dressed, and mounted on a horse which like himself is emerald green. He makes his challenge on New Year’s Day and requires his opponent to stand the return blow a year and a day later at the Green Chapel, which must be found without directions. Gawain is chosen as the court’s representative, promises to meet the Green Knight as stipulated, and decapitates him. The victim picks up his head, leaps into his saddle, and after reminding Gawain of his undertaking gallops away. At the Green Chapel a year later Gawain stands three swings from the Green Knight’s axe. The first two are checked just short of his neck, and the third gashes the flesh as punishment for Gawain’s dishonesty in a matter which has no evident connection with the beheading game. In this and other respects Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a much more elaborate and ingenious reworking of the legend, but its dependence upon that primitive story is obvious. There are reasons for supposing that the major changes in the Gawain-poet’s version of the tale—the challenger’s color; the midwinter setting, and the year’s interval between blows, for instance—were of his own devising, for these are not inconsequential details but parts of the imaginative purpose that integrates the whole poem.

None of the analogues of the temptation theme used by the poet are very closely related to his story of Gawain’s attempted seduction, and no source of the motif has been found in legend. In the Welsh Mabinogi Pwyll spends a year at the court of Arawn in his friend’s likeness, sleeping beside the queen but respecting her chastity; but while his self-restraint is tested no attempt is made to seduce him. The story is one of many legends which require the hero or heroine to undergo a trial of patience, forbearance or self-denial, usually in preparation for some task that demands special powers. The French romance of Le Chevalier à l’Épée is distantly related to this theme, and one of several works which seem to have contributed to the Gawain-poet’s version of the temptation story.

The James Winny translation of the poem which appears below has been widely praised for its sensitivity to nuances of meaning; given the facing-text presentation, the translator has not felt it necessary to imitate the alliterative qualities of the Middle English verse, and has thus been able to convey the sense of the original as clearly as possible for the modern reader.

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Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Part 1

When the siege and the assault were ended at Troy,
The city laid waste and burnt into ashes,
The man who had plotted the treacherous scheme
Was tried for the wickedest trickery ever.

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Sir Gawain and the Grene Knyght

Fitt 1

Sithen the sege and the assault watz sesed at Troye,
The borgh britten and brent to brondez and askez,
The tulk that the trammes of tresoun ther wroght
Watz tried for his tricherie, the trewest on erthe.

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1 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight  The translation is that of James Winny.
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Fitt 1

Review Copy

5 Hit watz Ennias the athel and his highe kynde 1
That sithen decreed provinces, and patrones bcome
Welles of al the wele in the west iles.
Fro riche Romulus to Rome richness hym scythe;
With grete bobbauence that burge he biges upon fyrst,
And nevenes his aune nome, as hit now hat;
Tirius to Tuscan and telde bigynnes,
Langaberde in Lumbardie lyftes up homes,
And fer over the French fylde Felix Brutus
On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayne he settez
with wynne;
Where werre and wrake and wonder
Bi sythex hatz wont therinne,
And oft both bylyse and blunder
Ful skete hatz skytef synne.

10 Ande quen this Bretayne 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 kynges,
Ay watz Arthur the hendest, as I haf herde telle.
Forthi an aunter in erde I atle to schawe,
That a selly in syght summe men hit holde,
And an outraghe aventure of Arthurez wonderez.

15 If ye wyl lysten this lave bot on little quile
I schal telle hit as-tit, as I in toun herde,2
with tonge,3
As hit is stad and stoken4
In stori stif and stronge,
With lel letteres loken,
In londe so hath ben longe.

This kyng lay at Camylot upon Krystmasse
With mony luflych lorde, ledex of the best,
Rekenly of the Rounde Table alle tho rich brether,
With rych reveloryght and rechles merthes.

5 It was princely Aeneas and his noble kin
Who then subdued kingdoms, and came to be lords
Of almost all the riches of the western isles.
Afterwards noble Romulus hastens to Rome;
With great pride he gives that city its beginnings,
And calls it by his own name, which it still has.
Tirius goes to Tuscan and sets up houses,
Langobard in Lombardy establishes homes,
And far over the French sea Felix Brutus
On many broad hillsides settles Britain
with delight;
Where war and grief and wonder
Have visited by turns,
And often joy and turmoil
Have alternated since.

20 And when Britain had been founded by this noble lord,
Valiant men bred there, who thrived on battle.
In many an age bygone they brought about trouble.
More wondrous events have occurred in this country
Than in any other I know of, since that same time.
But of all those whose dwelt there, of the British kings
Arthur was always judged noblest, as I have heard tell.
And so an actual adventure I mean to relate
Which some men consider a marvelous event,
And a prodigious happening among tales about Arthur.

25 If you will listen to this story just a little while
I will tell it at once, as I heard it told
in court.
As it is written down
In story brave and strong,
Made fast in truthful words,
That had endured long.

The king spent that Christmas at Camelot
With many gracious lords, men of great worth,
Noble brothers-in-arms worthy of the Round Table,
With rich revelry and carefree amusement, as was right.

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1 Ennias the athel  Here athel is used as a title appropriate to a prince (Aeneas), but at 2065 the word is applied to Gawain’s guide.
2 as I in toun herde  It seems unlikely that the poet had either read or heard this particular tale recited. Although the beheading game figures in an Irish legend and the test of chastity has many analogues, no other surviving story combines them in a single narrative. But originality was not expected of medieval storytellers.
3 with tonge  Compare wylth syngh, 197 and 226, and meled with his mathe, 447, for similar constructions.
4 stad and stoken  Set down and fixed.
Ther tourneyed tulkes by tynez ful mony,
Justed ful jolilé thise gentyle knightes,
Sythen kayred to the court caroles to make.
For ther the fest watz ilyche ful fifteen dayes,
With alle the mete and the mirth that men couthe ayve;
Such glaume and gle glorious to here,
Dere dyn upon day, daunsyng on nyghtes,
Al watz hap upon heghe in hallez and chambrz
With lordes and ladys, as levest him thought,
With all the wel of the worlde thay woned ther samen,
The most kyld knightes under Krystes selven,
And the lovelokest ladys that ever lif haden,
And he the comolokest kyng thay the court hailde;
For al watz this fayre folk in her first age,

on sille,
The hapnest under heven,
Kyng hyghest mon of wylle;
Hit were now gret ryte to neven
So hardy a here on hille.

Wyle Nwe Yer watz so yep that hit watz nwe cummen,
That day double on the dece watz the douth served.
Fro the kyng watz cummen with knyghtes into the halle,
The chauntré of the chapel cheved to an ende,
Loude crye watz ther kest of clerkes and other;
Novel Nayted onewe, nevened ful ofte;
And sythen riche forth runnen to reche hondeselle,
Yghed yeres-giftes on high, yelde hem bi hond,
Debated busily aboute the giftes;
Ladies laghed ful lounde, thogh thay lost haden,
And he that wan watz not wrothe, that may ye wel trawe.
Alle this mirthe thay maden to the mete tyme;
When thay had waschen worthely thay wenten to sete,
The best burne ay abof, as hit best semed,
Where Guenore, ful gay, graythed in the mylades,
Dressed on the dere des, dubbeled al aboute,
Smal sendal beside, a selure hir over
Of tryed tolose, of tars tapites innoghe,

There knights fought in tournament again and again,
Jousting most gallantly, these valiant men,
Then rode to the court for dancing and song.
For ther the festival lasted the whole fifteen days
With all the feasting and merry-making that could be devised:
Such sounds of revelry splendid to hear,
Days full of uproar, dancing at night.
Everywhere joy resounded in chambers and halls
Among lords and ladies, whatever pleased them most.
With all of life’s best they spent that time together,
The most famous warriors in Christendom,
And the loveliest ladies who ever drew breath,
And he the finest king who rules the court.
For these fair people were then in the flower of youth
in the hall.

Luckiest under heaven,
King of lofiest mind;
Hard it would be
Bolder men to find.

When New Year was so fresh that it had hardly begun,
Double helpings of food were served on the dais that day.
By the time the king with his knights entered the hall
When the service in the chapel came to an end,
Loud cries were uttered by the clergy and others,
“Novel” repeated again, constantly spoken;
And then the nobles hurried to hand out New Year’s gifts,
Cried their wares noisily, gave them by hand,
And argued excitedly over those gifts.
Ladies laughed out loud, even though they had lost,
And the winner was not angry, you may be sure.
All this merry-making went on until feasting time.
When they had washed as was fit they took their places,
The noblest knight in a higher seat, as seemed proper;
Queen Guenevere gaily dressed and placed in the middle,
Seated on the upper level, adorned all about;
Fine silk surrounding her, a canopy overhead
Of costly French fabric, silk carpets underfoot

1 in her first age  In their youth.
2 Novel  I.e., Noël, a Christmas greeting.
3 And sythen … bond Some have suggested that bondeville are given
to servants and yeres-giftes to equals. But Arthur is said figuratively
to have received a hanielle at 491.
That were enbrawded and beten wyth the best gemmes
That myght be proved of prys\(^1\) wyth penyes to bye,
   in daye.\(^2\)
   The comlokest to discrye
   Ther glent wyth yghen gray,\(^3\)
   A semloker that ever he syghte
   Soth moght no mon say.

85
Bot Arthure wolde not ete til al were served,
He watz so joly of his joyfines, and sumquat childerged:
His lif liked hym lyght, he lovied the lasse
Author to longe lyf to or longe sitte,
So bisied him his yonge blod and his brayn wylede.
And also an other maner meved him eke
That he thurgh nobelad had nomen, he wolde never ete
Upon such a dere day er hym devised were
Of sum aventurys thyngh un couthe tale,
Of sum mayn mervayle, that he myght trowe,
Of alderes, of armes, of other aventurys,
Other sum segg hym bisogn of sum siker knyght
To joyne wyth hym in justynge, in jopardé to lay
Lede, lif for lyf, leve uchon other,
As fortune wolde fulsun hom, the fayre to have.

95
This watz the kynges countenance where he in court were,
At uch farande fest among his fre meny
   in halle.
   Therfore of face so fere
   He stightez stif in stalle,
   Ful yep in that Nw Yere
   Much mirthe he mas withalle.

100
Thus ther stondes in stale the stif kyng hisseven,
Talkkande bifoire the hythe table of trifles ful hende.
There gode Gawan\(^4\) watz graythed Gwenero bisyde,
And Agravain à la dure mayn on that other syde sittes,
Bothe the kynges sisteresunes and ful siker knightes;
Bishop Bawdewyn abof biginez the table,
And Ywan, Uryn son, ette with hymselfen.
Thise were dight on the des and derythly served,
And sithen mony siker segge at the sidbordez.

105
That were embroidered and studded with the finest gems
That money could buy at the highest price
   anywhere.
   The loveliest to see
   Glanced round with eyes blue-grey;
   That he had seen a fairer one
   Truly could no man say.

110
But Arthur would not eat until everyone was served,
He was so lively in his youth, and a little boystish.
He hankereth after an active life, and cared very little
To spend time either lying or sitting,
His young blood and restless mind stirred him so much.
And another habit influenced him too,
Which he had made a point of honor: he would never eat
On such a special day until he had been told
A curious tale about some perilous thing,
Of some great wonder that he could believe,
Of princes, of battles, or other marvels;
Or some knight begged him for a trustworthy foe
To oppose him in jousting, in hazard to set
His life against his opponent’s, each letting the other.
As luck would assist him, gain the upper hand.
This was the king’s custom when he was in court,
At each splendid feast with his noble company
   in hall.
   Therefore with proud face
   He stands there, masterful,
   Valiant in that New Year,
   Joking with them all.

115
So there the bold king himself keeps on his feet,
Chatting before the high table of charming trifles.
There good Gawan was seated beside Guenevere,
And Agravain à la Dure Main on the other side;
Both the king’s nephews and outstanding knights.
Bishop Baldwin heads the table in the highest seat,
And Ywain, son of Urien, dined as his partner.
These knights were set on a dais and sumptuously served,
And after them many a true man at the side tables.

\(^1\) proved of prys Proved of value.
\(^2\) in daye Literally, ever.
\(^3\) yghen gray Virtually obligatory in medieval heroines.
Then the first cors come with craklyng of trumpes, 
Wyth mony baner ful brighty that therbi henged; 
Nye nakryn noyse with the noble pipes, 
Wylde werbles and wyght wakned lote,
120
That mony hert ful highe hef at her touche.
Dayntés dryven therwryth of ful dere metes,
Foysoyn of the fresche, and on so fele disches
That pine to fynde the place the peple bifome
For to sette the syveren that sere sewes halden
125
on clothe.
Iche lede as he loved hymselfe
Ther lught withouten lothe;
Ay two had disches twelve,
Good ber and bryght wyn bothe.

130
Now wyd I of ho servise say yow no more,
For uch wyghte may wel wyt no wonst that ther were.
An other noyse ful newe neghed blive
That the lude myght haf leye liflode to cache;\footnote{haf leye liflode to cache Arthur will not eat until he has sen a selly, 475, which is about to arrive.}
135
For unethe watze the noyce not a whyle sesed,
And the first couste in the court lyndely served,
Ther hales in at the halle dor an aghlich masyter,
On the most\footnote{on most Not “one of the biggest” but “the very biggest.”} on the molde on mesure hyghte;
Fro the swyre to the swange to sware and so thik,
And his lyndes and his lymes so longe and so grete,
Half etay in erde I hope that he were,
Bot mon most I algate mynn hym to bene,
And that the myriest in his milkel that myght ride;
For of his bak and his brest al were his bodi sturne,
Bot his wome and his wast were worthely smale,
And alle his fetyres folyande, in forme that he hade,
140
ful clothe;
For wonder of his hwe men hade,
Set in his semblant sene;
He ferte as freke were fade,
And overal enker-grene.

145
And al grathed in grene this gome and his wedes:
A strayte cote ful streght, that stek on his sides,
A mere mantile abof, mensked withinne
With pelute pured apert, the pane ful clothe
With blythe the blauener ful bryght, and his hode bothe,
That watz lught fro his lokkez and layde on his schulderes;

150
Then the first course was brought in with trumpets blaring,
Many colorful banners hanging from them.
The novel sound of kettledrums with the splendid pipes
Waked echoes with shrill and tremulous notes,
That many hearts leapt at the outburst of music.
At the same time servings of such exquisite food,
Abundance of fresh meat, in so many dishes
That space could hardly be found in front of the guests
To set down the silverware holding various stews
155
on the board.
Each man who loved himself
Took ungrudged, pair by pair,
From a dozen tasty dishes,
And drank good wine or beer.

160
Now I will say nothing more about how they were served,
For everyone can guess that no shortage was there.
Another noise, quite different, quickly drew near,
So that the king might have leave to swallow some food.
For hardly had the music stopped for a moment,
And the first course been properly served to the court,
When there bursts in at the hall door a terrible figure,
In his stature the very tallest on earth.
From the waist to the neck so thick-set and square,
And his loins and his limbs so massive and long,
In truth half a giant I believe he was,
But anyway of all men I judge him the largest,
And the most attractive of his size who could sit on a horse.
For while in back and chest his body was forbidding,
Both his belly and waist were becomingly trim,
165
And every part of his body equally elegant
in shape.
His hue astounded them,
Set in his looks so keen;
For boldly he rode in,
Completely emerald green.

170
And all arrayed in green this man and his clothes:
A straight close-fitting coat that clung to his body,
A pleasant mantle over that, adorned within
With plain trimmed fur, the facing made bright
With gay shining ermine, and his hood of the same
Thrown back from his hair and laid over his shoulders.

\footnotetext{On the most Not “one of the biggest” but “the very biggest.”}
Heme wel-haked hose of that same,
That spenet on his sparlyr, and clene spures under
Of bryght golde, upon silk bordes barred ful yche,
And scholes under schankes\(^1\) there the shalk rides;
And all his vesture verylyl watc clene verdure,
Bothe the barres of his belt and other blythe stones,
That were richely rayled in his aray clene
Aboute hymself and his sadel, upon silk werkz.

That were to tor to telle of tryfles\(^2\) the halfe
That were enbrauded abof, wyth brydde and flyghes,
With gay gaudd of grene, the gold ay inmyddes.
The pendauntes of his paytture, the proude cropyre,
His molaynes, and alle the metail anamayld was thenne,
The stropes that he stod on styned of the same,
And his arounz al af ter and his alhel skyrtes,
That ever glemered and glent al of grene stones;
The folke that he ferkkes on fyn of that ilke,
sertayn.

\(^{1}\) scholes under schankes Meaning that he was not wearing the steel shoes belonging to a suit of armor; see 574. The Green Knight’s feet are covered by the *wel-haked hose* of 157.

\(^{2}\) tryfles Decorative emblems, such as are embroidered on Gawain’s silk uryson, 611–12, and on the old lady’s headdress, 960.

A grene hors gre and thikke,
A stede ful stif to strayne,
In brawden bryddel quik;
To the gome he watc ful gayn.

Wel gay watc this gome gered in grene,
And the here of his hed of his hors sweve.
Fayre fannand fax umbefoldes his schulders;
A much berd as a busk over his brest henges,
That wyth his highlich here that of his hed reche
Watc enwede al umbetorne abof his elbowes,
That halp his armes ther-under were halched in the wyse
Of a kynges capades\(^3\) that closes his swer;
The mane of that mayn hors much to hit lyke,
Wel cresped and cenned, wyth knottes ful mony
Folden in with a fildore aboute the fayre grene,
Ay a herel of the here, an other of golde;
The tyl and his toppying twynnen of a sute,
And bounden bothe wyth a bande of a bryght grene,
Dubbed wyth ful dere stoneye, as the dok lasted,
Sythen thracen 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,

Neat tightly-drawyn stockings coloed to match
Clingyn to his caft, and shinyn spurs belo
Of bryght golde, over embrodiered and richly striped silk;
And without shoes on his feet there the man rides.
And truly all his cloting was brillant grene,
Both the bars on his belt and other gay gemes
That were lavishely set in his shining array
Round himself and his saddele, on embroidered silk.

It would be hard to describe even half the fine work
That was embrodiered upon it, the butterflis and birdis,
With lovely beadwork of grene, alwayes centered upon golde.
The pendants on the breast-trappings, the splendid crupper,
The bosses on the bit, and all the metail enameled.
The stirrups he stood in were coloried the same,
And his saddellow behind hym and his splendid skirtes
That constantly glittered and shone, all of grene gemes;
The horse that he rides entirely of that color,
in truth.

\(^{3}\) capades Hood.
Watz never sene in that sale wyth syght er that tyme,
with ygyhe.

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

Whether hade he no helme ne no hawbergh1 nauther,
Ne no pysan ne no plate that pented to armes,

Ne no schafte ne no schele to schwve ne to snyte,
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 spetos sperthe to expoun in spelle, quoso myght.

The lenkthe of an elnyerde the large hede hade,
The grayn al of grene stel and of golde hewen,
The bit burnyst byght, with a brod egge
As wel schapen to schere as scharp rasores,
The stele of a stif staf the sturne hit bi gypte,

That watz wounden wyth yrn to the wandez ende,
And al bigraven with grene in gracios werkes;
A lace lapped aboute, that lounded at the hede,
And so after the halmel halded ful ofte,
Wyth tryed tasselez therto taczxed innoghe

On botouz of the byght grene brayden ful rych.
This hathel heldez hym in and the halle entres,
Drivande to the heghe dece, dut he no wothe,
Haylsed he never one, bot heghe he over loked.
The fyrst word that he warp, “Where is,” he sayd,

“The governeur of this gyng? Gladly I wolde
Se that segg in syght, and with hymselfe speke
raysoun.”

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

Ther watz loyng on lenth the lude to beholde,
For uch mon had mervyale quat hit mene myght

Had any man in that hall before thought to see
with his eyes.

His glance was lightning swift,
All said who saw him there;
It seemed that no one could
His massive blows endure.

Yet he had no helmet nor hauberk either.
No neck-armour or plate belonging to arms,

No spear and no shield to push or to strike;
But in one hand he carried a holly-branch
That is brilliantly green when forests are bare,
And an axe in the other, monstrously huge;
A cruel battle-axe to tell of in words, if one could.

The great head was as broad as a measuring-rod,
The spike made entirely of green and gold steel,
Its blade brightly burnished, with a long cutting-edge
As well fashioned to shear as the keenest razor.
The grim man gripped the handle, a powerful staff,

That was wound with iron to the end of the haft
And all engraved in green with craftsmanly work.
It had a thong wrapped about it, fastened to the head,
And then looped round the handle several times,
With many splendid tassels attached to it

With buttons of bright green, richly embroidered.
This giant bursts in and rides through the hall,
Approaching the high dais, disdainful of peril,
Greeting none, but haughtily looking over their heads.
The first words he spoke, “Where is,” he demanded,

“The governor of this crowd? Glad should I be
To clap eyes on the man, and exchange with him
a few words.”

He looked down at the knights,
As he rode up and down,
Then paused, waiting to see
Who had the most renown.

For long there was only staring at the man,
For everyone marveled what it could mean.

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1 hawbergh  I.e., hauberk, coat of chain mail.
2 raysoun  Words, implicit in speke but evidently idiomatic.
That a knight and a horse might take such a color
And become green as grass, and greener it seemed
Than green enamel shining brightly on gold.
All those standing there gazed, and warily crept closer,
Bursting with wonder to see what he would do;
For many marvels they had known, but such a one never;
So the folk there judged it phantasm or magic.
For this reason many noble knights feared to answer:
And stunned by his words they sat there stock-still,
While dead silence spread throughout the rich hall
As though everyone fell asleep, so was their talk stilled
at a word.

Not just for fear, I think,
But some for courtesy;
Letting him whom all revere
To that man reply.

Then Arthur confronts that wonder before the high table,
And saluted him politely, for afraid was he never,
And said, “Sir, welcome indeed to this place;
I am master of this house, my name is Arthur.
Be pleased to dismount and spend some time here, I beg,
And what you have come for we shall learn later.”

“No, by heaven,” said the knight, “and him who sits there,
To spend time in this house was not the cause of my coming,
But because your name, sir, is so highly regarded,
And your city and your warriors reputed the best,
Dauntless in armor and on horseback afield,
The most valiant and excellent of all living men,
Courageous as players in other noble sports,
And here courtesy is displayed, as I have heard tell,
And that has brought me here, truly, on this day.
You may be assured by this branch that I carry
That I approach you in peace, seeking no battle.
For had I traveled in fighting dress, in warlike manner,
I have a hauberk at home and a helmet too,
A shield and a keen spear, shining bright,
And other weapons to brandish, I assure you, as well;
But since I look for no combat I am not dressed for battle.
But if you are as courteous as everyone says,
You will graciously grant me the game that I ask for
by right.”

In answer Arthur said,
“If you seek, courteous knight,
If thou crave batayl bare,\(^1\)
   Here fayle thou not to fayght.”

“No, I seek no battle, I assure you truly;
Those about me in this hall are but beardless children.
If I were locked in my armor on a great horse,
No one here could match me with their feeble powers.
Therefore I ask of the court a Christmas game,
For it is Yule and New Year, and here are brave men in plenty.

If anyone in this hall thinks himself bold enough,
So doughty in body and reckless in mind
As to strike a blow fearlessly and take one in return,
I shall give him this marvelous battle-axe as a gift,
This ponderous axe, to use as he pleases;
And I shall stand the first blow, unarmed as I am.
If anyone is fierce enough to take up my challenge,
Run to me quickly and seize this weapon,
I renounce all claim to it, let him keep it as his own,
And I shall stand his blow unflinching on this floor,

Provided you assign me the right to deal such a one
   in return;
   And yet grant him respite
   A twelvemonth and a day.
   Now hurry, and let’s see
   What any here dare say.”

If he stoned upon fyrst, stiller were thanne
Alle the heredmen in halle, the hythe and the lowe.
The renk on his rounce hym ruched in his sadel,
And runishly his red yghen he rele aboute,
Bende his bresed browez, blycande grene,
Wayved his bende for to wayte quo-so wolde ryse.
When non wolde kepe hym with carp he coghed ful hygh,
Ande rimed hym ful richely, and ryght hym to speke:
“What, is this Arthures hous?” quoth the thathel thenne,
“That al the rous tennes of thurgh ryalmes so mony?
Where is now your sounyquydrasyd e your conquestes,
Your gryndellayk y and your greme, and your grete wordes?

\(^{1}\) batayl bare  Either “without armor” (compare 290) or—as suggested by the bare mote, 1141—“in single combat.”

\(^{2}\) a Crysntemas gomen  In earlier times the midwinter festival included many games and sports now forgotten. Many of them involved mock-violence, of which traces remained in Blind Man’s Buff, played by striking a blindfolded victim and inviting him to guess who had struck him. Others exposed a victim to ridicule by playing a trick on him.

\(^{3}\) brayn  Crazy, reckless; usually brayuwod, as at 1461.

\(^{4}\) as bare as I sitt  Without the protection of armor.

\(^{5}\) barlay  An obscure term, possibly meaning “by law,” or here, “by agreement.”
Now is the revel and the renoun of the Rounde Table
Overwaite wyth a worde of on wyghtes speche,
For al dares for drede withoute dynt schewed!"
Wyth this he lauges 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,

And sayde, “Hathel, by heven, thy askying is nys,
And as thou foly hatz frayst, fynde the behoves.
I know no gome that is gast of thy grete wordses,
Gif me now thy geserene, upon Godze halve,
And I schal baythyn thy bone that thou boden habbes.”
Lyghtly leped he him to, and laght at his honde,
Then feersly that other freke upon foty lyghtnis.

Now hatz Arthur his axe, and the halme grypez,
And sturndy stuez hit aboute, that stryke wyth hit thoghht.
The stif mon hym bfore stod upon hyght,
Here ther ani in the houys by the hede and more.
With sturne schere ther he stod he stroked his berde,

And wyth a countenaunche dryghhe he drogh doun his cote,
No more mate ne dismayd for hys mayn dintez
Then any burne upon bench hade broght hym to drynk
of wyne.
Gawan, that sate bi the quene,
To the kyng he can enclyne:
“I besche now with sayez sene
This melly mot be myne.”

“Wolde ye, worthilych lorde,” quoth Wawan to the kyng,
“Bid me boghe fro this benche, and stonde by yow there,
That I wythoute ylyane myght voyde this table,
And that my legge lady lyked not ille,
I wolde com to your counselyl bfore your cort riche.
For me think hit not semly, as hit is soth knawen,
Ther such an askyng is hevened so hygte in your sail,
Thagh ye yoursel fyltynt, to take hit to yourselven,
Whil mony so bolde yow aboute upon bench sytten
That under heven I hope non hagherer of wylle,
Ne better bodyes on bent ther baret is teryd.

Now the reveley and repute of the Round Table
Are overthrown with a word from one man’s mouth,
For you all cower in fear before a blow has been struck!”
Then he laughs so uproariously that the king took offense;
The blood rushed into his fair face and cheek
for shame.
Arthur grew red with rage,
As all the others did.
The king, by nature bold,
Approached that man and said,

“Sir, by heaven, what you demand is absurd,
And since you have asked for folly, that you deserve.
No man known to me fears your boastful words;
Hand over your battle-axe, in God’s name,
And I shall grant the wish that you have requested.”
He quickly goes to him and took the axe from his hand.
Then proudly the other dismounts and stands there.

Now Arthur has the axe, grips it by the shaft,
And grimly swings it about, as preparing to strike.
Towering before him stood the bold man,
Taller than anyone in the court by more than a head.
Standing there grim-faced he stroked his beard,
And with an unmoved expression then pulled down his coat,
No more daunted or dismayed by those powerful strokes
Than if any knight in the hall had brought him a measure
of wine.

Seated by Guenevere
Then bowed the good Gawain:
“I beg you in plain words
To let this task be mine.”

Said Gawain to the king, “If you would, noble lord,
Bid me rise from my seat and stand at your side,
If without discourtesy I might leave the table,
And that my liege lady were not displeased,
I would offer you counsel before your royal court.
For it seems to me unfitting, if the truth be admitted,
When so arrogant a request is put forward in hall,
Even if you are desirous, to undertake it yourself
While so many brave men sit about you in their places
Who, I think, are unrivalled in temper of mind,
And without equal as warriors on field of battle.

1. for hys mayn dintez: Because of Arthur’s great practice blows.
2. This melly not be myne: Let this be my combat.
3. that my legge lady lyked not ille: That the Queen (beside whom Gawain is sitting) would not be offended if I left her side.
I am the wakkest, I wot, and of wyt feblest,
And lest lur of my lyf, quo laytes the sothe:
Bot for as much as ye are myn em I am only to prayse,
No bounté bot your blod I in my bodé knowe;
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 Gawain the game.

Then commaunded the kyng the knyght for to ryse;
And he ful radly upros, and ruched hym fayre,
Kneled doun bifore the kyng, and cachez that weppen;
And he lustly hit hym laft, and lyfte up his honde
And gef hym Goddez blessyng, and gladly hym biddes
That his hert and his honde schulde hardi be bothe.
"Kepe the, cosyn," quoth the kyng, "that thou on kyrf sette,
And if thou redexe hym ryght, redly I trowe
That thou schal byden the bur' that he schal bede after."
Gawan gott to the gome with giserne in honde,
And he baldly hym bydez, he bayst never the heder.
Then carppez to Sir Gawain the knyght in the grene,
"Refoume we oure forwarde, er we fyre passe.
Fyrst I eth the, hathel, how that thou hattes
That thou me telle truly, as I tryst may."
"In god fayth," quoth the goode knyght, "Gawain I hatte,
That bede the this buffet, quat-so bifalez after,
And at this tyme twelmonyth take at the an other
Wyth what weppen so thou wylt, and wyth no wyght ellez
on lyve."
That other onswarez agayn,
"Sir Gawain, so mot I thryve,
As I am ferly fayn
This dint that thou schal dryve.

"Bigog," quoth the grene knyght, "Sir Gawain, me lykes
That I schal fange at thy fust that I hafrayst here."
And thou hazt redly rehersed, bi resoun ful trwe,
Clanly al the covenaunt that I the kyngge asked,
Saf that thou schal siker me, segge, bi thi trawthe,
I am the weakest of them, I know, and the dullest-minded,
So my death would be lost less, if truth should be told;
Only because you are my uncle am I to be praised,
No virtue I know in myself but your blood;
And since this affair is so foolish and unfitting for you,
And I have asked you for it first, it should fall to me.
And if my request is improper, let not this royal court
bear the blame."
Nobles whispered together
And agreed on their advice,
That Arthur should withdraw
And Gawain take his place.

Then the king commanded Gawain to stand up,
And he did so promptly, and moved forward with grace,
Kneled down before the king and laid hold of the weapon;
And Arthur gave it up graciously, and lifting his hand
Gave Gawain God's blessing, and cheerfully bids
That he bring a strong heart and firm hand to the task.
"Take care, nephew," said the king, "that you strike one blow,
And if you deal it aright, truly I believe
You will wait a long time for his stroke in return."
Gawain approaches the man with battle-axe in hand,
And he waits for him boldly, with no sign of alarm.
Then the knight in the green addresses Gawain,
"Let us repeat our agreement before going further.
First I entreat you, sir, that what is your name
You shall tell me truly, that I may believe you."
"In good faith," said that virtuous knight, "I am called Gawain,
Who deals you this blow, whatever happens after,
On this day next year to accept another from you
With what weapon you choose, and from no other person
on earth."
The other man replied,
"Sir Gawain, as I live,
I am extremely glad
This blow is yours to give.

4 "Bigog," … here  The Green Knight does not explain why he is especially pleased that Gawain accepts the challenge.
That thou schal seche me thyselwe, where-so thou hopes
I may be funde upon folde, and foch the such wages
As thou deles me to-day before this doughter riche.

"Where schulde I wale the?" quoth Gawane, "Where is thy place?
I wot never where thou wonyes, bi hym that me wroght,
Bot teche me truly thereto, and telle me how thou hattes,
And I schal ware alle my wyt to wynne me theder,
And that I spere the for sothe, and by my seker traweth."

"That is innogh in Nye Yer, 1 hit nedes no more,
Quoth the gome in the grene to Gawane the hende;
"Yf I the telle truely quen I the tape have,
And thou me smothely hatt smyten, smarly I the teche
Of my hous and my home and myn owen nome,
Then may thou frayst my fare and forwardes holde;
And if I spende no speche, thenne spedez thou the better,
For thou may lern in thy londe and latt no fyrt—
bot skoles!
Ta now thy gyyme tole to the,
And let se how thou cnokez."

"Gladly, sir, for sothe."
Quoth Gawane: his ax he stroke.

The grene knyght upon grounde graythely hym dresses,
A litle lut with the hed, the leere he discoveurez,
His longe lovelych lokkez he layd over his croun,
Let the naked nec to the note schewe.
Gawane gripped to his ax and gederes hit on hyght,
The kay fot on the folde he before sette,
Let hit doun lyhtly lyght on the naked,
That the scharp of the schalk schyndered the bones,
And schrank thogh the schyrie grene, and schade hit in twynne,
That the bit of the broun 2 stel bot on the grounde.
The fayre hede fro the halce hit to the erthe,
That fele hit foynded wyth hir fete, there hit forth roled;
The blod brayed from the body, that blykked on the grene;
And nawther falterne ne fel the freke never the heder,
Bot stythly he start forth upon styf schonkes,
And runyschly he rought out, there as renkkez stoden,
Laght to his lufly hed, and lyft hit up sone;
And sythen bowez to his blonk, the brydel he cachchez,

That you will seek me yourself, wherever you think
I may be found upon earth, to accept such payment
As you deal me today before this noble gathering."

"Where shall I find you?" said Gawane, "Where is your dwelling?
I have no idea where you live, by him who made me;
Nor do I know you, sir, your count nor your name.
Just tell me truly these things, and what you are called,
And I shall use all my wits to get myself there,
And that I swear to you honestly, by my pledged word."

"That is enough for the moment, it needs nothing more;"

The man in green to the courteous Gawane,
"If I answer you truly after taking the blow,
And you have dextrously struck me, I will tell you at once
Of my house and my home and my proper name,
Then you can pay me a visit and keep your pledged word;
And if I say nothing, then you will fare better,
For you may stay in your country and seek no further—
but enough!
Take up your feamsome weapon
And let's see how you smite."
Said Gawane, "Gladly, indeed,"
Whetting the metal bit.

The Green Knight readily takes up his position,
Bowed his head a little, uncovering the flesh,
His long lovely hair he swept over his head,
In readiness letting the naked neck show.
Gawane grasped the axe and lifts it up high,
Setting his left foot before him on the ground,
Brought it down swiftly on the bare flesh
So that the bright blade slashed through the man’s spine
And cut through the white flesh, severing it in two,
So that the shining steel blade bit into the floor.
The handsome head flew from the neck to the ground,
And many courtiers kicked at it as it rolled past.
Blood spurted from the trunk, gleamed on the green dress,
Yet the man neither staggered nor fell a whit for all that,
But sprang forward vigorously on powerful legs,
And fiercely reached out where knights were standing,
Grabbed at his fine head and snatched it up quickly,
And then strides to his horse, seizes the bridle;

1  innogh in Nye Yer  Literally, “enough for this New Year’s Day”; meaning that Gawain need say nothing more, as the Green Knight goes on to say.

2  broun  Burnished.
Steppe into stelbawe and stydez alofte,
And his hede by the here in his honde haldez.
And as sadly the segge hym in his sadel sette
As non unhap had hym ayled, thagh hedlez he were
in steedde.

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

For the hede in his honde he haldez up even,
Toward the derrest on the dece he dressez the face,
And hit lyfte up the yge-lyddez and loked ful brode,
And meled thus much with his muthe, as ye may now
here:
“Loke, Gawan, thou be graythe to go as thou hettez,
And lase y til thou me, lude, fynde;
As thou hazzette in this halle, herande thisse knyghtez;
To the grene chapel thou chose, I charge the, to forze
Such a dunt as thou hazzel talt, dizzerd thou habbez
To be yederly yolden on Nw Yeres morn.
The knyght of the grene chapel men knowen me mony,
Forthe me for to fynde if thou fraystez, faylez thou never.
Therfore com, other recreaunt be calde thou behoves.”
With a runisch rout the raynez he tornez,
Halled out at the hal dor, his hed in his hande,
That the fyr of the flynt flaghe fro folke hoves.

To quat kyth he becom knewe non there,
Never more then thy wyste from quethen he watz wonnen.

What thenne?
The kyng and Gawan thare
At that grene thy laghe and grenne;
Yet breved watz hit ful bare
A mervayl among the menne.

Thagh Arther the hende kyng at hert hade wonder,
He let no semblant be sene, bot sayde ful hyghbe
To the comlyth quene wyth cortays speche,
“Dere dame, to-day demay yow never;
Wel bycomes such craft1 upon Cristmase,
Laykyng of enterludes, to laghe and to synge,
Among thisse kynde caroles of knyghtze and ladyez.
Never the lece to my mete I may me wel dres,

Puts foot into stirrup and swings into his seat,
His other hand clutching his head by the hair;
And the man seated himself on horseback as firmly
As if he had suffered no injury, though headless he sat
in his place.

He turned his body round,
That gruesome trunk that bled;
Many were struck by fear
When all his words were said.

For he holds up the head in his hand, truly,
Turns its face towards the noblest on the dais,
And it lifted its eyelids and glared with wide eyes,
And the mouth uttered these words, which you shall now
hear:
“See, Gawan, that you carry out your promise exactly,
And search for me truly, sir, until I am found,
As you have sworn in this hall in the hearing of these knights.
Make your way to the Green Chapel, I charge you, to get
Such a blow as you have dealt, rightfully given,
To be readily returned on New Year’s Day.
As the Knight of the Green Chapel I am widely known,
So if you make search to find me you cannot possibly fail.
Therefore come, or merit the name of craven coward.”
With a fierce jerk of the reins he turns his horse
And hurtled out of the hall door, his head in his hand,
So fast that flint-fire sparked from the hoofs.
What land he returned to no one there knew,
Any more than they guessed where he had come from.

What then?
Seeing that green man go,
The king and Gawan grin;
Yet they both agreed
They had a wonder seen.

Although inwardly Arthur was deeply astonished,
He let no sign of this appear, but loudly remarked
To the beautiful queen with courteous speech,
“Dear lady, let nothing distress you today.
Such strange goings-on are fitting at Christmas,
Putting on interludes, laughing and singing,
Mixed with courtly dances of ladies and knights.
None the less, I can certainly go to my food,

1 such craft  Display of skill. Arthur speaks as though the beheading
had been a conjuring trick.
For I haf sen a selly, I may not forsake."
He glent upon Sir Gawen, and gayly he sayde,
"Now sir, heng up thyn ax,¹ that hatz innogh hewen."
And hit watz don abof the dece on doser to henge,
Ther alle men for mervayl myght on hit loke,
And bi trwe tytel thenof to telle the wonder.
Thynge thay bowed to a borde thise stooned togeder,
The kyng and the gode kynght, and kene men hem servd
Of alle dayntyze double, or myght falle;
Wyth alle maner of mete and mynstralic bothe,
Wyth wele walt thay that day, til worthed an ende
In londe.
Now thank wel, Sir Gawen,
For wotho that thou ne wonde
This aventur for to frayn
That thou hatz tan on honde.

This hanselle hatz Arthur of aventures on fyrst
In yonge yer, for he yerned yelpyng to here.
Thagh hym wordez were wane² when thay to sete wentsen,
Now ar thay stoken of sturren werk, staffurs her hood.
Gawen watz glad to begynne those gornnez in halle,
Bot thagh the ende be hevy haf ye no wonder;
For thagh men ben mery quen thay han mayn drynk,
A yere yernes ful yerne, and yeldez never lyke,
The forme to the fynisment foldzes ful selden.
Forthi this Yol overyde, and the yere after,
And uche sesoun serlepes sued after other:
After Crystenmasse com the crabbed lentoun
That fraystez flesch wyth the fysche and fode more symple;
Bot thenne the weder of the worlde wyth wynter hit thepeze,³
Colde clengez adoun,⁴ cloudez upliften,
Schyre shedez the rayn in schowerz ful warme,
Fallez upon sayre flat, flowrez there schewen,
Bothe groundez and the grever grene ar her wedez,
Brydde busked to byle, and bremlych syngen

For I have witnessed a marvel, I cannot deny."
He glanced at Sir Gawain, and aptly he said,
"Now sir, hang your axe up, for it has severed enough."
And it was hung above the dais, on a piece of tapestry,
Where everyone might gaze on it as a wonder,
And the living proof of this marvelous tale.
Then these two men together walked to a table,
The king and the good knight, and were dutifully served
With delicious double helpings befitting their rank.
With every kind of food and minstrelsy
They spent that day joyfully, until daylight ended
On earth.
Now take good care, Gawain,
Lest fear hold you back
From leaving on the quest
You have sworn to undertake.

This wonder has Arthur as his first New Year’s gift
When the year was newborn, for he loved hearing challenges.
Though words were wanting when they sat down at table,
Now a grim task confronts them, their hands are cram-full.
Gawain was glad enough to begin those games in the hall,
But if the outcome prove troublesome don’t be surprised;
For though men are light-hearted when they have strong drink,
A year passes swiftly, never bringing the same;
Beginning and ending seldom take the same form.
And so that Yule went by, and the year ensuing,
Each season in turn following the other.
After Christmas came mean-spirited Lent,
That tries the body with fish and planer nourishment;
But then the weather on earth battles with winter,
The cold shrinks downwards, clouds rise higher,
And shed sparkling rain in warming showers,
Falling on smiling plains where flowers unfold,
Both open fields and woodlands put on green dress;
Birds hasten to build, and rapturously sing

¹ *heng up thyn ax*  Arthur gayly or aptly quotes a proverbial saying, meaning “end your strife.”
² *wordes were wane*  Because the Green Knight had taken their breath away.
³ *wyth wynter hit thepeze*  The seasons do not simply follow each other quietly but fight for succession: see 525, where autumn wind *wrestlez with the sunne.*
⁴ *Colde clengez adoun*  Winter is driven down into the earth, waiting to emerge again.
For solace of the softe somer that sues therafter
bi bonk;
And blossamez bolne to blowe
Bi rawez rych and ronk,
Then notez noble innoghe
Ar herde in wod so wlonk.

After the sesoun of somer wyth the soft wynde,
Quen Zeferus¹ syllez hymself on sedez erbez,
Wela wynne is the wort that waxes theroute,
When the donkande dewe dropez of the levez,

To bide a blysful blusch of the bryght sunne.
Bot then hyghes hervest, and hardenes hym sone,
Warnez hym for the wynter to wax ful rype.
He dryvys wyth droght the dust for to ryse
Fro the face of the folde to flyghe ful hygte;

Wrothe wynde of the welkyn wraetlez with the sunne,
The levez lancen fro the lynde and lyghten on the grounde,
And al grayzes the gres that grene watz er.
Thenne al rypez and rotez that ros upon fyrst,
And thus yirmez the yere in yesterdayez mony,

And wynter wyndez agayn, as the worlde askez,
no fage;
Til Meghelmas² mone
Watz cumen wyth wynter wage;
Then thenkez Gawan ful sone
Of his anious vyage.

Yet quy! Al-hal-day³ with Arther he lenges;
And he made a fare on that fest for the frekez sake,
With much revel and rych of the Rounde Table.
Knyghtez ful cortays and comlych ladies

Al for luf of that lede in longynge thay were,
Bot never the lece ne the later thay nevened bot merthe;
Mony joylez for that jentyle japez ther maden.
And after mete with mounnyng he melez to his eme,
And spekez of his passage, and perily he sayde,

“Now, lege lorde of my lyf, lefe I yow ask;
Ye knowe the cost of this case, kepe I no more
To telle yow tezey therof, never bot trifel;
Bot I am boun to the bur barely to-morne
To sech the gome of the grene, as God wyte me wyse.”

Then the best of the burgh bowed togethe,

For joy of gentle summer that follows next
on the slopes.
And flowers bud and blossom
In hedgerows rich with growth,
And many splendid songs
From woodlands echo forth.

Then comes the summer season with gentle winds,
When Zephirus blows softly on seeding grasses and plants,
Beautiful is the growth that springs from the seed,
When the moistening dew drips from the leaves
To await a joyful gleam of the bright sun.
But then autumn comes quickly and urges it on,
Warms it to ripen before winter’s approach.
Dry winds of autumn force the dust to fly
From the face of the earth high into the air;
Fierce winds of heaven wrestle with the sun,
Leaves are torn from the trees and fall to the ground,
And all withered is the grass that was green before.
Then all ripens and rots that had sprung up at first,
And in so many yesterdays the year wears away,
And winter comes round again, as custom requires,
in truth;
Until the Michælas moon
Brought hint of winter’s frost;
And into Gawain’s mind
Come thoughts of his grim quest.

Yet until All Saints’ Day he lingers in court,
And Arthur made a feast on that day to honor the knight,
With much splendid revelry at the Round Table.
The most courteous of knights and beautiful ladies
Grieved out of love for that noble man,
But no less readily for that spoke as if unconcerned.
Many troubled for that nobleman made joking remarks.
And after the feast sorrowfully he addressed his uncle,
Raised the matter of his quest, and openly said

“Liege lord of my being, I must ask for your leave;
You know the terms of this matter, and I have no wish
To bother you with them, saving one small point;
But tomorrow without fail I set out for the blow,
To seek this man in green, as God will direct me.”

Then the noblest in the court gathered together,

¹ Zeferus God of the West Wind.
² Meghelmas I.e., Michaelmas, the feast of St. Michael, celebrated
on 29 September.
¹ Al-hal-day I.e., All Hallows’ Day, or All Saints’ Day, celebrated
1 November.
To drye a delful dynt, and dele no more
   wyth bronde.
   The knyght mad ay god chere,
   And sayde, “Quat schuld I wonde?
   Of destiné def and dere
   What may mon do bot fonde?”

He dowelleth ther al that day, and dressez on the morn,
Aske erly his armez, and alle were thay bright.
Fyrst a tule tapit tyght over the flet,
And mich wyth the gild gere that glent theralofte.

The stif mon steppez thron, and the stel hondelez,
Dubbed in a dublet of a dere tars,
And sythen a crafty capados, closed aloft,
That wyth a bryght blaunder was bounden withinne.

Thenne set thay the sabatouz upon the segge fotez,
His leges lappid in stel with luffly greves,
With polynez piched therto, policed ful clere,
Aboute his knez knaged wyth knobes of golde;
Queme quyssewes then, that coyntlych closed
His thik thrawen thyghes, with thwonges to tachched;

And sythen the brawden bryné of bryght stel rynges
Umbeweved that wygh upon wlonk stuffe,
And wel borsnyt brace upoun his bothe armes,
With gode cowters and gay, and golvez of plate,
And all the godlych gere that hym gayn schulde
   that tyle;
   Wyth ryche cote-armure
   His gold sporez spend with pryde,
   Gurde wyth a bront ful sere
   With silk sayn umbe his syde.

When he watz hased in armes, his harnays watz ryche:
The lest lachet other loupe lemed of golde.
So harnayst as he watz he herknex his masse,
Offred and honoured at the heghe auter.
Sythen he come to the kyng and to his cort-ferez,

He stayz ther all that day, and makes ready the next,
Calls early for his accouterment, and all was brought in.
First a crimson carpet was stretched over the floor,
A heap of gilded armor gleaming brightly piled there.

The brave knyght steps on it and examines his armour,
Dressed in a costly doublet of silk
Under a well-made capados, fastened at the top
And trimmed with white ermine on the inside.
Then they fitted metal shoes upon the knyght’s feet,
Clasped his legs in steel with elegant greaves
With knee-pieces attached to them, highly polished
And fastened to his knees with knots of gold.
Next fine cuisses that neatly enclosed
His thick muscular thighs, with thongs attached,
And then the linked mail-shirt made of bright steel rings
Covered that man and his beautiful clothes:
Well burnished braces on both his arms,
With fine elbow-pieces and gloves of steel plate,
And all the splendid equipment that would benefit him
   at that time;
   With costly coat-armour,
   His gold spurs worm with pride,
   Girte with a trusty sword,
   A silk belt round him tied.

All locked in his armor his gear looked noble:
The smallest fastening or loop was gleaming with gold.
In armor as he was, he went to hear mass
Offered and celebrated at the high altar.
Then he comes to the king and his fellows at court,
Lachez lufly his leve at lordez and ladeye;
And thay him kyst and conveyed, bikende hym to Kryst.
Bi that watz Gryngolet grayth, and gurde with a sadel
That glemed ful gayly with mony golde fringes,
Ayquere naylet ful nwe, for that note ryched;
The brydel barred aboute, with bryght golde bounden,
The apparayl of the payttture and of the proude skyrtle,
The cropyre and the covertor, acorded wyth the arsounez;
And al watz rayled on red ryche golde naylez,
That al glytered and glent as gleem of the sunne.
Thenne hentes he the helme, and hastily hit kysses,
That watz stapled stilly, and stoffed wythinne.
Hit watz hygre on his hede, hasped bishynde,
Wyth a lyghly uryson over the avantayle,
Enbradwen and bounden wyth the best gemmez
On brode sylkyn borde, and braydez on semez,
As papjayez paynted persyng birwene,
Tortors and trulofez entayled so thyk
As mony burde theraboute had ben seven wynter
in toune.
The cercle watz more o priys
That umbelclipped lys crowne,
Of dianauntez a devys
That bothe were bryght and broun.¹

Then thay schewed hym the schelde, that was of schyr goulez,
Wyth the pentangle depaynt of pure golde hwez.
He braydez hit by the bauderyk, aboute the hals kests,
That bisemd the sengge semlyly farie.
And quy the pentangle apenzed to that prynce noble
I am in tent yow to telle, thof tary hyt me schulde:
Hit is a sygnye that Salomon set sumquyle
In bytyknyng of trawthe, bi tyle that hit habbez,
For hit is a figure that haldez fyve poynytez,
And uche lyne umbelappez and loukez in other,
And ayquere hit is endelez; and Englych hit callen
Overal, as I herte, the endeles knot.²
Forthy hit acondez to this knytgyd and to his cler arnze,
For ay faughtly in fyve and seve fyve syrzes
Gawan watz for gode knawen, and as golde pured,
Voydez of uche vylnay, wyth vertuzz ennourned
in mot;

Graciously takes his leve of lords and ladies;
And they kissed and esorted him, commendg him to Christ.
By then Gryngolet was ready, fitted with a saddle
That splendidly shone with many gold fringes,
Newly studded all over for that special purpose;
The bridle striped all along, and trimmed with bright gold;
The adornment of the trapping and the fine saddle-skirts,
The crupper and the horse-cloth matched the saddle-bows,
All covered with gold studs on a background of red,
So that the whole glittered and shone like the sun.
Then Gawain seizes his helmet and kisses it quickly,
That was strongly stapled and padded inside.
It stood high on his head, fastened at the back
With a shining silk band over the mailed neck-guard,
Embroidered and studded with the finest gems
On a broad border of silk with birds covering the seams—
Popinjays depicted between periwinkles,
Turtledoves and true-love flowers embroidered so thick
As if many women had worked on it seven years
in town.
A cirelet still more precious
Was ringed about his head,
Made with perfect diamonds
Of every brilliant shade.

Then they brought out the shield of shining gules,
With the pentangle painted on it in pure gold.
He swings it over his baldric, throws it round his neck,
Where it suited the knight extremely well.
And why the pentangle should befit that noble prince
I intend to explain, even should that delay me.
It is a symbol that Solomon designed long ago
As an emblem of fidelity, and justly so;
For it is a figure consisting of five points,
Where each line overlaps and locks into another,
And the whole design is continuous, and in England is called
Everywhere, I am told, the endless knot.
Therefore it suits this knight and his shining arms,
For always faithful in five ways, and five times in each case,
Gawain was reputed as virtuous, like refined gold,
Devoid of all vice, and with all courtly virtues
adorned.

¹ bryght and broun  Clear and colored.
² the endeles knot  No other use of this phrase is known. Like the poet’s claim to have heard the story recited, and his closing of refer-

ence to its place in the best boke of romance, l. 2521, the remark should probably be regarded as poetic license. The line does not alliterate.
Forthye the pentangle newe
He ber in scheldre and cote,
As tulk of tale most trwe
And gentylest knyght of lote.

Fyrst he watz funden fautlez in his fuye wyttez,
And eft fayled never the freke in his fuye fyngres,
And alle his afaunche upon folde watz in the fuye woundez
That Cryst cagh on the croys, as the crede tellez;
And queere-so-ever thys mon in melly watz stad,
His thro thought watz in that, thurgh alle other thyngez,
That alle his fornses he feng at the fuye joyez
That the hende heven-queene had of hir chylde;
At this cause the knyght comlyche had
In the inore half of his schelde his hir image depaynted,
That quen he blusedh therto his belde never payred.
The fyfte fye that I fynde that the frek used
Watz fraunchyse and felaghschyp forbe al thynge,
His clannes and his cortaysye croked were never,
And pite, that passez alle poynzte: thysue pure fye
Were harder happe on that hathel then on any other.
Now alle these fyve sythez, for sothe, were fetel on this knyght,
And uchone halched in other, that non ende hade,
And fyched upon fyve poynzte, that fayld never,
Ne samned never in no syde, ne sundred noughter,
Withouten ende at any noke I quere fynde,
Whereverre the gomen bygan, or glod to an ende.
Therfore on his schenche schelden watz the knot
Rally wyth red golde upon rede gowlez,
That is the pure pentaungel wyth the peple called with lore.
Now graythel is Gawan gay,
And laigth his launce ryght thore,
And gef them alle goud day,
He wende for evermore.

He sperres the sted with the spurez and sprong on his way,
So stif that the ston-fyr stroke out thereafter.
Al that say that semly syked in hert,
And sayde sothly, al same segges til other,
Carande for that comly, “Bi Kryst, hit is scathe
That thou leude, schal be lost, that art of lyf noble!

So this new-painted sign
He bore on shield and coat,
As man most true of speech
And fairest-spoken knight.

First he was judged perfect in his five senses,
And next his five fingers never lost their dexterity;
And all his earthly faith was in the five wounds
That Christ suffered on the cross, as the creed declares.
And wheresoe this man found himself in battle
His fixed thought was that, above all other things,
All his fortitude should come from the five joys
That the mild Queen of Heaven found in her child.
For this reason the gracious knight had
Her image depicted on the inside of his shield,
So that when he glanced at it his heart never quailed.
The fifth group of five the man respected, I hear,
Was generosity and love of fellow-men above all;
His purity and courtesy were never lacking,
And surpassing the others, compassion: these noble five
Were more deeply implanted in that man than any other.
Now truly, all these five groups were embodied in that knight,
Each one linked to the others in an endless design,
Based upon five points that was never unfinished,
Not uniting in one line nor separatn either;
Without ending anywhere at any point that I find,
No matter where the line began or ran to an end.
Therefore the knot was fashioned on his bright shield
Royally with red gold upon red gules,
That is called the true pentangle by learned people
who know.
Now Gawain, lance in hand,
Is ready to depart;
He bade them all farewell,
Not to return, he thought.

He set spurs to his horse and sprang on his way
So vigorously that sparks flew up from the stones.
All who watched that fair knight leave sighed from the heart,
And together whispered one to another,
Distressed for that handsome one, “What a pity indeed
That your life must be squandered, noble as you are!

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1 pite’ Cannot readily be translated in one word, as it means both pity and piety.

2 nobly A dialect term meaning “quietly.”
To fynde hys fere upon folde, in fayth, is not ethe.
Warloker to haf wroght had more wyt bere,
And haf dyght yonder dere a duk to have worthed;
A lowande leder of ledez in londe hym wel semez,
And so had better haf then briddet to nought,
Hade wyth an alvisch mon, for angardez pryde.
Who knew ever any kyng such counsel to take
As knyghtez in cavelaicus on Crysmasse gomnez?'
Wele much watz the warne water that waltered of yghen,
When that semly syre soght fro tho wonez
thad daye.
He made non abode,
Bot wyghtly went his wy;  
Mony wyssum way he rode,
The bok as I herde say.

Now rides this renk thurgh the ryalme of Logres,1
Sir Gawain, on Godez halve, thagh hym no gomen thoght.
Ofi leudlez and alone he lenzer on ryghtez.
Ther he fonde noght hym byfore the fare that he lyked.

Hade he no fere bot his folye by frythez and doynez,
Ne no gumt bot God bi gate wyth to carp,
Til that he neghed ful neghe into the Northwe Walez.
Alle the ilez of Anglesey on lyft half he haldez,
And farez over the fordez by the forlondez,
Over at the Holy Hed, til he hede eft bonk
In the wyldrenesse of Wyrale, wondere ther bot lyte
That autheur God other gume wyth goud hert lovied.
And ay he frayned as he ferde, at frekez that he met,
If thay hade herde any karp of a knyght grene,
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
grene.
The knyght tok gates straunge
In mony a bonk unben,
His cher ful oft con chaunge
That chapel er he myght sene.

Mony klyf he overclambe in contrayez straunge,
Fer floten fro his fendez fremedly he rydez.
At uche warthe other water ther the wyghe passed
He fonde a foo hym before, bot ferly hit were,
And that so foule and so felle that feght hym byhode.
So mony mervayl bi mount ther the mon fyndez,
To find his equal on earth is not easy, in faith.
To have acted more cautiously would have been much wiser,
And have appointed that dear man to become a duke.
To be a brilliant leader of men, as he is well suited,
And would better have been so than battered to nothing.
Beheaded by an orghis man out of excessive pride.
Whoever knew a king to take such foolish advice.
As knights offer in arguments about Christmas games?
A great deal of warm water trickled from eyes.
When that elegant lord set out from the city
that day.
He did not linger there,
But swiftly went his way;
Taking perplexing roads
As I have heard books say.

Now rides this knight through the realm of England,
Sir Gawain, in God’s name, though he found it no pleasure.
Often friendless and alone he passes his nights,
Finding before him no food that he liked.

He had no fellow but his horse by forest and hill,
And no one but God to talk to on the way.
Until he came very close to the north part of Wales.
All the islands of Anglesey he keeps on his left,
And crosses over the fords at the headlands,
There at the Holyhead, and came ashore again
In the wilderness of Wirral. There few people lived
Whom either God or good-hearted men could love.
And always as he rode he asked those whom he met
If they had heard anyone speak of a green knight
Or of a green chapel in any place round about;
And they all answered him no, that never in their lives
Had they ever seen a man who had such color

of green.
Strange roads the knight pursued
Through many a dreary space,
Turning from side to side
To find the meeting-place.

Many fell he climbed over in territory strange,
Far distant from his friends like an alien he rides.
At every ford or river where the knight crossed
He found an enemy facing him, unless he was in luck,
And so ugly and fierce that he was forced to give fight.
So many wonders befell him in the hills,

1 Logres  Celtic name for England.
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 berez otherquyle,
And tayneze that hym aneled of the heghe felle;
Nade he ben dugthy and dryghe, and Dryghtyn had served,
Doutles he hade ben ded and dreped ful ofte.

For were wrathed hym not so much that wynter nas wors,
When the colde cler water fro the cloudez schadde,
And fres er hit falle myght to the fale erthe.

 Ner slayn wyth the slete he slept in his yres
Mo nyghtez then innoghe in naked rokkez,
Ther as claterande fro the crest the colde borne rinnen,
And henged heghe over his hede in hard isse-ikkles.
Thus in perl and payne and plytes ful harde
Bi contray caryez this knighty, tyl Krystmasse even, al one;
The knight wel that tyde
To Mary made his mone,
That ho hym red to rye
And wisse hym to sum wone.

Bi a mounte on the morne merly he rydes
Into a forest ful dep, that ferly watz wylye;
Highe hillez on uche a halve, and holtwodez under
Of hore okez ful hoge a hundreth togeder;
The hasel and the hagthome were harled al samen,
With roghe raged mosse rayled anywhere,
With mony bryddez unblule the 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 sell nyght
Of a bunde watz borne, our barest to quelle;
And therfore sykyng he sayde, “I beseeche the, lorde,
And Mary, that is myldes moder so dere,
Of sum herber ther heghly I myght here masse,
And thi matynez’ to-morne, mekyly I ask,
And thereto prestly I pray my pater3 and ave4
and crede.”

1 matynez  I.e., matins, morning prayer, but here a church service specifically devoted to Mary as the mother of Jesus Christ (“matins of the blessed Virgin Mary”).
2 pater  Latin: father; i.e., “The Lord’s Prayer” (“Our Father, who art in Heaven … ”).
3 ave  Latin: hail; i.e., “Ave Maria” (“Hail Mary”).
4 crede  Latin: I believe (“The Creed”).

It would be tedious to recount the least part of them.
Sometimes he fights dragons, and wolves as well,
Sometimes with wild men who dwelt among the crags;
Both with bulls and with bears, and at other times boars,
And ogres who chased him across the high fells.
Had he not been valiant and resolute, trusting in God,
He would surely have died or been killed many times.

For fighting troubled him less than the rigorous winter,
When cold clear water fell from the clouds
And froze before it could reach the frozen earth.
Half dead with the cold Gawain slept in his armor
More nights than enough among the bare rocks,
Where splashing from the hilltops the freezing stream runs,
And hung over his head in hard icicles.
Thus in danger, hardship and continual pain
This knight rides across the land until Christmas Eve alone.

Earnestly Gawain then
Prayed Mary that she send
Him guidance to some place
Where he might lodging find.

Over a hill in the morning in splendor he rides
Into a dense forest, wondrously wild;
High slopes on each side and woods at their base
Of massive grey oaks, hundreds growing together;
Hazel and hawthorn were densely entangled,
Thickly festooned with coarse shaggy moss,
Where many miserable birds on the bare branches
Wretchedly piped for torment of the cold.
The knight on Gringolet hurries under the trees,
Through many a moras and swamp, a solitary figure,
Troubled about his plight, lest he should be unable
To attend mass for that lord who on that same night
Was born of a maiden, our suffering to end;
And therefore sighing he prayed, “I beg of you, Lord,
And Mary, who is gentlest mother so dear,
For some lodging where I might devoutly hear mass
And your matins tomorrow, humbly I ask;
And to this end promptly repeat my Pater and Ave
And Creed.”
He rode in his prayere,  
And cryd for his mysdede,  
He sayned hym in sythes sere,  
And sayde, “Croes Kryst me spede!”

Nade he sayned hymself, sege, bot thrye,  
Er he watz war in the wod of a wore 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 knight aghte,  
Pyched on a prayere, a park al aboute,  
With a pyked palays pyned ful thik,  
That umbeteye mony tre mo then two myle.  
That holde on that on syde the hathel avysed  
As hit schemered and schon1 thurgh the schyre okez;  
Thenne hatz he hendlly of his helme, and highely he thonkez  
Jesus and sayn Gilyan,2 that gentyle at bothe,  
That cortasely had hym kydde, and his cry herkened.  
“Now bone hostel,”3 coth the burne, “I beseche yow yette!”  
Thenne gerdez he to Gryngolet with the gilt helez,  
And he ful chauncely hatz chosen to the chef gate,  
That broght bremlly the burne to the bryge ende  
in haste.  
The bryge watz breme up Brayde,  
The gatez were stoken faste,  
The wallaz were wel arayed  
Hit dut no wynde blaste.

The burne bode on blonk, that on bonk hoved  
Of the depe double dich that drof to the place;  
The walle wod in the water wonderly depe,  
And eft a ful huge hight hit haled upon loft  
Of harde hewen ston up to the tablez,  
Enbaned under the abataylment in the best lawe;  
And syten garytez ful gaye gered bitwene,  
Wyth mony luflych loupe that louked ful cleene:  
A better barbican that burne blusched upon never.  
And innermore he behelde that halle ful hyghye,  
Towres telded bytwen, trochet ful thik,  
Faye fybyolez that fythged, and ferlyly long.

Bewailing his misdeeds,  
And praying as he rode,  
He often crossed himself  
Crying, “Prosper me, Christ’s cross”

Hardly he crossed himself, that man, three times,  
Before he caught sight through the trees of a moated building  
Standing over a field, on a mound, surrounded by boughs  
Of many a massive tree-trunk enclosing the moat:  
The most splendid castle ever owned by a knight,  
Set on a meadow, a park all around,  
Closely guarded by a spiked palisade  
That encircled many trees for more than two miles.  
That side of the castle Sir Gawain surveyed  
As it shimmered and shone through the fine oakes;  
Then graciously takes off his helmet, and devoutly thanks  
Jesus and St. Julian, who kindly are both,  
Who had treated him courteously, and listened to his prayer.  
“Now good lodging,” said the man, “I beg you to grant!”  
Then he urged Gryngolet forward with his gilt spurs,  
And by good chance happened upon the main path  
That led the knight directly to the end of the drawbridge  
with speed.  
The bridge was drawn up tight,  
The gates were bolted fast.  
The walls were strongly built,  
They feared no tempest’s blast.

The knight sat on his horse, pausing on the slope  
Of the deep double ditch that surrounded the place.  
The wall stood in the water incredibly deep,  
And then soared up above an astonishing height,  
Made of squared stone up to the cornice,  
With coursings under battlements in the latest style.  
At intervals splendid watch-towers were placed,  
With many neat loop-holes that could be tightly shut:  
Better outworks of a castle the knight had never seen.  
Further inside he noticed a lofty hall  
With towers set at intervals, richly ornate,  
Splendid pinnacles fitted into them, wonderfully tall.

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1 in sythes sere  Every time he prayed.  
2 hit schemered and schon  See also that denked ful quyte, 799.  
3 sayn Gilyan  I.e., St. Julian, patron saint of hospitality.

4 bone hostel “Good lodging,” a traditional invocation to St. Julian.
With corvon coprounec crafily slegh.
Chalkwthy chymnees ther ches he innoghe.

Upon bastel rove, that blanked ful quyte;
So mony pynakle paynted watz pouderd ayquere,
Among the castel carneke zambred so thik
That pared out of papure purely hit semed.
The fre freke on the folke hit fayre innoghe thoght,
If he myght kever to com the cloyster wythinne,
To herber in that hostel whyl halyday lested,
aviant.
He calde, and son ther com
A porter pure plesaunt,
On the wal his ernde he nome,
And haylsed the knyght errant.

“Gode sir,” quoth Gawan, “wolde thou go myn ernde,
To the hegh lorde of this hous, herber to crave?”
“Ye, Peter,” quoth the porter, “and purely I trouve
That ye be, wygh, welcum to worthy hyn wykez.”
Then yede the wygh yeerne and com agayn swythe,
And folke frely hym wyth, to fonge the knyght.
Thay let doun the grete draght and derely out yeden,
And kneled doun on her kenes 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 rased rekenly, and rod over the brygge.
Sere segges hym sesed by sadel, quel he lyght,
And sythen stabled his stede stil men innoghe.
Knyghtez and swyrez come doun thenne
For to byngy this buerne wyth blys into halle;
Quen he hef up his helme, ther hyghedy innoghe
For to hent it at his honde, the hende to serven;
His bronde and his blasoun both thay token.
Then haylsed he ful hendly tho hathelz uchone,
And mony proud mon ther preser that prynce to honour.
Alle hasped in his hegh wede to halle thay hym wonnen,
Topped by carved crocketing, skilfully worked.
Chalk-white chimneys he saw there without number
On the roofs of the towers, that brilliantly shone.
So many painted pinnacles were scattered everywhere,
Thickly clustered among the castle’s embrasures,
That, truly, the building seemed cut out of paper.
To the noble on the horse it was an attractive thought
That he might gain entrance into the castle,
To lodge in that building during the festival days
at his ease.
A cheerful porter came
In answer to his shout,
Who stationed on the wall
Greeted the questing knight.

“Good sir,” said Gawan, “will you carry my message
To the master of this house, to ask for lodging?”
“Yes, by St. Peter,” said the porter, “and I truly believe
That you are welcome, sir, to stay as long as you please.”
Then the man went speedily and quickly returned,
Bringing others with him, to welcome the knight.
They lowered the great drawbridge and graciously came out,
Kneeling down on their knees upon the cold ground
To welcome this knight in the way they thought fit.
They gave him passage through the broad gate, set open wide,
And he courteously bade them rise, and rode over the bridge.
Several men held his saddle while he dismounted,
And then strong men in plenty stabled his horse.
Knights and squires came down then
To escort this man joyfully into the hall.
When Gawan took off his helmet, several jumped forward
To receive it from his hand, serving that prince.
His sword and his shield they took from him both.
Then he greeted politely every one of these knights,
And many proud men pressed forward to honor that noble.
Still dressed in his armor they brought him into hall,

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1. *craftily slegh* The castle architecture abounds with craftsmanship. *Slegh*, meaning skillful, intricate, subtle, is a term of some significance in the poem. Gawan’s fellow-guests hope to see *sleghet of thweez*, 916, skillful displays of good manners; and after creeping into his bedchamber the lady calls him a *sleur unlygyhe*, 1209 or unwary, a related term. On being told that he cannot be killed for *slegh upon erthe*, 1854, while wearing the belt, Gawan tells himself that such a *sleigh were noble*, 1858. Here the word shades off towards modern “sleight,” with overtones of trickery or deceit appropriate to the story. But many passages of the poem illustrate the poet’s fondness for the elaborate craftsmanship or *wylye werke* that is evident in his own writing, particularly in the *entrelacement* of Part 3.

2. *ches be innoghe* He saw enough of them, meaning there were very many.

3. *papure* Paper, a word newly introduced into English, perhaps by the poet.

4. *Peter* I.e., St. Peter, one of Christ’s twelve apostles and, traditionally, the gate-keeper of Heaven.
Ther fayre fyre upon flet fersly brenned,
Thenne the lorde of the lede loutez fro his chambre
For to mete wyth menske the mon on the flor;
He sayde, “Ye ar welcum to welde as yow lykez
That here is: al is yowre awen, to have at yowre wylle
and welde.”
“Graunt mercy,” quoth Gawyn,
“Ther Kryst hit yow foryelde.”
As frekez that semed fayn
Ayther other in armez con felde.

Gawan glynte on the gone that godly hym gret,
And thught hit a bolde burne that the burgh aghte;
A hoge hathel for the nonex, and of hyghe elde;
Brode, blight, watz his berde, and al bever-hwed,
Sturne, stif on the stryththe on stalworth schonkez,
Felle face as the fyre, and fre of hys speche,
And wel hym semed, for sothe, as the segge thught,
To lede a lortschyp in lee of leudez ful gode.

The lorde hym charred to a chambre, and cheffy cumaunitez
To delyver hym a leude, hym lowly to serve;
And there were boun at his bode burnez innoghne,
That broght hym to a bryght boue, ther beddyng was noble,

Of cortynes of clere sylk wyth cler golde hemmeez,
And coverterez ful curious with comlych panez
Of lryght blouseyner above, embrawded bisydez,
Rudelez rennande on ropez, red golde ryngez,
Tapitez tyght to the wowe of tuly and tars,
And under fete, on the fltet, of folyande sute.

Ther he watz dispoyled, wyth speches of myertye,
The burne of his brundy and of his bryght wedez.
Rythe robes ful rad renkkez hym broghten,
For to charge and to chaunghe, and chose of the best.
Sone as he on hent, and happed therinne,
That sete on hym semly wyth saylende skyrtez
The ver by his visage verably hit semed
Welnehg to uche hathel, alle on hwes
Lowande and luflly alle his lymmez under,
That a comlaker knyght never Kryst made,
hem thought.

Whethen in worlde he were,
Hit semed as he moght

Where a blazing fire was fiercely burning,
Then the lord of that company comes down from his chamber,
To show his respect by meeting Gawain there.

He said, “You are welcome to do as you please
With everything here: all is yours, to have and command
as you wish.”
Said Gawain, “Thanks indeed,
Christ repay your noblesse.”
Like men overjoyed
Each hugged the other close.

Gawain studied the man who greeted him courteously,
And thought him a bold one who governed the castle,
A great-sized knight indeed, in the prime of life;
Broad and glossy was his beard, all reddish-brown,
Stern-faced, standing firmly on powerful legs;
With a face fierce as fire, and noble in speech,
Who truly seemed capable, it appeared to Gawain,
Of being master of a castle with outstanding knights.
The lord led him to a chamber and quickly orders
A man to be assigned to him, humbly to serve;
And several attendants stood ready at his command
Who took him to a fine bedroom with marvelous bedding:

Curtains of pure silk with shining gold borders,
And elaborate coverlets with splendid facing
Of bright ermine on top, embroidered all around;
Curtains on golden rings, running on cords,
Walls covered with hangings from Tharsia and Toulouse
And underfoot on the floor of a matching kind.

There he was stripped, with joking remarks,
That knight, of his mail-shirt and his fine clothes.
Men hurried to bring him costly robes
To choose from the best of them, change and put on.
As soon as he took one and dressed himself in it,
Which suited him well with its flowing skirts,
Almost everyone truly supposed from his looks
That spring had arrived in all its colors;
His limbs so shining and attractive under his clothes
That a handsomer knight God never made,
it seemed.

Wherever he came from,
He must be, so they thought,
Be prync withouten pere
In feldr ther felle men fought.

A cheyer¹ before the chemné, ther charcole brenned,
Watz gratethd for Sire Gawyn graythely with clothes,
Whysynges upon queldepyntynges that koynt wer bothe;
And thenne a mere manyte wydst on that mon cast
Of a brooun bleaunt, enbrausd ful rych.

And fayre ferred wythinne with fellex of the best,
Alle of ermyne erde, his hode of the same;
And he sette in that settel semlych rych,
And achaufe hym chelly, and thenne his cher mended.
Sone wat uz telded up tabil on tretez ful fayre,
Clad wyth a clene cloth that cler quynt schewed,
Sanap, and salure, and sylverin sponez.
The wynghe wesse at his wyll wend to his mete:
Seggez hym served semly inneghie,
Wyth serene seweses and sete, sesounde of the best,
Double-felde, as hit fallez, and fely kyn fischez,²
Summe baken in bred, summe brad on the gledez,
Summe sothe, summe in sewes savered with spyes,
And ay sawes so slegez that the segge lyked.
The freke calde hit a fest ful frely and ofte
Ful hendely, quen alle the hatheles rehayted hym at onez,
as hende,
"This penaunce now ye take,
And eft hit schal amende."
That mon much mertime con make,
For wyn in his hed that wende.

Thenne watz spreyed and spured upon sper wyse
Bi prevé poiyyntz of that prync, put to hymselfen,
That he biknew cortaysly of the court that he were
That aeth Arthure the hende halez hyme one,
That is the rych ryal kyng of the Rounde Table,
And hit watz Wawen hymselfz that in that won syttez,
Comen to that Krystmas, as case hym then lampsed.
When the lorde hade lerned that he the leude hade,
Loud aythed he therat, so lef hit hym thought,

A prince unparalleled
In field where warriors fought.

A chair before the fireplace where charcoal glowed
Was made ready with coverings for Gawain at once:
Cushions set on quilted spreads, both skilfully made,
And then a handsome robe was thrown over the man
Made of rich brown material, with embroidery rich,
And well fur-lined inside with the very best pelts,
All of ermine in fact, with a matching hood.

Becomingly rich in attire he sat in that chair,
Quickly warmed himself, and then his expression softened.
Soon a table was deftly set up on trestles,
Spread with a fine tablecloth, brilliantly white,
With overcloth and salt-cellars, and silver spoons.
When he was ready Gawain washed and sat down to his meal.
Men served him with every mark of respect,
With many excellent dishes, wonderfully seasoned,
In double portions, as is fitting, and all kinds of fish:
Some baked in pastry, some grilled over coals,
Some boiled, some in stews flavored with spices,
Always with subtle sauces that the knight found tasty.

Many times he graciously called it a feast,
Courteously when the knights all urged him together,
as polite,
"Accept this penaunce now,
Soon you’ll be better fed."
Gawain grew full of mirth
As wine went to his head.

Then he was tactfully questioned and asked
By discreet enquirey addressed to that prince,
So that he must politely admit he belonged to the court
Which noble Arthur, that gracious man, rules alone,
Who is the great and royal king of the Round Table;
And that it was Gawain himself who was sitting there,
Having arrived there at Christmas, as his fortune chanced.
When the lord of the castle heard who was his guest,
He laughed loudly at the news, so deeply was he pleased;

¹ A cheyer Chairs were relatively rare, and to be given one was a mark of respect. The usual form of seat is indicated by the Green Knight’s reference to knights aboute on this benche, 280, and by Gawain’s request for permission to boghe fro this benche, 344.

² fely kyn fischez Many kinds of fish. Because Christmas Eve is a fast-day, no red meat is served. The meal is jokingly referred to as penaunce, 897, and Gawain is promised something better on the next day, 898.
910  And all the men in that mote maden much joye
   To apere in his presense prestly that tyme,
   That alle pry and provos and pure thewe\footnote{alle pry and provos and pure thewe: Great excellence, military valor, and refined manners.}
   Apenes to hys persoune, and prayed is ever;
   Byfore alle men upon molde his mensk is the most.

915  Uch segle ful softly sayde to his fere:
   “Now schal we semlyh se sleghtez of thewe\footnote{Wich speke is in speche unspurd may we lerne: We may learn without asking what success in conversation consists of.}
   And the teccheles termes of talkyng noble,
   Wich spede is in speche unspurd may we lerne;\footnote{The fayrest in felle: Literally, the most beautiful in skin.}
   Syn we haf fonged that fyne fader of nurture.

920  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
   and syng.
   In menyng of manerez mere
   This burse 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 nighneg hed the tyme.
Chaplaynez to the chapesles chosen the gate,
Rungen ful rychely, saydel that schulden,
To the hersum evensong of the hyghe tyde.
The lorde loutes therto, and the lady als,
Into a cumly closet coyntyly ho entrez.

930  Gawan glydez ful gay and gos theder sone;
The lorde laches hym by the lappe and ledez hym to sytte,
And couthly hym knowez and callez hym his nome,
And sayde he watz the welcomest wyghte of the world;
And he hym thonkkes throly, and ayther hachted other,
And seten soberly samen the servise quyde.
Thenne lyst the lady to loke on the knyght,
Thenne com ho of hir closet with mony cler burdez.
Ho watz the fayrest in felle,\footnote{fayrest in felle: The most beautiful.}
of flesche and of lyre,
And of compas and colour and costes, of all other,
And wener then Wenore, as the wyght thoight.
Ho ches thurg the chaunsel to cherche that hende:
An other lady hir lad bi the lyft honde,
That watz alder then ho, an aucian hit semed,
And highely honwered with hathelez aboute.

935  And all the men in the castle were overjoyed
   To make the acquaintance quickly then
   Of the man to whom all excellence and valor belongs,
   Whose refined manners are everywhere praised,
   And whose fame exceeds any other person’s on earth.

940  Each knight whispered to his companion,
   “Now we shall enjoy seeing displays of good manners,
   And the irreproachable terms of noble speech;
   The art of conversation we can learn unasked,
   Since we have taken in the source of good breeding.

945  Truly, God has been gracious to us indeed,
   In allowing us to receive such a guest as Gawan,
   Whose birth men will happily sit down and celebrate
   in song.
   In knowledge of fine manners
   This man has expertise;
   I think that those who hear him
   Will learn what love-talk is.”

When dinner was finished and Gawan had risen,
The time had drawn on almost to night:
Chaplains made their way to the castle chapels,
Rang their bells loudly, just as they should,
For devout evensong on that holy occasion.
The lord makes his way there, and his lady too,
Who gracefully enters a finely carved pew.

950  Gawain hastens there, smartly dressed, and quickly arrives;
The lord takes him by the sleeve and leads him to a seat,
And greets him familiarly, calling him by his name,
And said he was the welcome guest in the world.
Gawain thanked him heartily, and the two men embraced,
And sat gravely together while the service lasted.
Then the lady wished to set eyes on the knight
And left her pew with many fair women.
She was the loveliest on earth in complexion and features,
In figure, in coloring and behavior above all others,
And more beautiful than Guenevere, it seemed to the knight.
She came through the chancel to greet him courteously,
Another lady leading her by the left hand,
Who was older than she, an aged one it seemed,
And respectfully treated by the assembled knights.
950 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 perlz,
  Hir brest and hir byghte throte bare displayed,
  Schon schynter then snawe that schedez on hillez;
  That other wyth a gorget watz gered over the sware,
  Chymblde over hir blake chyn with chalkquyte vayles,
  Hir froute folden in sylk, enfoubled ayquere,
  Toreted and teleted with tryffles aboute,
  That noght watz bare of that burde bot the blake browes,
  The twayne yghen and the nase, the naked lypsez,
  And those were sourte to se and sellyly blyted;
  A mensk lady on molde mon may hire calle,
       for Gode!
  Hir body watz short and thik,
  Hir buttokes balgh and brode,
  More lykkerwys on to lyk
  Watz that scho hade on lode.

955 But very different in looks were those two ladies,
  For where the young one was fresh, the other was withered;
  Every part of that one was rosily aglow:
  On that other, rough wrinkled cheeks hung in folds.
  Many bright pearls adorned the kerciefs of one,
  Whose breast and white throat, uncovered and bare,
  Shone more dazzling than snow new-fallen on hills;
  The other wore a gorget over her neck,
  Her swarty chyn wrapped in chalkwhite veils,
  Her forehead enfolded in silk, muffled up everywhere,
  With embroidered hems and lattice-work of tiny stitching,
  So that nothing was exposed of her but her black brows,
  Her two eyes and her nose, her naked lips,
  Which were repulsive to see and shockingly bleared.
  A noble lady indeed you might call her,
       by God!
       With body squat and thick,
       And buttocks bulging broad,
       More delectable in looks
       Was the lady whom she led.

Gawain glanced at that beauty, who favored him with a look,
  And taking leave of the lord he walked towards them.
  The older one he salutes with a deep bow,
  And takes the lovelier one briefly into his arms,
  Kisses her respectfully and courteously speaks.
  They ask to make his acquaintance, and he quickly begs
    truly to be their servant, if that would please them.
  They place him between them and lead him, still chatting,
    to a private room, to the fireplace, and immediately call
    For spiced cakes, which men hurried to bring them unstinted,
    Together with marvelous wine each time they asked.
  The lord jumps up politely on several occasions,
    Repeatedly urging his guests to make merry;
    Graciously pulled off his hood and hung it on a spear,
    And encouraged them to gain honor by winning it,
    So that the Christmas season would abound with mirth.
    “And I shall try, on my word, to compete with the best,
    Before I lose my hood, with the help of my friends.”
    Thus with laughing words the lord makes merry,
    To keep Sir Gawain amused with games in hall
     that night.

1 Spycez Spiced cakes, still a Christmas tradition. Cloves, ginger,
   and cinnamon were available.

2 Hent heghly ... Crystennasw whyle Another Christmas game,
   evidently a jumping contest, typically boisterous in character.
Til that hit watz tyme
The lord comaunderd lyght;
Sir Gawen his leve con nyme
And to his bed hym dight.

995 On the morne, as uch mon mynez that tyme
That Dryghtyn for our destyné to deye watz borne,
Wéle waxe in uche a won in world for his sake;
So did hit there on that day thrugh dayntés mony.
Bothe at mes and at mele messes ful quaynt¹

1000 Derf men upon dece drest of the best.
The olde auncian wyf highest ho sytze,
The lorde lufly her by lent, as I towe;
Gawan and the gay burde togeder thay seten,
Even innmydez, as the messe metely come,
And syrth thurg al the sale as hem best semed.
Bi uche grome at his degré graythely watz served,
Ther watz mete, ther watz myrthe, ther watz much joye,
That for to telle therof hit me tene were,
And to poynte hit yet I pyned me paraventure.
Bot yet I wot that Wáwen and the wale burde
Such comfort of her compaynye caghten togeder
Thurgh her dere dalyuance of her derne wordez,
Wyth clene cortays carp closed fro fythle,
That hor play watz passande uche pyynce gomen,
in vayres.

1005 Trumpes and nakerys,
Much ppyng ther repayres;
Uche mon tented hys,²
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 ³ watz gentyle to here,
And watz the last of the laky, leudez ther thoghten.
Ther wer gestes to go upon the gray morne,
Forthy wonderly thay woke, and the wyn dronken,
Daunsed ful dreghly wyth dere carolez.
At the last, when hit watz late, thay lachen her leve,
Uchon to wend on his way that watz wyghe straunge.⁴

1020 Until it was so late
That lights were ordered in;
Then taking courteous leave
To chamber went Gawain.

1025 On the next day, when everyone remembers the time
When God who died for our salvation was born,
Joy spreads through every dwelling on earth for his sake.
So did it there on that day, through numerous pleasures;
Both light meals and great dishes cunningly prepared
And of exquisite quality bold men served on the dais.
The ancient lady sits in the place of honor,
The lord politely taking his place by her, I believe.
Gawan and the lovely lady were seated together,
Right in the middle of the table, where food duly came,
And was then served throughout the hall in proper sequence.
By the time each man had been served according to rank,
Such food and such merriment, so much enjoyment were there
That to tell you about it would give me much trouble,
Especially if I tried to describe it in detail.
Yet I know that Gawan and his beautiful partner
Found such enjoyment in each other’s company,
Through a playful exchange of private remarks,
And well-mannered small-talk, unsullied by sin,
That their pleasure surpassed every princely amusement,
for sure.

Trumpets, kettledrums
And piping roused all ears.
Each man fulfilled his wishes,
And those two followed theirs.

1030 Great joy filled that day and the one following,
And a third as delightful came pressing after;
The revelry on St. John’s Day was glorious to hear,
And was the end of the festivities, the people supposed.
The guests were to leave early next morning,
And so they revealed all night, drinking the wine
And ceaselessly dancing and caroling songs.
At last, when it was late, they take their leave,
Each one who was a guest there to go on his way.

¹ messe ful quaynt  Finely prepared meals, set out (dress) on the high table. Elsewhere koynt, 877 is a variant spelling, again indicating skillfully made things.
² Uche mon tented hys  Each man attended to his own needs or pleasures.
³ sayn Jonez day  27 December, but three days later it is New Year’s Eve—a day too early. Some editors have suggested a line may be missing here.
⁴ wyghe straunge  Stranger or visitor to the castle.
Gawan gef hym god day, the godmon hym lachez,
Ledes hym to his awen chambre, the chemné bysyde,
And there he drawez hym on dryghe, and derly hym thonkdez
Of the wynne worshipe that he hym wayved hade,
As to honour his hous on that hygh tyde,
And enbelyse his burgh with his bele chere.¹

“Iwysse, sir, quy! I leve, me worthez the better
That Gawyn hatz ben my gest at Goddez awen fest.”
“Grant merci, sir,” quoth Gawyn, “in god fayth hit is yownez,
Al the honour is your awen—the heghe kyng yow yelde!
And I am wyghte at your wylle to worche youre hest,
As I am halden therto, in hyghe and in lowe,
bi right.”
The lorde fast can hym Payne
To holde lenger the knyght;
To hym answarez Gawyn
Bi non way that he myght.²

Then frayned the freke ful fayre at himselfen
Quat derve dede had hym dryven at that dere tyme
So kenly fro the kyngez kourt to kayre al his one,
Er the halidayez holly were halet² 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 wat in the world whederwarde to wende hit to fynde.
I nolde bot if I hit negh myght on Nw Yeres morne
For alle the londe inwyr 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 chapel, 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, yif I myght last;
And of that ilk Nw Yere bot neked now wonte,
And I wolde loke on that lede, if God me let wolde,
Gladloker, bi Goddez sun, then any god welde!
Forthi, iwyse, bi yowre wylle, wende me bihoves,
Naf I now to busy bot bare thay deye,
And me als fayn to falle feye as fayly of myyn ernde.”
Thenne laghande quoth the lorde, “Now leng the byhoves,

Gawan bids goodbye to his host, who takes hold of him,
Leads him to his own room, beside the fire,
And there he detains him, thanks him profusely
For the wonderful kindness that Gawain had shown
By honoring his house at that festive time,
And by gracing the castle with his charming presence.

“Indeed, sir, as long as I live I shall be the better
Because Gawain was my guest at God’s own feast.”
“All my thanks, sir,” said Gawain, “in truth it is yours,
All the honor falls to you, and may the high king repay you!
And I am at your commandment to act on your bidding,
As I am duty bound to in everything, large or small,
by right.”
The lord tried strenuously
To lengthen Gawain’s stay,
But Gawain answered him
That he could not delay.

Then the lord politely enquired of the knight
What pressing need had forced him at that festive time
So urgently from the royal court to travel all alone,
Before the holy days there had completely passed.

“Indeed, sir,” said the knight, “you are right to wonder;
A task important and pressing drove me into the wild,
For I am summoned in person to seek out a place
With no idea whatever where it might be found.
I would not fail to reach it on New Year’s morning
For all the land in England, so help me our Lord!²
Therefore, sir, this request I make of you now,
That you truthfully tell me if you ever heard talk
Of a Green Chapel, wherever it stands upon earth,
And of a knight who maintains it, who is colored green.
A verbal agreement was settled between us
To meet that man at that place, should I be alive,
And before that New Year little time now remains;
And I would face that man, if God would allow me,
More gladly, by God’s son, than come by great wealth!
With your permission, therefore, I must indeed leave:
I have now for my business only three short days,
And would rather be struck dead than fail in my quest.”
Then the lord said, laughing, “Now you must stay,

¹ *Enbelys... bele chere* Bertilak (Gawain’s host) makes an uncharacteristic sortie into courtly French terms.
² *Bi non way that he myght* He could not by any means.
For I schal teche yow to that terme bi the tymes ende,
The grene chapayle upon grounde greve yow no more;
Bot ye schal be in yowre bed, burne, at thyn ese,
Quyle forth dayez, and efk on the fryst of the yere,
And cum to that merk at mydumorn, to make quat yow likez
in spenne.

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

Thenne watz Gawain ful glad, and gomely he laghed:
"Now I thank yow thryvandyel thurgh all other thynge,
Now achede is my chaunce, I schal at yowre wylle
Dowelle, and ellez do quat ye demen.”
Thenne sezed hym the syre and set hym bysylde,
Let the ladiez be fette to lyke hem the better.

Ther watz some solace by hemself stille;
The lorde let for luflotez so myry
As wyl that wolde of his wyte, ne wyst quat he myght.
Thenne he carped to the knyght, criande loudene,
“Ye han demed to do the dede that I bidde;
Wyl ye halde this hes here at thys onez?”

"Ye, sir, for sothe,” sayd the segge trwe,
"Whyl I byde in yowre borghe, be bayn to yowre hest.”
"For ye haf travayled,” quoth the tulk, “towen fro ferre,
And sythen waked me wylh, ye am not wel waryst
Nauther of sostnace ne of slepe, sothly I knowe;
Ye schal lenge in your lofte, and lyghye in your es;
To-morn quyle the mesequyle, and to mete wende
When ye wyl, wyth my wyf, that wyth yow schal sitte
And comfort yow with compayny, til I to cort torne;
ye lende,
And I schal erl ryse,
On huntyng wyl I wende.”
Gavyn grantez alle thys,
Hym heldande, at the hende.

Yet ferre,” quoth the freke, “a forwarde we make:
Quat-so-ever I wynne in the wod hit worthex to yourez,
And quot chek so ye acheve chaunge me therforme.
Swete, swap we so, sware with trawthe,

For I shall direct you to your meeting at the year’s end.
Let the whereabouts of the Green Chapel worry you no more;
For you shall lie in your bed, sir, taking your ease
Until late in the day, and leave on the first of the year,
And reach that place at midday, to do whatever pleases you there.

Stay till the year’s end,
And leave on New Year’s Day;
We’ll put you on the path,
It’s not two miles away.”

Then Gawain was overjoyed, and merrily laughed:
“Now I thank you heartily for this, above everything else,
Now my quest is accomplished, I shall at your wish
Remain here, and do whatever else you think fit.”
Then the host seizd him, set Gawain by his side,
And bid the ladies be fetched to increase their delight.

They had great pleasure by themselves in private;
In his excitement the lord uttered such merry words
Like a man out of his mind, not knowing what he did.
Then he said to the knight exuberantly,
“Do you agree to carry out whatever deed I ask;
Will you keep this promise now, at this very instant?”
“Yes, sir, assuredly,” said the true knight,
“While I am under your roof, I obey your bidding.”
“You have wearied yourself,” said the man, “traveling from far,
And then reveled all night with me: you have not recovered
Neither your lost sleep or your nourishment, I am sure.
You shall stay in your bed and lie at your ease
Tomorrow until mass-time, and then go to dine
When you like, with my wife, who will sit at your side
And be your charming companion until I come home.
You stay,
And I shall rise at dawn
And hunting will I go.”
All this Gawain grants,
With a well-mannered bow.

Yet further,” said the man, “let us make an agreement:
Whatever I catch in the wood shall become yours,
And whatever mishap comes your way give me in exchange.
Dear sir, let us swap so, swear me that truly.

\[1 \text{quat chek so ye acheve} \] Whatever fortune you win. The remark is equivocal. Chek also has the sense of misfortune—see 1857 and 2195.
Quether, leude, so lymp, lere other better.”

“Bi God,” quoth Gawain the gode, “I grant thertylle, And that yow lyst for to layke, lef hit me thynek.”

“Who bryngez uus this beverage, this bargayn is maked”:
So sayde the lorde of that lede; thay laughe uchone, Thay dronken and dalyeden and dalten untyghtel, Thise lordes and ladyez, quyyle that hem lyked;
And sythen with Frenkysch fare and fele fayre lozet
Thay stoden and stemed and styly speken, Kysten ful comlyly and kaghsten he leve.
With mony leude ful lyght and lemande torches
Uche burne to his bed watz brought at the laste,
ful softe.
To bed yet er thay yede,
Recorded covenautez ofte;
The olde lorde of that lede
Cowthe wel halde layk alofte.

Whatever falls to our lot, worthless or better.”

“By God,” said the good Gawain, “I agree to that, And your love of amusement pleases me much.”

“If someone brings us drink, it will be an agreement,”
Said the lord of that company: everyone laughed.
They drank wine and joked and frivolously chatted
For as long as it pleased them, these lords and ladies;
And then with exquisite manners and many gracious words
They stood at a pause, conversing quietly,
Kissed each other affectionately and then took their leave.
With many brisk servingmen and gleaming torches
Each man was at last escorted to a bed
downy soft.
Yet first, and many times
Again the terms were sworn;
The master of those folk
Knew how to foster fun.

Ful erly before the day the folk uprysen,
Gestes that go wolde hor gromez thay calden,
And thay busken up blyve blonkkes to sadel,
Tyffen her takles, trussen her males,
Richen hem the rychest, to ryde alle arayde,
Lepen up lighty, lachen her brydeles,
Uche wyghhe on his way ther hym wel lyked.
The leve lordes of the londe watz not the last
Arayed for the rydyng, with renkkes ful mony;
Ete a sop hastly, when he hadhe herde masse,
With bugle to bent-felde he buskez blyve.
By that any daylyght lemed upon erthe
He with his hatheles on hyghe horses weren.
Thenne thise cachetis that couthe cowpled hor houndez,
Unclosed the kenel doore and calde hem theroute,
Blwe bygly in buglez thare bare motes:
Braches bayed therfore and breme noyse maked;
And thay chastysed and charred on chasyng that went,

Early before daybreak the household arose;
Guests who were leaving called for their grooms,
And they hurried quickly to saddle horses,
Make equipment ready and pack their bags.
The noblest prepare themselves to ride finely dressed,
Leap nimblly into saddle, seize their bridles,
Each man taking the path that attracted him most.
The well-loved lord of the region was not the last
Prepared for riding, with a great many knights;
Snatched a hasty breakfast after hearing mass,
And makes ready for the hunting-field with bugles blowing.
By the time the first glimmers of daylight appeared
He and his knights were mounted on horse.
Then experienced huntsmen coupled the hounds,
Unlocked the kennel door and ordered them out,
Loudly blowing three long notes on their horns.
Hounds bayed at the sound and made a fierce noise;
And those who went straying were whipped in and turned back.

1 Quether, leude, so lymp, lere other better  Whichever man wins something worthless or better. The literal sense of lymp is “falls to his lot.”
2 Frenkysch fare  Refined manners, modeled on courtly French behavior.
3 three bare note  Three single notes on the horn, ordering the release of the hounds.
A hundredth of hunteres, as I hav herde telle,
of the best.
To trystors wytteres yod,\textsuperscript{1}
Couples huntes of kest;
Ther ros for blastez gode
Gret rurde in that forest.

At the first quete of the quest quaked the wylde;
Der drof in the dale, doted for drede,
Highed to the hyghes, bot haterly thay were
Restayed with the stablye, that stoutly ascryed.
Thay let the hertez haf the gate, with the hyghes hedez,
The breme buckez also with hory breke paumez;
For the fre lorde hade defende in fermesoun tyme
That thier schulde no mon meve to the male dere.
The hindez were halden in with hay! and war!
The does dryven with gret dyn to the depe sladez.
Their myght mon se, as thay slypte, sleiting of arwes—
At uche wende under wande wapped a fone—
That biglye bone on the broun with ful brede hedez.
What! thay brayen and bleden, bi bonkkez thay deyen,
And ay rachches in a res radly hem folwes,
Huntery wyth hygye horne hasted hem after
Wyth such a crakkande kry as klyffes haden brusten.
What wylye so atwaped wyghes that schotten
Watz al toraced and rent at the resayt,
Bi thay were tened at the hygye and tayesd to the watteres;
The ledez were so lerned at the lowe trysteres,
And the greshoundez so grete, that geten hem bylyve
And hem tofylched, as fast as frekez myght lyke,
ther-ryght.
The lorde for hlys abloy
Ful ofte con launc and lyght,
And drof that day wyth joy
Thus to the deryght.

Thus laykez this lorde by lynde-wodez evz,
And Gawayn the god mon in gay bed lyggez,
Lurkez\textsuperscript{2} quy the daylyght lened on the wows,
Under covertour ful clere, coryned aboute;
And as in slymez he slode, slaghly he herde
A littel dyn at his dor, and dernly upon;
And he hevez up his hed out of the clothes,

By a hundred hunters, as I hav been told,
of the best.
With keepers at their posts
Huntsmen uncoupled hounds;
Great clamor in the woods
From mightly horn-blasts sounds.

At the first sound of the hunt the wild creatures trembled;
Deer fled from the valley, frantic with fear,
And rushed to the high ground, but were fiercely turned back
By the line of beaters, who yelled at them savagely.
They let the stags with their tall antlers pass,
And the wonderful bucks with their broad horns;
For the noble lord had forbidden in the close season
Anyone to interfere with the male deer.
The hinds were held back with shouts of hay! and war!
The does driven with great noise into the deep valleys.

There you might see, as they ran, arrows flying—
At every turn in the wood a shaft whistled through the air—
Deeply piercing the hide with their wide heads.
What they cry out and bleed, on the slopes they are slaughtered,
And always swiftly pursued by the rushing hounds;
Hunters with screaming hons gallop behind
With such an ear-splitting noise as if cliffs had collapsed.
Those beasts that escaped the men shooting at them
Were all pulled down and killed at the receiving points,
As they were driven from the high ground down to the streams.
The men at the lower stations were so skillful,
And the greyhounds so large, that they seized them quickly
And tore them down as fast as men could number,
right there.

Thus this nobleman sports along the edges of woods,
And the good man Gawayn lies in his fine bed,
Lying snug while the daylight gleamed on the walls,
Under a splendid coverlet, shut in by curtains.
And as he lazily dozed, he heard softly made
A little noise at his door and it stealthily open;
And he raised up his head from the bedclothes,

\textsuperscript{1} To trystors wytteres yod  Keepers of hounds went to their hunting-stations.

\textsuperscript{2} Lurkez  Lay snug; but the term has pejorative overtones that are heard again at 1195.
A corner of the cortyn he caghed up a lyttel,
And waytez warly thiderwarde quat hit be myght.
Hit watz the ladi, loftyst to beholde,
That drow the dor after hur ful dernity and stylle,
And bowed towarde the bed; and the burne schamed, And layde hym dowen lystyly and let as he slepte;
And ho stepped stilly and stel to his bedde,
Kest up the cortyn and creped withinne,
And set hur ful softly on the bed-syde,
And lenged there selly longe to loke quen he wakened.

The lede lay lurked a ful longe quyle,
Compast in his concience to quat that cace myght
Meve other mount—to mervayle hym thought,
Bot yet he sayde in hymself, “More semly hit were
To aspy wyth my spelle in space quat ho wolde.”

Then he wakenede, and wroth, and to hit warde torned,
And unlounked his yghye-lsydez, and let as hym wondered,
And sayned hym, as bi his saghe the saver to worthe,
with hande.

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

“God moroun, Sir Gawayn,” sayde that gay lady,
“Ye ar a sleper unslyghye, that mon may sylyde 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 bountez.

“Goud moroun, gay,” quoth Gawayn the blythe,
“Me schal worthe at your wille, and that me wel lykez, For I yelde me yederly, and yeghe after grece,
And that is the best, be my dome, for me byhovez nede”: And thus he boured agayn with mony a blythe lghter.
“Bot wolde ye, lady lovely, then leve me grante,
And deprece your pryson, 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,

Lifted a corner of the curtain a little,
And takes a glimpse warily to see what it could be.
It was the lady, looking her loveliest,
Who shut the door after her carefully, not making a sound,
And came towards the bed. The knight felt confused,
And lay down again cautiously, pretending to sleep;
And she approached silently, stealing to his bed,
Lifted the bed-curtain and crept within,
And seating herself softly on the bedside,
Waited there strangely long to see when he would wake.

The knight shammed sleep for a very long while,
Wondering what the matter could be leading to
Or portend. It seemed an astonishing thing,
Yet he told himself, “It would be more fitting
To discover straightway by talking just what she wants.”

Then he wakened and stretched and turned towards her,
Opened his eyes and pretended surprise,
And crossed himself as if protecting himself by prayer
and this sign.

With lovely chin and cheek
Of blended color both,
Charmingly she spoke
From her small laughing mouth.

“Good morning, Sir Gawain,” said that fair lady,
“You are an unwary sleeper, that one can steal in here:
Now you are caught in a moment! Unless we agree on a truce,
I shall imprison you in your bed, be certain of that!”
Laughing merrily the lady uttered this jest.

“Good morning, dear lady,” said Gawain gayly,
“You shall do with me as you wish, and that pleases me much,
For I surrender at once, and beg for your mercy,
And that is best, in my judgment, for I simply must.”
Thus he joked in return with a burst of laughter.
“But if, lovely lady, you would grant me leave
And release your captive, and ask him to rise,
I would get out of this bed and put on proper dress,
And then take more pleasure in talking with you.”
“No, indeed not, good sir,” said that sweet one,

1 and the burne schamed   And the knight was embarrassed.
2 Now ar ye tan as-tyt!  Now are you captured in a moment! There may be a suggestion here of another traditional game, played by women on Hock Monday, the week after Easter. It consisted of seizing and binding men, who were released after paying a small sum of money.
3 that me wel lykez   That pleases me very much.
“Ye schal not rise of your bedde, I rych yow better. 
I schal happe yow here that other halfe al,
And sythen karp wyth my knyght that I kagh have; 
For I wene wel, iwyse, Sir Wowen ye are, 
That alle the worlde worchipyz quer-so ye ride; 
Your honour, your hendelayk is hendely prayed 
With lordez, wyth ladyes, with alle that lyf bere.
And now ye are here, iwyse, and we bot our one; 
My lorde and his ledez ar on lenthe faren, 
Other burnez in her bedde, and my berdez als, 
The dor drawen and dit with a dery aspe; 
And sythen I have in this hous hyme that al lykez, 
I schal ware my whyle wel, quyly hit lastez, 
with tyle.
Ye ar welcum to my cors, ¹
Yowre aven won to wale, 
Me behowe of fyne force
Your servaunt be, and schale.”

“In god fayth,” quoth Gawayn, “gayn hit me thynkkez, 
Thagh I be not now he that ye of speken; 
To reche to such reverence as ye reche here 
I am wygher unworthy, I wot wel myselven.
Bi God, I were glad, and yow god thoght, 
At sathe other at servyce that I sette myght 
To the plesaunce of your pryss—hit were a pure joye.”
“In god fayth, Sir Gawyn,” quoth the gay lady, 
“The pryss and the proues that plesal al other,
If I hit lakked other set at lyght, hit were little daynte; 
Bot hit ar ladyes innoghe that lever were nowthe 
Haf the, hende, in hor holde, as I the habbe here, 
To dayl with derely your daynte wordez, 
Kever hem comfort and colen her carez, 
Then much of the garysoun other gold that thay haven. 
Bot I loue that ilk lorde that the lyfte haldez 
I have hit holly in my hone that al desyres, 
thurgy grace.”
Scho made hym so gret chere, 
That warz so fast of face, 
The knyght with speches skere 
Anwared to uche a case.

“You shall not leave your bed, I intend something better. 
I shall tuck ye in here on both sides of the bed,
And then chat with my knyght whom I have captured. 
For I know well, in truth, that you are Sir Gawain, 
Whom everyone revere wherover you go; 
Your good name and courtesy are honorably praised 
By lords and by ladies and all folk alke.
And now indeed you are here, and we two quite alone, 
My husband and his men have gone far away, 
Other servants are in bed, and my women too, 
The door shut and locked with a powerful aspe; 
And since I have under my roof the man everyone loves,
I shall spend my time well, while it lasts, 
with talk.
You are welcome to me indeed, 
Take whatever you want; 
Circumstances force me 
To be your true servant.”

“Truly,” replied Gawain, “I am greatly honored, 
Though I am not in fact such a man as you speke of. 
To deserve such respect as you have just described 
I am completely unworthy, I know very well.
I should be happy indeed, if you thought it proper, 
That I might devote myself by words or by deed 
To giving you pleasure: it would be a great joy.”
“In all truth, Sir Gawain,” replied the beautiful lady, 
“If the excellence and gallantry everyone admires
I were to slight or disparage, that would hardly be courteous; 
But a great many ladies would much rather now
Hold you, sir, in their power as I have you here, 
To spend time amusingly with your charming talk, 
Delighting themselves and forgetting their cares,
Than much of the treasure or wealth they possess. 
But I praise that same lord who holds up the heavens, 
I have completely in my grasp the man everyone longs for, 
through God’s grace.”
Radiant with loveliness
Great favor she conferred; 
The knyght with virtuous speche 
Anwared her every word.

¹ Ye are welcum to my cors  A suggestive ambiguity that cannot be 
translated. My cors may mean “me,” just as “your honor” or “your 
worship” mean “you.” But the literal sense of the phrase, “my body,” 
is present.

² To the plesaunce of your prys  To pleasing you, or to carrying out 
your wishes, your prys meaning your noble self.
“Madame,” quoth the myrty mon, “Mary yow yelede,
For I haf founden, in god fayth, yowre fraunchis noble,
And other ful much of other folk fongen bi hor dedez,
Bot the daynté that thay delen, for my disert nys even,
Hit is the worchyp of yourself, that noght bot wel coneez.”
“Bi Mary,” quod the menskful, “me thynk hit an other;
For were I worth at the wone of wynnmen 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 knowan upon the, knyght, here,
Of bewedé and deboneré and blythe semblant,
And that I haf er herkkened and halde hit here trwee,
Ther schulde no freke upon folde bifo re yow be chosen.”
“Iwyse, worthy,” quoth the wyghe, “ye haf waled wel
better.\(^1\)
Bot I am proude of the pryys that ye put on me,
And soberly your servaunt, my soveryn I holde yow,
And yowre knyght I becom, and Kryst yow for yelde.”
Thus thay meled of muchquat til mydnom paste,
And ay the lady let lyk as hym loved mych.
The freke ferde with defence, and feted ful fayre;
Thagh ho were bure bryghtest the burne in mynde hade,\(^2\)
The lase luf in his lode for luf that he sogh:
  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 stonyd hym wyth ful stor wordez:
“Now he that spedeue uche spech this disport yelede yow!
Bot that ye be Gawan, hit gotz in mynde.”
“Querfore?” quod the freke, and freschly he askez,
Ferde lest he hade fayled in fourne of his castes;
Bot the burde hym blesse, and “Bi this skyl” sayde:
“So god as Gawayn gaynly is halden,
And cortayse is closed so clene in hymseven,
Couth not lightly haf lenged so long wyth a lady;
Bot he had crave a cosse, bi his courtayse,

“Lady,” said the man pleasantly, “may Mary repay you,
For I have truly made proof of your great generosity,
And many other folk win credit for their deeds;
But the respect shown to me is not at all my deserving:
That honor is due to yourself, who know nothing but good.”
“By Mary,” said the noble lady, “to me it seems very different;
For if I were the worthiest of all women alive,
And held all the riches of the earth in my hand,
And could bargain and pick a lord for myself,
For the virtues I have seen in you, sir knight, here,
Of good looks and courtesy and charming manner—
All that I have previously heard and now know to be true—
No man on earth would be picked before you.”
“Indeed, noble lady,” said the man, “you have chosen
much better.
But I am proud of the esteem that you hold me in,
And in all gravity your servant, my sovereign I consider you,
And declare myself your knight, and may Christ reward you.”
So they chattted of this and that until late morning,
And always the lady behaved as if loving him much.
The knight acted cautiously, in the most courteous of ways,
Though she was the loveliest woman he could remember:
He felt small interest in love because of the ordeal he must face
very soon—
To stand a crushing blow,
In helpless suffrence.
Of leaving then she spoke,
The knight agreed at once.

Then she bade him goodbye, glanced at him and laughed,
And as she stood astonished him with a forceful rebuke:
“May he who prosper each speech repay you this pleasure!
But that you should be Gawan I very much doubt.”
“But why?” said the knight, quick with his question,
Fearing he had committed some breach of good manners;
But the lady said “Bless you” and replied, “For this cause:
So good a knight as Gawan is rightly reputed,
In whom courtesy is so completely embodied,
Could not easily have spent so much time with a lady
Without begging a kiss, to comply with politeness,

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\(^1\) ye haf waled wel Better. You have made a much better choice; reminding the lady that she has a husband.
\(^2\) Thagh ho were bure bryghtest the burne in mynde hade The frightening prospect facing Gawan (she lar that he soghi, 1284) does
Bi sum towch of summe trylfe at sum talez ende."

Then quoth Woven, "Iwysse, worthese as yow lyke; I schal kyse at your commaundement, as a knyght falliz.
And fire, lest he displesse yow, so plede hit no more."
Ho comes nere with that and cachez hym in armez,
Louterz luffych adoun and the leude kysses.
Thay comly bykennyn 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 chamberdny, choses his wede,
Bowez forth, quen he watz boun, blythely to masse;
And thenne he meved to his mete that menskyly kepned,
And made myrty al day, til the mone rysed,
with game.
Watz never freke fayrer fonge
Bitwene two so dynge dame,
The alder and the yonge;
Much solace set thay same.

And ay the lorde of the londe is lento on his gamnez,
To hunt in holtes and hethe at hyndebaraynez;
Such a sume he ther slowe bi that the sumne heldet,
Of dos and of other derte, to deme were wonder.
Thenne fersly that flooked in folk at the laste,
And quykly of the quelled derte a querré thay makey.
The best bowed thereto with burnez innoghe,
Gedered the grattest of gres that ther were,
Andidden hem derely undo as the dede askze;
Sedched hem at the asay summe that ther were,
Two fyngers thay fonde of the fowlest of alle.
Sythyn thay slyt the slot, sesed the eber,
Schaved wyth a scharp knyf, and the schyre knitten;
Sythyn rytte thay the four lynnmes, and rent of the hyde,
Then brek thay the bale, the bowelez out token
Lysily for laucyng the lere of the knot;
Thay gryped to the gargulun, and graythely departed
The wesaunt fro the wynt-hole, and wait out the guttes;
Then scher thay out the schuderez with her scharp knyvez,
Haled hem by a lytted hole to have hole sydes.
Sithen britten thay the brest and brayden hit in twynne,
And eft at the gargulun bigynez on thenne,
Ryvez hit up radly ryght to the byght,
Voydyez out the avanters, and verayly thereafter
Alle the rymez by the rybbez radly thay lance;
So ryde thay of by resoun bi the rygge bonez,
By some hint or suggestion at the end of a remark."
Then Gawain said, "Indeed, let it be as you wish;
I will kiss at your bidding, as befits a knight,
And do more, rather than displease you, so urge it no further."
With that she approaches him and takes him in her arms,
Stoops graciously over him and kisses the knight.
They politely commend each other to Christ’s keeping;
She goes out of the room without one word more.
And he prepares to get up as quickly as he can,
Calls for his chamberlain, selects his clothes,
Makes his way, when he was ready, contentedly to mass;
And then went to his meal that worthily awaited him,
And made merry all day until the moon rose
with games.

Never knight was entertained
By such a worthy pair,
One old, the other young;
Much pleasure did they share.

And still the lord of that land is absorbed his sport,
Chasing through woodland and heath after barren hinds.
What a number he killed by the time the day ended
Of does and other deer would be hard to imagine.
Then proudly the hunters flokced together at the end,
And quickly made a quarry of the slaughtered deer.

The noblest pressed forward with many attendants,
Gathered together the fatest of the deer,
And neatly dismembered them as ritual requires.
Some of those who examined them at the assay
Found two inches of flesh in the leanest of them.

Then they slit the base of the throat, took hold of the gullet,
Scraped it with a sharp knife and knotted it shut;
Next they cut off the four legs and ripped off the hide,
Then broke open the belly and took out the entrails
Carefully to avoid loosening the ligature of the knot.

They took hold of the throat, and quickly separated
The gullet from the windpipe, and threw out the guts.
Then they cut round the shoulders with their keen knives,
Drawing them through an aperture to keep the sides whole.
Next they cut open the breast and split it in two,
And then one of them turns again to the throat
And swiftly lays open the body right to the fork,
Throws out the neck-offal, and expertly then
Quickly severs all the membranes on the ribs.
So correctly they cut off all the offal on the spine
Evenden to the haunches, that henged al samen,
And heven it up al hole, and lwen 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 lappex thay lance bihynde;
To hewe hit in two thay hyghes,
   Bi the bakbon to unbynde.

Bothe the heode and the hals thay hwen of thenne,
And sythsen sunder thay the sydez swyf fro the chyne,
And the corbeles fe1 they kest in a greve;
Thenn thurled they aytther thik side thurgh bi the rybbe,
And henged thenne aytther bi hoghes of the fourchez,
Uche freke for his fe, as fallez for to have.
Upon a felle of the sayre best fede thay thayr houndes

Wyth the lyver and the lyghtez, the lether of the pauncesz,
And bred bathed in blod blende theramongez.
Baldeley they blyw prys,2 bayed thyar rachecz,
Sythen fonge thay her flesche, folden to home,
Strakande ful stoutly mony stif motez.

Bi that the daylyght watz done the doutehe watz al wonen
Into the comly castel, ther the knyght bidez
   ful stille,
   Wyth blys and bryght fyr bette.
The lorde is come th妳rtylte;
When Gawayn wyth hym mette
Ther watz bot wele at wylle.

Thenne commaundd the lorde in that sale to samen alle the meny,
Bothe the ladies on lowe to lyght with her burdes
Bifore alle the folk on the flette, frekez he beddez
Verayly his venysoun to fech hym byforne,
And al godly in gomen Gawayn he called,
Techez hym to the tayles3 of ful tayt bestes,
Schewez hym the schytres gree schorne upon rybbes.

"How payetz yow this play? Haf I prys womenn?"
Have I thyvandely thank thurgh my craft servd?"  
"Ye, iverys," quoth that other wyghte, "hyn is wyghte fayrest
That I sey this seven yere in sesoun of wynter."
"And al I gif yow, Gawayn," quoth the gome thenne,

1. *the corbeles fee* A piece of gristle thrown to the birds as part of the ritual.
2. *blyw prys* A blast on the horn when the quarry is taken.

Right down to the haunches, in one unbroken piece,
And lifted it up whole, and cut it off there;
And to that they give the name of numbs, I believe,
as is right.
Then where the hind legs fork
At the back they cut the skin,
Then hacked the carcass in two,
Swiftly along the spine.

Both the head and the neck they cut off next,
And then rapidly separate the sides from the chine;
And the raven’s fee in a thicket they threw.
Then they pierced both thick sides through the ribs,
Hanging each of them by the hocks of their legs,
For each man’s payment, as his proper reward.
They put food for their hounds on a fine beast’s skin—
The liver and lights, the lining of the stomach,
And bread soaked in blood, mixed up together.
Noisily they blew capture, their hounds barking,
Then shouldering their venison they started for home,
Vigorously sounding many loud single notes.

By the time daylight failed they had ridden back
To the splendid castle, where the knight waits
   undisturbed,
   With joy and bright fire warm.
   Then into hall the lord
   Came, and the two men met
   In joyfallest accord.

Then the lord commanded the household to assemble in hall,
And both ladies to come downstairs with their maids.
In front of the gathering he orders his men
To lay out his venison truly before him;
And with playful courtesy he called Gawayn to him,
Reckons up the tally of well-grown beasts,
Points out the splendid flesh cut from the ribs.
"Does this game please you? Have I won your praise?"
"Yes indeed," said the other, "this is the finest venison
That I have seen for many years in the winter season."
"And I give it all to you, Gawayn," said the man then,
“For by acorde of covenaunt ye crave hit as your awen.”
“This is soth,” quoth the sege, “I say yow that ilke:
That I haf worldly wonnen this wone wythinne,
Iwyse with as god wyle hit worthez to yournez.”
He hasppez his fayre hal his armez wythinne,
And kysses hym as comlyly as he couthe awyse:
“Tas yow there my chevicaunce, I cheved no more;
I wowsche hit saf fynly, thagh feler hit were.”
“Hit is god,” quoth the godmon, “grant mercy therfore.
Hit may be such hit is the better, and ye me brewe wolde
Where ye wan this ilk wele bi wytte of yourselven.”
“That watz not forward,” quoth he, “frayst me no more.
For ye haf tan that yow tydez, trawe non other
ye moywe.”
Thay laught, and made hem blythe
Wyth lotez that were to lowe;
To soper thay yede as-swythe,
Wyth dayntês nwe innowe.

And sythen by the chynme in chamber thay seten,
Wyghes the walle wyn weghed to hem oft,
And efte in her boudyng thay baythen in the torn
To fyle the same forwardez that thay before maden:
Wat chaunce so bytayez hor chevysaunce to chaunge,
What nwez so thay nome, at naght quen thay metten.
Thay acorded of the covenauntez before the court alle;
The beverage watz brought forth in boude at that tyme,
Thenne thay lovelych leghten leve at the last,
Uche burne to his bedde busked bylyve.
Bi that the coke haze crowen and cacked bot thryse;
The lorde watz lopen of his bedde, the leudez uchone;
So that the mete and the masse watz metely delyvered,
The douthe dressed to the wod er any day sprenged,
to chace;
Hagh with yhunte and horns
Thurghplaynez thay passe in space,
Uncoupled among tho thornez
Rachez that rane on race.

Sone thay calle of a quest in a ker syde,
The hunte rehayted the houndez that hit fyrst mynged,
Wylde wordez hym warr wyth a wast noisey;
The houndez that hit herde hastid thider swythe,

[1] crowen ... bot thryse  Cocks supposedly crowed at midnight, 3 a.m., and 6 a.m.
And fallen as fast to the fuyt, forthy at ones;  
Thenne such a glaver ande glam of gedered rachchez  
Ros that the rocherez rungen aboute;  
Hunterez hem hardened with horne and wyth muthe.
Then al in a semblé sweyed togeder

Bitwene a flosche in that fryth and a foo cragg;  
In a knot bi a cliffe, at the kerre syde,  
Ther as the rogh rocher unrydel was fallen,  
Thay ferden to the fyndyng, and frekez hem after;  
Thay umbekested the knarre and the knot bothe,

Wyghte, whyl thay wyster wel wythinne hem it were,  
The best that ther breved watz wyth the blodhoundez.

Thenne thay beten on the buskez, and bede hym upryse,  
And he unsoundely out soght seggez overthrowt;
On the sellokest swyn swenged out there,  
Long sythen fro the sounder that sighned for olde,  
For he watz borelych and brode, bor alther-grattest,  
Ful gymme quen he gronym; thenne greved mony,  
For thre at the first thryst that thraft to the erthe,  
And sparrd forth good sped boute spyt more.

Thise other halowed hyghe! ful hyghe, and hay! hay! hay! cryed,
Haden hornez to mouthere, helerly rechated;
Mony watz the myry mouthe of men and of houndez  
That buskez after this bor with bost and wyth noysy  
to quelle.

Ful ofte he hydez the baye,  
And maymez the mute inn melle;  
He hurtez of the houndez, and thay  
Ful yomeryla yale and yelle.

Schalkez to shote at hym schowen to thenne,  
Haled to hym of her arewez, hitten hym oif;  
Bot the poynytez payred at the pyght that pyght in his schelez  
And the barbez of his browe bote non wolde;  
Thagh the schaven schafte shynndered in pieces,  
The hede hypped agayn were-so-ever hit hitte.

Bot quen the dynytez hym dered of her dryghe strokez,  
Then, braymwod for bate, on burnez he rasez,  
Hurtz hem ful helerly ther he forth hyghez,  
And mony argched therat, and on lyte droghen.  
Bot the lorde on a lyght horce launces hym after,  
As burnez bolde upon bent his bugle he blowez,  
He rechated, and rode thurgh ronez ful thyk,  
Suande this wylde swyn til the sunne schafted.

And rushed towards the trail, forty of them together.  
Then such a deafening babel from gathered hounds rose  
That the rocky bank echoed from end to end.  
Huntsmen encouraged them with horn-blasts and shouts;  
And then all in a throng they rushed together

Between a pool in that thicket and a towering crag,  
On a wooded knoll near a cliff at the edge of the marsh  
Where fallen rocks were untidily scattered,  
They ran to the dislodging, with men at their heels.  
The hunters surrounded both the crag and the knoll

Until they were certain that inside their circle  
Was the beast which had made the bloodhounds give tongue.  
Then they beat on the bushes and called him to come out;  
And he broke cover ferociously through a line of men.  
An incredible wild boar charged out there,

Which long since had left the herd through his age,  
For he was massive and broad, greatest of all boars,  
Terrible when he snorted. Then many were dismayed,  
For three men in one rush he threw on their backs,  
And made away fast without doing more harm.

The others shouted "hi!" and "hay, hay!" at the tops of  
their voices,  
Put horns to mouth and loudly sounded recall.  
Many hunters and hounds joyfully gave tongue,  
Hurrying after this boar with outcry and clamor  
to kill.

Often he stands at bay,  
And maiems the circling pack,  
Wounding many hounds  
That piteously yelp and bark.

Men press forward to shoot at him then,  
Loosed their arrows at him, hit him many times;  
But those that struck his shoulders were foiled by their toughness,  
And none of them could pierce through the bristles on his brow.  
Although the polished shaft shivered into pieces,  
The head rebounded away wherever it struck.

But when the hits hurt him with their constant blows,  
Frenzied with fighting he turns headlong on the men,  
And injures them savagely when he charges out,  
So that many grew fearful and drew back further.  
But the lord on a lively horse races after him,

Like a valiant hunter, blowing his horn.  
He urged the hounds on, and through dense thickets rode  
Following this wild boar until the sun went down.
This day wyth this ilk dede thy dryven on this wyse,
Whyle oure luftych 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 he watt hym ate
His mode for to remewe.

Ho commes to the cortyn, and at the knyght totes.
Sir Waven her welcumed worthy on fyrist,
And ho hym yeldez agayn ful yerne of hir wordez,
Settez hir softly by hys syde, and swythez ho laghez.
And wyth a luftych loke ho layde hym thys wordez:
“Sire, yf ye be Waven, wonder me thynkdeck,
Wyghte that is so wel wrayt alway to god,
And connz not of companynne the costez undertake;
And if mon kennes yow hom to knowe, ye kist hom of
our mynde;

Thou hazt forynet yederly that yesterday I taght te
Bi alder-tes token of talk that I cowthe.”
“What is that?” quoth the wyghte, “Iwyse I wot never;
If hit be sothe by hys syde, the blame is myn aven.”
“Yet I kende yow of kyssyng,” quoth the cler thene;

Quere-so countenaunce is couthe quickly to claryme;
That bicumes uche a knyght that cortaesy uses.”
“Do way,” quoth that derr mon, “my dere, that speche;
For that dyrst I not do, lest I devayed were.
If I were werned, I were wrang, iwyse, yf I proferred.”

“Ma fay,” quoth the mer wyf, “ye may not be werned,
Ye ar stef innoghe to constrayne wyth stenke, yf yow lykez,
Yf any were so vilaneus that ye devaye wodle.”
“Ye, be God,” quoth Gawyn, “good is your speche;
Bot threte is unthryvande in thede ther I lende,
And ouch gift that is geven not with goud wylle.
I am at your comaundement, to kyss ye quen yore lykez,
Ye may lach quen yow lyst, and leve quen yow thynkdez,
in space.”
The lady loutez adoun
And comlyly kysses his face;

So they spent the day in this manner, in this wild chase,
While our gracious knight lies in his bed:
Gawyn, happily at home amid bright-colored bedding
so rich.
Nor did the lady fail
To wish her guest good day;
Early she was there

His mood to mollify.

She comes to the curtain and peeps in at the knight.
Sir Gawain welcomes her politely at once,
And she returns his greeting with eager speech,
Seats herself gently at his side and quickly laughs,
And with a charming glance at him uttered these words:
“Sire, if you are Gawain, it astonishes me
That a man always so strongly inclined to good,
Cannot grasp the rules of polite behavior,
And if someone instructs him, lets them drop out of
mind.

You have quickly forgotten what I taught you yesterday,
By the very truest lesson I could put into words.”
“What was that?” said the knight, “Indeed, I don’t know at all.
If what you say is true, the blame is all mine.”
“Yet I told you about kissing,” the fair lady replied,

“To act quickly wherever a glance of favor is seen;
That befits every knight who practises courtesy.”
“Dear lady, enough of such talk,” said that brave man,
“For I dare not do that, lest I were refused.
If repulsed, I should be at fault for having presumed.”

“Ma foi,” said the gay lady, “you could not be refused;
You are strong enough to force your will if you wish,
If any woman were so ill-mannered as to reject you.”
“Yes, indeed,” said Gawain, “what you say is quite true;
But in my country force is considered ignoble,
And so each gift that is not freely given.
I am at your disposal, to kiss when it pleases you,
You may take one when you like, and stop as seems good,
in a while.”

She bends down over him
And gives the knight a kiss;

1. watz hym ate At him in one of two senses or both: in his bedchamber, and bothering him.
2. companynne Critics have suggested that the term may have amorous connotations.
3. Quere-so countenaunce is couthe Wherever looks of favor are shown.
4. devayed Denied, refused: a neologism from Old French, repeated by the lady at 1497.
5. “Ma fay” I.e., ma foi, French: “by my faith,” as asseveration.
Much speche that ther expoun
Of druryes greme and grace.

“I woled wyte at yow, wyghte,” that warythe then sayde,
“And yow wrathed not therwyth, what were the skylle
That so yong and so yepe as ye at this tyme,
So corteaye, so knychtly, as ye ar knawen outhe—
And of alle chevalry to chose, the cheff thyng alyed
Is the lel layk of luf, the lettreyre of armes;
For to telle of this tevelynge of this trewe knyghtez,
Hit is the tytelet token and tyxt of her werkkez;
How ledes for her le lufe hor lyvez han auntered,
Endured for her drury dulful stoundez,
And after wenged with her walour and voyded her care,
And broght blyse into boute1 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 seere twyes,
Yet herde I never of your hed helde no wordez
That ever longed to luf, lasse ne more;
And ye, that are so cortayts and coyn of your hetez,2
Ogte to a yonke thynk yern to schewe
And teche sum tokenez of trweluf crafes.
Why, ar ye lewed, that alle the los weldez?
Other elles ye demen me to dille your dalyaunce to herken?
For shame!
   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 fathe,” quothe Gawayn, “God yow forylde!
Gret is the gode gle, and gomen to me huge,
That so worthy as ye wolde wynne hidere,
And pyne yow with so pouer a man, as play wyth your knyght
With anyslykynnez countenaunce, hit keverez mese;
Bot to take the torvayle to yourself to trweluf expoun,
And towche the temze of tyxt and talez of armez
To yow that, I wot wel, weldez more slyyght
Of that art, bi the halfe, or a hundreth of seche
As I am, other ever schal, in ende ther I leve,
Hit were a folé felekole, my fre, by my trawhe.

For long they then discuss
Love’s misery and bliss.

“I would learn from you, sir,” said that gentele lady,
“If the question was not irksome, what the reason was
That someone as young and valiant as yourself,
So courteous and chivalrous as you are known far and wide—
And of all the aspects of chivalry, the thing most praised
Is the true practice of love, knighthood’s very lore;
For to speak of the endeavors of true knights,
The written heading and text of their deeds is that:
How knights have ventured their lives for true love,
Suffered for their love-longings dismal times,
And later taken revenge on their misery through valor,
Bringing joy to their ladies through their personal merits—
And you are the outstanding knight of your time,
Your fame and your honor are known everywhere,
And I have sat by you here on two separate occasions
Yet never heard from your mouth a solitary word
Referring to love, of any kind at all.

And you, who make such courteous and elegant vows,
Should be eager to instruct a youthful creature,
And teach her some elements of skill in true love.
What, are you ignorant, who enjoy such great fame?
Or do you think me too silly to take in courtly chat?
For shame!
   I come here alone, and sit
   To learn your special play;
   Show me your expertise
   While my husband is away.”

“In good faith,” said Gawayn, “may God reward you!
It gives me great gladness and pleases me hugely
That one as noble as yourself should make your way here,
And trouble yourself with a nobody, trifling with your knight
With any kind of favor: it gives me delight.

But to take the task on myself of explaining true love,
And treat the matter of romance and chivalric tales
To you whom—I know well—have more expertise
In that subject by half than a hundred such men
As myself ever can, however long I may live,
Would be absolute folly, noble lady, on my word.

1 into boute Into the lady’s bower.
2 coyn of your hetes Gracious in your promises of knighdy service.
I wolde yowre wyllnyng worche at myght,
As I am hyghly bihalden, and evermore wylle
Be servaunt to yoreselfen, so save me Dryghtynl!  
Thus hym frayned that fe, and fondet hym ofte,
For to haf wonnen hym to woghe,1 what-so scho thought elles;
Bot he defended hym so fayr that no faut semed,
Ne non evel on nawther halve, nawther thay wyster
bot blyse,
Thay laghed and layked long;
At the last scho con hym kyssy,
Hir leve fayre con scho fonge,
And went wiry waye, iwyse.

Then ruthes hym the renk and ryses to the mass,
And siten hor diner watz dyght and derely served.
The lede with the ladyz layked alte day,
Bot the lordke over the londez launced ful ofte,
Swez his uncey swyn, that swyngez bi the bonkkez
And bote the best of his braches the bakkez in sunder
Ther he bode in his bay, tel bawmen hit breken,
And made hym mawgref his hed2 for to mwe utter,
So felle fonez ther flete when the folk gedered.
Bot yet the styffest to start bi stoundez he made,
Til at the last he watz so mat he myght no more renne,
Bot in the hast that he myght to a hole wynnyn
Of a rasse bi a rokk ther rennez the boerne.
He gete the bonk at his bak, bigynez to scrape,3
The frothe femed at his mouth unfayre bi the wykez,
Whettez his whyte tuscz; with hym then inked
Alle the burnez so bolde that hym by stoden
To nye hym on-ferum, bot neghe hym non durst
for wothe;
He hade hurt so mony byforne
That al thught thenne ful lothe
Be more wyth his tusches torne
That breme watz and braynwode bothe.

Til the knyght com hymself, kachande his blonk,
Sygh hym byde at the bay, his burnez bysyde;
He lyghtes luftych adoun, levez his corsour,
Braydez out a bryght bront and bigly forth strydez,
Foundez fast thurgh the forth ther the felle bydez.

I will carry out your desires with all my power,
As I am in all duty bound, and always will be
The servant of your wishes, may God preserve me!"
Thus that lady made trial of him, tempting him many times
To have led hym into mischief, whatever her purpose;
But he defended himself so skillfully that no fault appeared,
Nor evil on either side, nor anything did they feel
but delight.
They laughed and bantared long;
Then she kissed her guest,
Charmingly took her leave,
And went her way at last.

Then Gawain rouses himself and dresses for mass,
And afterwards dinner was cooked and splendidly served.
The knight diverted himself with the ladies all day,
But the lord raced ceaselessly over the countryside,
After his menacing boar, that scurries over the hills,
And hit the backs of his bravest hounds asunder
Where he stood at bay, until archers broke it,
And forced him unwillingly to move into the open;
So thickly the arrows flew when the hunters gathered.
But yet he made the bravest of them flinch at times,
Until at last he was so tired that he could run no more,
And as fast as he can he makes his way to a hole
By a rocky ledge overlooking the stream.
He gets the river-bank at his back, begins to scrape—
The froth foamed hideously at the corners of his mouth—
And whets his white tusks. Then it grew irksome
For all the bold men who surrounded him triying
To wound him from afar, but for the danger none dared
to get close;
So many had been hurt
That no one wished to risk
To be more savaged by
A maddened boar’s tusk.

Until the lord himself came, spurring his horse,
Saw the boar standing at bay, ringed by his men;
He nimbly dismounts, leaving his courser,
Unsheathes a bright sword and mightily strides,
Hastens quickly through the stream towards the waiting boar.

1 to haf wonnen hym to woghe  It is uncertain whether woghe means “wrong” or “woo.”
2 mawgref his hed  In spite of himself.
3 bigynez to scrape  Angriyly scrape (the earth with his feet).
The wylde watz war of the wygh with wepen in honde,
Hef heghly the herne, so hetterly he fnast
That fele ferde for the freke, lest felle hym the worre.
The swyn settez hym out on the segge even,
That the burne and the bor were both upon hepez
In the wyghtest of the water: the worre hade that other,
For the mon merkkez hym wel, as thay mette fyrest,
Set sadly the scharp in the slot even,
Hit hym up to the hult, that the hert schyndered,
And he yarrande hym yelde, and yeldoun the water
ful tyt.
A hundreth houndez hym hent,
That breuely con hym bite,
Burnez him broght to bent,
And dogges to dete endite.

There watz blawyng of pry in mony breme horne,
Heghe halowing on highe with hathelez thay myght;
Brachets bayed that best, as bidden the maysterez
Of that chargeaunt chace that were chef huntez.
Thenne a wygh that watz wys upon wodcartez
To unlace this bor lufly bigynnez.
Fyrist he hewes of his hed and on highe settez,
And sythen rendez him al roge bi the rygge after,
Braydez out the bowes, brennez hon on glede,
With bred blent therwith his braches rewardez.
Sythen he brinettez out the brawn in byght brode cheldez,
And hatz out the hastlettez, as highly bismeze;
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 re the burnes selven
That him forferde in the forthe thurge forse of his honde
so stronge.
Til he seye Sir Gawayne
In halle hym thoght ful longe;
He calde, and he com gyn
His feez ther for to fonge.

The lordz ful lowde with lote and laughe myr, y
When he seye Sir Lowawy, with solace he spekez;
The goude ladysz were geten, and gedered the
meyny,
He schewez hem the scheldez, and schapes hem the tale
Of the larges ez and the lenthe, the litheremz alz
The beast saw the man with his weapon in hand,
Raised his bristles erect, and so fiercely snorted
That many feared for the man, lest he got the worst of it.
The boar charged out, straight at the man,
So that he and the beast were both in a heap
Where the water was swiftest. The other had the worse;
For the man takes aim carefully as the two met,
And thrust the sword firmly straight into his throat,
Drove it up to the hilt, so that the heart burst open,
And squalling he gave up, and was swept through the water
downstream.
Seized by a hundred hounds
Fierce and sharp of tooth,
Men dragged him to the bank,
And dogs do him to death.

There was sounding of capture from many brave horns,
Proud shouting by knights as loud as they could,
Hounds bayed at that beast, as bidden by the masters
Who were the chief huntsmen of that wearisome chase.
Then a man who was expert in hunting practice
Skilfully begins to dismember this boar.
First he cuts off the head and sets it on high,
And then roughly opens him along the spine,
Throws out the entrails, grills them over embers,
And rewards his hounds with them, mixed with bread.
Next he cuts out the boar’s-meat in broad glistening slabs,
And takes out the innards, as properly follows;
Yet he fastens the two sides together unbroken,
And then proudly hangs them on a strong pole.
Now with this very boar they gallop towards home;
Carrying the boar’s head before the same man
Who had killed it in the stream by force of his own
strong hand.
Until he saw Gawain
It seemed a tedious time,
He gladly came when called,
His due reward to claim.

The lordz noisy with speech and merry laughter,
Joyfully exclaims at the sight of Sir Gawayn.
The good ladies were brought down and the household
assembled;
He shows them the sides of meat, and gives an account
Of the boar’s huge size and the ferocity
Of the were of the wylde swyn in wod ther he fled.
That other knyght ful comly comended his dedez,
And prayd hit as a gret prys that he proved hade,
For suche a brawne of a best, the bolde burne sayde,
Ne such sydes of a swyn seghe he never are.
Thenne honded thyth the hoghe hed, the hend mon hit praysed,
And let lodly therat the lorde for to here.

“Nowe, Gawayn,” quoth the godmon, “this gomen is your awen
By fyn forwarde and faste, faythely ye knowe.”
“Hit is sothe,” quoth the segge, “and as siker trwe
Alle my get I schal yow gif agayn, bi my travthe.”
He hent the hathel aboute the halse, and hendely hym kysses,
And efforsons of the same he served hym there.
“Now ar we even,” quoth the hathel, “in this eventide,
Of alle the covenantes that we knay, sythen I com hider,
bi lawe.”
The lorde sayde, “Bi saynt Gyle,
Ye ar the best that I knowe!
Ye ben ryche in a whyle,
Such chaffer and ye droue.”

Thenne thay teldet tables trestes alofe,
Kesten clothez upon; clere lyght thenne
Wakned by wowzes, waxen torches;
Segges sette and served in sale al aboute;
Much glam and gle glent up therinne
Aboute the fyre upon flet, and on fele wyse
At the soper and after, mony athel songez,
As coundutes of Krystmasse and carolez newe,
With al the manerly merthe that mon may of telle.
And ever oure lyghty knyght the lady bisyde,
Such semblant to that segge semly so thrée;
Wyth stille stollen countenaunce, that stalworth to plese,
That al forwondered watz the wyghe, and wroth with hymselfen,
Bot he nold not for his nurture nume hir agaynez.
Bot dalt with hir al in daynté, how-se-ever the dede turned towras t.
Quen thay hade played in halle
As longe as hor wylle hom last,

Of the fight with the beast in the wood where he fled.
The other knyght warmly commended his dedez,
And praised his action as proof of his excellence,
For such boar’s-meat, the brave knyght declared,
And such sides of wild boar he had never seen before.
Then they picked up the huge head, the polite man praised it
And pretended to feel horror, to honor the lord.

“Nowe, Gawayn,” said his host, “this quary is all yours,
By fully ratifid covenant, as you well know.”
“That is so,” said the knyght, “and as truly indeed
I shall give you all I gained in return, by my pledged word.”
He grasped the lord round the neck and graciously kisses him,
And then a second time treated him in the same way.
“Nowe we are quit,” said Gawain, “at the end of the day,
Of all the agreements we have made since I came here,
in due form.”
The lord said, “By St. Giles,
You’re the best man I know!
You’ll be a rich one soon
If you keep on trading so.”

Then tables were set up on top of trestles,
And tablecloths spread on them: bright light then
Glittered on the walls from waxen torches.
Attendants laid table and served throughout hall.
A great noise of merry-making and joking arose
Round the fire in the center; and of many kinds,
At supper and afterwards, noble songs were sung,
Such as Christmas carols and the newest dances,
With all the fitting amusement that could be thought;
Our courteous knight sitting with the lady throughout.
Such a loving demeanor she displayed to that man,
Through furtive looks of affection to give him delight,
That he was utterly astonished and angry inside;
But he could not in courtesy rebuff her advances,
But treated her politely, even though his actions might be
misconstrued.
When the revelry in hall
Had lasted long enough,

\[ Such chaffer and ye droue If you carry on such a trade (since on the second day Gawain has doubled his takings). Bertilak makes another joking allusion to marketing at the third exchange: see l. 1938–39.\]


To chambre he con hym calle,
   And to the chemnë thay past.

Ande ther thay dronken, and dalten, and demed eft nwe
To norme 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 true segge, I siker my trawthe
Thou schal cheve to the grene chapel thy charres to make,
Leude, on Nw Yeres lyght, longe bfore pryme."

Forthy thow lye in thy loft and lach thyn ese,
And I schal hunt in this holt, and halde the touchez,
Chaunge 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 quy! we may and mymne upon joye,
For the lur may lach when-so mon lykez."  
This watz graythely gaunted, and Gawayne is lenged,
Blithe brught 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 mornynge, his moutnure he askes.
Alle the hatehe that on horse schulde helden hym after
Were boun busked on hor blonkhek before the halle gatez.
Ferly fayre watz the foldes, for the forst clenged;
In red ruded upon rak rises the sunne,
And ful clere castez the clowdes of the welkyn.
Hunteres unhardeali bi a holt syde,
Rochere rougen bi rys for rude of her horses;
Summer 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;
His felawes fallen hym to, that fnausted ful thike,
Runnen forth in a rabel in his ryght fare,

To the fireside in his room
   The lord took Gawain off.

And there they drank and chattet, and spoke once again
To repeat the arrangement on New Year's Eve;

But the knight begged leave to depart the next day,
For it was next time for the appointment that he had to keep.
The lord held him back, begging him to remain,
And sayde, "As I am an honest man, I give you my word
That you shall reach the Green Chapel to settle your affairs,
Dear sir, on New Year's Day, well before nine.
Therefore lie in your bed enjoying your ease,
And I shall hunt in the woods, and keep the compact,
Exchange winnings with you when I return here;
For I have tested you twice, and find you trustworthy.

Now tomorrow remember, 'Best throw third time';
Let us make merry while we can and think only of joy,
For misery can be found whenever a man wants it.'"
This was readily agreed, and Gawain is stayed;
Drink was gladly brought to him, and with torches they went
to their beds.
   Sir Gawain lies and sleeps
   All night taking his rest;
   While eager for his sport
   By dawn the lord was dressed.

After mass he and his men snatchet a mouthful of food:
The morning was cheerful, he calls for his horse.
All the knights who would ride after him on horses
Were ready arrayed in the saddle outside the hall doors.
The countryside looked splendid, girded by the frost;
The sun rises fiery through drifting clouds,
And then dazzling bright drives the rack from the sky.
At the edge of a wood hunters unleashed the hounds;
Among the trees rocks resounded with the noise of their horns.
Some picked up the scent where a fox was lurking,
Search back and forwards in their cunning practice.
A small hound gives tongue, the huntsman calls to him,
His fellows rally around, panting loudly,
And dash forward in a rabble right on the fox's track.

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1  Thou schal cheve ... bfore pryme  Prime begins either at 6 a.m. or at sunrise. At 1073 Bertilak promises that Gawain will *cum to that merk at mydsmorn*, meaning at 9 a.m. In fact the sun rises when he is on the way to the Green Chapel, 2085–86. In northwest England midwinter sunrise would not occur before 8 a.m. Two hours earlier it would be completely dark.

2  balde the touchez  Keep the terms of the agreement.

3  that his craftez kepes  Who attends to his pursuits.

4  Traylez ofte a traveres  Track the scent by working back and forth across the line.
And he fyskez hem byfore; thay founden hym sone,
And quen thay seghe hym with syght thay sued hym fast,
Wreghande hym ful weterly with a wroth noyse;
And he trantes and tornayez thurgh mony tene greve,
Havilounez, and herkenez bi hegges ful ofte.
At the last bi a littal dich he lepez over a spenne,
Stelez out ful stilly bi a strotho rande;
Went half wyt of the wode1 with wylez fro the houndes;
Thenne watz he went, or he wyst, to a wale tryster,
Ther thre thro at a thrich thrat hym at ones,
   al graye.
       He blenchd agayn bilyve,
       And stifly start on-stray,2
       With alle the wo on lyve
       To the wod he went away.

Thenne watz hit list upon liff to lythen the houndez,
When alle the mute hade hym met, menged togeder:
Such a sorwe at that syght thay sette on his hede
As alle the clamberande clyffes hade clatered on hepes;
Here he watz halowd, when hathelez hym metten,
   Loude he watz rayked with yarande speche;
   Ther he watz threted and ofte thef called,
   And ay the titlens at his tal, that tary he ne myght.
   Ofte he watz runnen at, when he out rayked,
   And ofte reled in agayn, so Reniarde3 watz wyle.
   And ye, he lad hem bi lagmon,4 the lorde and his meyny,
On this maner bi the mountes quyle myd-over-under,5
Whyke the hendre knyght at hom holsomly slepes
Withinne the comly cortynes, on the colde morn.
   Bot the lady for luft 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 ethe,
That watz furred ful fyne with fellez wel pured;
No hweze6 goud on hir hede bot the haerger stones
Trasad aboute hir tresour by twenty in clusters;
Hir thriven face and hir throte throwen al nakéd,
   He scampers ahead of them, they soon found his trail,
   And when they caught sight of him followed fast,
   Abusing him furiously with an angry noise.
   He twists and dodges through many a dense copse,
   Often doubling back and listening at the hedges.
   At last he jumps over a fence by a little ditch,
Creeps stealthily by the edge of a bush-covered marsh,
Thinking to escape from the wood and the hounds by his wiles.
Then he came, before he knew it, to a well-placed station,
Where three fierce greyhounds flew at him at once
   in a rush.
       Undaunted changing course
       He quickly swerved away,
       Pursued into the woods
       With hideous outcry.

Then it was joy upon earth to hear the hounds giving tongue
When all the pack had come upon him, mingled together:
Such a cursing at that sight they called down on his head
As if all the clustering cliffs had crashed down in a mass.
Here he was yelled at when hunters happened upon him,
   Loudly he was greeted with chiding speech;
There he was reviled and often called thief,
And always the hounds at his tail, that he could not pause.
Many times he was run at when he made for the open,
And many times doubled back, so cunning was Reynard.
And ye6 strung out he led them, the lord and his followers,
Across the hills in this manner until mid-afternoon,
While the knight in the castle takes his health-giving sleep
Behind splendid bed-curtains on the cold morn.
But out of love the lady did not let herself sleep,
Nor the purpose to weaken that was fixed in her heart;
But rose from her bed quickly and hastened there
   In a charming mantle reaching to the ground,
That was richly lined with well-trimmed furs;
   No modest coif on her head, but skillfully cut gems
   Arranged about her hair-fret in clusters of twenty;
Her lovely face and throat displayed uncovered,

1 Went haf wyt of the wode   Thought to have escaped out of the wood.
2 on-stray   In a different direction.
3 Reniard      Renard was the crafty fox hero of a series of old French poems.
4 he lad hem bi lagmon   The critic Norman Davis explains lagmon as “the last man in a line of reapers,” who would advance diagonally across a field; hence “strung out.”
5 quyle myd-over-under  Variously explained as mid-morning, midday, or afternoon. When the fox is killed it is niegh nyght (1922).
6 hweze   So the manuscript; some critics prefer hweof. The sense of the passage is that the lady is not wearing the headdress of a married woman.
Hir brest bare before, and bihinde eke.  
Ho come withinne the chambre done, and closes hit hir after,  
Wayvez up a wyndow, and on the wyndow callez,  
And radly thus rehayed hym with hir riche wordes,  
with chere:  
“A, mon, how may thou slepe,  
This morning is so clere?”  
He watz in drowpyng depe,  
Bot thenne he con hir here.

In dregh droupyng of dreme draveled that noble,  
As mon that watz in mornynge of mony thor thoghtes,  
How that destyné schulde that day dele hym his wyerde  
At the grene chapel, when he the gome metes,  
And bihoves his buffet abide withoute debate more;  
Bot quen that comly com he kevered his wyttes,  
Swenges out of the swevenes, and swarez with hast.  
The lady hufflych com laghtande swette,  
Felle over his fayre face, and fely hym kyssed;  
He welcomes hir worthily with a wale chere.  
He sey hir so glorious and gayly ayred,  
So faultes of hir fetues and of so fyne hewes,  
Wight wallande joye warmed his hert.  
With smothe smyleng and smolt thay smeten into merthe,  
That al watz blis and bonchef that breke hem bitteyne,  
and wynne.  
Thay lanced wordes gode,  
Much wele then watz therinne;  
Gret perile bitteyne hem stod,  
Nif Maré of hir knyght myyne.

Fo that prynces of pris depresed hym so thikke,  
Nurned hym so neghe the thred, that nede hym bihowed  
Other lach ther hir luf other lodly refuese.  
He cared for his cortayse, lest crathayn he were,  
And more for his meschef yf he schulde make synne,  
And be traytor to that tolke that that telde aght.  
“God schylde,” quoth the schalk, “that schal not befalle!”  
With luf-laghnyng a lyt he layd hym bissyde  
Alle the spechez of specialty that spranghe of her mouthe.  
Quoth that burde to the burne, “Blame ye deserve  
Yf ye luf not that lyf that ye lye neste,

Her breast was exposed, and her shoulders bare.  
She enters the chamber and shuts the door after her,  
Throws open a window and calls to the knight,  
Rebuking him at once with merry words in play:

“Ah, sir, how can you sleep?  
The morning is so clear!”  
Deep in his drowsines  
Her voice broke in his ear.

In the stupor of a dream that nobleman muttered,  
Like a man overburdened with troublesome thoughts;  
How destiny would deal him his fate on the day  
When he meets the man at the Green Chapel,  
And must stand the return blow without any more talk:

But when that lovely one spoke he recovered his wits,  
Broke out of his dreaming and hastily replied.  
The gracious lady approached him, laughing sweetly,  
Bent over his handsome face and daintily kissed him.  
He welcomes her politely with charming demeanor;

Seeing her so radiant and attractively dressed,  
Every part of her so perfect, and in color so fine,  
Hot passionate feeling welled up in his heart.  
Smiling gently and courteously they made playful speech,  
So that all that passed between them was happiness, joy  
and delight.  
Gracious words they spoke,  
And pleasure reached its height.  
Great peril threatened, should  
Mary not mind her knight.

For that noble lady so constantly pressed,  
Pushed him so close to the verge, that either he must  
Take her love there and then or churlishly reject it.  
He felt concerned for good manners, lest he behaved like a boor,  
And still more lest he shame himself by an act of sin,  
And treacherously betray the lord of the castle.  
“God forbid!” said the knight, “That shall not come about!”  
With affectionate laughter he put to one side  
All the loving inducements that fell from her mouth.  
Said that lady to the knight, “You desire rebuke

If you feel no love for the person you are lying beside,
Bifore alle the wyghte in the worlde wounded in hert,
Bot if ye haft a leman, a lever, that you lykez better,
And folden fayth to that fre, festned so harde
That yow lausen ne lyst—and that I leue noughte;
And that ye telle me that now truly I pray yow,
For alle the lufez upon lye layne not the sothe for gile.”
The knyght sayde, “Be sayn Jon,”
And smethely con he smyle,
“In fayth I welde right non,
Ne non wil welde the quile.”

“That is a worde,” quoth that wyght, “that worst is of alle,
Bot I am swared for sothe, that sore me thinkkeze.
Kyse me now comly, and I shal cakh heten,

I may bot mourne upon molde, as may that much loyvys,”
Sykande he sweghe doun and semly hym kyssed,
And sithen he severs hym froy, and says as ho stondes,
“Now, dere, at this departynge do me this ese,
Gif me sumquart of thy gifte, thi glove if hit were,
That I may myyne on the, mon, my mournyng to lassan.”
“Now iwyse,” quoth that wyghte, “I wolde I had heere
The levest thing for thi luf that I in londe welde,
For ye haf deserved, for sothe, sellyly ofte
More rewardes bi resoun then I reche myght;

Bot to dele yow for druyne that dawed bot neked,
Hit is not your honour to haf at this tymye
A glove for a garsoun of Gawaynez giftez;
And I am here an erande in erdez uncouthe,
And have no men wyth no males with menseful thyngez;

That misykez me, ladé, for luf at this tymye,
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 rught hym a riche rynk of red golde werkez,
With a starande ston stondande alofte
That bere blusshande bemere as the bryght sunne—
Wyt ye wel, hit warz worth wele ful hoge.
Bot the rynk hit renayed, and redly he sayde,
“I wil no giftez, for God, my gae, at this tymye;
I haf none yow to none, ne noghte wyth I take.”

More than anyone on earth wounded in her heart;
Unless you have a mistress, someone you prefer,
And have plighted truth with that lady, so strongly tied
That you wish not to break it—which now I believe;
And I beg you now to confess that honestly:
For all the loves in the world hide not the truth
in guile.”
The knight said, “By St. John,”
And gave a pleasant smile,
“In truth I have no one,
Nor seek one for this while.”

“That remark,” said the lady, “is the worst you could make,
But I am answered indeed, and painfully, I feel.
Kiss me now lovingly, and I will hasten from here,

I must spend my life grieving, as a woman deeply in love.”
Sighing she stooped down and kissed him sweetly,
And then moves away from him and says, standing there,
“Now, dear sir, do me this kindness at parting,
Give me something as a present, for instance your glove,
That I may remember you by, to lessen my sorrow.”

“Now truly,” said that man, “I wish I had here
The dearest thing in the world I possess for your love,
For you have truly deserved, wonderfully often,
More recompense by right than I could repay.
But to give you as love-token something worth little
Would you do no honor, or to have at this time
A glove for a keepsake, as Gawain’s gift.
I am here on a mission in unknown country,
And have no servants with bags full of precious things;
That grieves me, lady, for your sake at this time,
But each man must do as conditions allow; take no offense
or pain.”
“No, most honored sir,”
Then said that lady free,
“Though I get no gift from you,
You shall have one from me.”

She held out a precious ring of finely worked gold
With a sparkling jewel standing up high,
Its facets flashing as bright as the sun:
Take my word, it was worth an enormous sum.
But the knight would not accept it, and straightaway said,
“I want no gifts, I swear, dear lady, at this time;
I have nothing to offer you, and nothing will I take.”
Ho bede hit hym ful blysly, and he hir bode wernes,
And swee swyfte by his sothate that he hit sesen nolde,
And ho soré that he forsoke, and sayde thereafter,
“If ye rene my rynk, to rych for hit semze,
Ye wolde not so hyghly halden be to me,
I schal gif yow my girdel, that gaynes yow lasse.”

Ho lach a lace lyghtly that leke umbe hir sydez,
Knit upon hir kyrtel under the clere mantyle;
Gered hit watz with grene sylke and with golde schaped,
Noght bot arounde brayden,1 beten with fynghrez;
And that ho bede to the burne, and blythely bisogh,
Thagh hit unworthi were, that he hit take wolde.
And he say that he noldhe neghe in no wyse
Nauther golde ne garysoun, er God hym grace sende
To achieve to the chaunce that he hadde chosen there.
“And therefore, I pry yow, displese yow noght,
And letter be your bisinesse, for I baythe hit yow never
to graunte.
I am derely to yow biholde
Because of your semblaunt,
And ever in hot and colde
To be your true servaunt.”

“Now forsake ye this silke,” sayde the burde thenne,
“For hit is symple in hitselfe; and so wel hit semze.
Lo, so hit is littel, and lasse hit is worthy;
But who-so knew the costes that knyt at therinne,
He wolde hit prayse at more prys, paraventure.
For quoy gome so is gorde with this grene lace,
While he hit hede hemely halched aboute,
Ther is no hathel under heven towehe hym that myght,
For he myght not be slayn for slyght upon ethre.”

Then kest the knyght, and hit come to his hert
Hit were a juel for the joparde that hym jugged were:
When he acheved to the chapel his chek for to fech,
Myght he haf slappe to be unslayn, the slghte were noble.
Thenne he thulged with hir threpe and thole d 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 bisogh ym, for hir sake, discver hit never,
Bot to lely layne fro hir lorde; the leude hym acoordez
That never wyghs shuldhe hit wyts, iywysse, bot thay twayne
for noghte.

She pressed him insistently, and he declines her request,
Swearing quickly on his word that he would never touch it,
And she was grieved that he refused it, and said to him then,
“If you reject my ring because you think it too precious,
And wish not to be so deeply indebted to me,
I shall give you my girdle, that profits you less.”

Quickly she unbuckled a belt clipped round her waist,
Fastened over her kirtle beneath the fine mantle;
It was woven of green silk and trimmed with gold,
Embroidered at the edges and decorated by hand;
And this she offered to the knight, and sweetly implored him
That despite its slight value he would accept it.
And he declared absolutely that he would never agree
To take either gold or keepsake before God gave him grace
To finish the task he had undertaken.
“And therefore I beg you, do not be displeased,
And cease your insisting, for I shall never be brought
to consent.
I am deeply in your debt
Because of your kind favor,
And will through thick and thin
Remain your servant ever.”

“Now, do you refuse this belt,” the lady said then,
“Because it is worth little? and so truly it appears.
See, it is indeed a trifle, and its worth even less;
But anyone who knew the power woven into it
Would put a much higher price on it, perhaps.
For whoever is buckled into this green belt,
As long as it is tightly fastened about him
There is no man on earth who can strike him down,
For he cannot be killed by any trick in the world.”

Then the knight reflected, and it flashed into his mind
This would be a godsend for the hazard he must face
When he reached the chapel to receive his deserts;
Could he escape being killed, the trick would be splendid.
Then he suffered her pleading and allowed her to speak,
And she pressed the belt on him, offering it at once—
And he consented and gave way with good grace—
And she begged him for her sake never to reveal it,
But loyally hide it from her husband. Gawain gives his word
That no one should ever know of it, not for anything,
but themselves.

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1 Nought bot arounde brayden No part of which was not embroi-
dered at the edges.
He thonkked hir oft ful swythe,
Ful thro with hert and thought.
Bi that on thynne sythe
Ho hatz kyst the knyght so toght.

Thenne lachez ho hir leve, and levez hym there,
For more myrthe of that mon mought 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,
Prevély aproched to a prest, and prayed hym there
That he wolde lyste his lyf 1 and lern hym better
How his sawle schuld be saved when he schuld seye hethen.

There he schrof hym schyrly and schewed his mysdedez,
Of the more and the myyne, and merci besechez,
And of absolucioun he on the segge calleth;
And he asoyle hym surely and sette hym so clene
As domexday schulde haf benght on the morn.
And sythen he mace hym as mery among the fre ladys,
With comelych caroles and alle lynnes joye,
As never he did bot that daye, to the dek nyghth,
with blys.

Uche mon hade daynté thare
Of hym, and sayde, “Iwyse,
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 londe on the launde ledande his gommes.
He hatz forfaren this fox that he folwed longe;
As he spent over a spenne to spye the schrewe,
Ther as he hert the howndes that hasted hym swythe,
Renaud com richchande thurgh a rogh greve,
And alle the rabele in a res ryght at his helez.
The wyghte watz war of the wylde, and warly abides,
And brayeze ou the bryght bronde, and at the best castez.
And he schunt for the scharp, and schulde haf arered;

He gave her heartfelt thanks
With earnest mind and sense;
By then she has three times
Kissed that valiant prince.

Then she takes her departure, leaving him there,
For more pleasure from that man was not to be had.
When she had gone, Gawain quickly makes himself ready,
Gets up and dresses himself in splendid array,
Puts away the love-token the lady gave him,

Hid it carefully where he could find it again.
Then quickly to the chapel he makes his way,
Approached a priest privately, and besought him there
To hear his confession and instruct him more clearly
How his soul could be saved when he leaves this world.

There he confessed himself honestly and admitted his sins,
Both the great and the small, and forgiveness begs,
And calls on the priest for absolution.
And the priest absolved him completely, and made him as clean
As if the Judgment were appointed for the next day.
And then Gawain makes merry with the noble ladys,
With charming dance-songs and gaiety of all kinds,
As he never did before that day, until darkness fell,
with joy.

Each man had courtesy
From him, and said, “Sure,
So merry since he came
He never was before.”

Let him stay in that shelter, and love come his way!
But still the lord is afield, enjoying his sport.

He has headed off the fox that he pursued so long;
As he leapt over a hedge to look for the villain,
Where he heard the hounds barking as they chased him fast,
Reynard came running through a rough thicket
With the pack howling behind him, right at his heels.
The man caught sight of the fox, and warily waits,
Unsheathes his bright sword and slashes at the beast;
And he swerved away from the blade and would have
turned back.

1 *lyste his lyf* Hear his confession. Much ink has been spilt over the passage. If Gawain tells the priest about his love-token he would be obliged to return it; if he does not reveal the liaison he cannot be *schrof schyrly* or given absolution.
A rach rapes hym to, ryght er he myght,
And ryght biforme the hors fete thay fel on hym alle,
And worried me this wyly1 wyth a wroth noyse.
The lorde lyghtez bilyve, and lachez hym sone,
Rased hym ful radly out of the rach mouthes,
Haltedeg hege over his heede, halowez faste,
And ther bayen aboute hym mony brath houndez.
Huntes hyghed hem theder with hornez ful mony,
Ay rechatande aryght til thay the renk seyen.
Bi that watz cornen his compeyny noble
Alle that ever ber bugle blowed at ones,
And alle thys other halowed that had no homes;
Hit watz the myristi mute that ever men herde,
The rich rund that ther watz rayed for Renaulde saule
with lote.
Hor houndez thay ther rewarde,
Her hedezy thay fawne and frote,
And sythen thay tan Reynarde
And tyrven of his cote.

And thenne thay helden to home, for hit watz niegh nyght,
Strakande ful stowlly in hor store hornez.
The lorde is lyght at last at hisz lef home,
Fyndez fire upon fet, the freke ther-byside,
Sir Gawayn the gode, that glad watz withalle,
Among the ladys for luf he ladde much joye.
He were a bleaunt of blwe that brade to the erthe,
His surkot semed hym wel that softe watz forred,
And his hode of that ilke henged on his schulder,
Blande al of blaunder were bothe al aboute.
He metez me this godmon inmyddez the flore,
And al with gomen he hym gret, and goudly he sayde,
“1 schal fylle upon yrst oure forwardez nouteh,
That we spelly hem spoken, ther spared watz no drynk.”
Then acoles he the knyght and kysses hym thryes,
As savelry and sadlys as he hem sette couthë.
“Bi Kyzy,” quoth that other knyght, “ye ech much sel
In cheвисaunce of this chaffet, yf ye hade goud chepez.”2

A hound rushed at him before he could turn,
And right at the horse’s feet the pack fell on him all,
Tearing at the wily one with an enraged noise.
The lord swiftly dismounts, grabs the fox at once,
Lifted it quickly out of the hounds’ mouths,
Holds it high over his head, halloos loudly,
And many fierce hounds surround him there, baying.
Huntes hurried towards him with many horns blowing,
Sounding rally in proper fashion until they saw the lord.
When his noble company was all assembled,
Everyone carrying a bugle blew it at once,
And the others, without horns, raised a great shout.
It was the most glorious baying that man ever heard,
The noble clamor set up there for Reynard’s soul
with din.
Huntes reward their hounds,
Heads they rub and pat;
And then they took Reynard
And stripped him of his coat.

And then they set off for home, for it was nearly night,
Stridently sounding their mighty horns.
At last the lord dismounts at his well-loved home,
Finds a fire burning in hall, the knight waiting beside,
Sir Gawain the good, completely content,
Taking great pleasure from the ladies’ affection.
He wore a blue mantle of rich stuff reaching the ground;
His softly furred surcoat suited him well,
And his hood of the same stuff hung on his shoulder,
Both trimmed with ermine along the edges.
He meets his host in the middle of the hall,
Laughingly greeted him, and courteously said,
“Now I shall first carry out the terms of our covenant,
Which we readily agreed on when wine was not spared.”
Then he embraces the lord and gives him three kisses,
With as much relish and gravity as he could contrive.
“By God,” said that other knight, “you had much luck
In winning this merchandise, if the price was right.”

1 *worried me this wyly* Tore at the fox. The ethic dative *me* is colloquial. Other examples occur at 2014 and 2144.
2 *yf ye hade goud chepez* If you struck a good bargain.
1940 “Ye, of the chepe no charg,” quoth cheffy that other,  
As is perly payed the porchez that I aghte.”  
“Mary,” quoth that other man, “myyn is bilynde,  
For I haf hunted al this day, and noght haf I geten  
Bot this foule fox felle—the fende haf the godez!  
And that is ful pore for to pay for suche prys or things  
As ye haf thryght me here thro, suche the cosses  
so gode.”  
“Inogh,” quoth Sir Gawayn,  
“I thonk yow, bi the rode”  
And how the fox watz slayn  
He tolde hym as thay stode.

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

1945 Gawayn and the godemon so glad were thay bothe  
Bot if the doute had doted, other dronken ben other.  
Both the mon and the meyny maden mony japez  
Til the sesoun watz seghen that thay sev mestoe;  
Bornez to hor bedde behoved at the laste.

1950 Thenne lowly his leve at the lorde fyrst  
Fochchez he this fre mon, and fayre he hym thonkkez  
“Of such a selly sojorne as I haf hade here,  
Your honour at this hyghfe fest, the hyghfe kyng yow yelde!  
I gef yow me for on of yourez, if yowresel fykez,  
For I mot nedes, as ye wot, meve to-morne,  
And ye me take sum tolke to tache, 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.”  
“ln god faythe,” quoth the godmon, “wyth a goud wylle  
Al that ever I yow hyght halde shal I redé.”

1960 Ther anyngnes he a serveant to sette hym in the waye,  
And counde hym by the downe, thay he no drechch had,  
For to ferke thrugh the frith, and fare at the gaynest  
i bi greve.

1940 “Oh, never mind the price,” replied the other quickly,  
“So long as the goods I got have been honestly paid.”  
“Marry,” said the other man, “mine don’t compare,  
For I have hunted all day, and yet have caught nothing  
But this stinking fox pelt—the devil take the goods!”  
And that is a meager return for such precious things  
As you have warmly pressed on me, three such kisses  
so good.”

1945 “Enough,” said Gawain,  
“I thank you, by the Rod”;  
And how the fox was killed  
He heard as there they stood.

1950 With mirth and minstrelsy, and all the food they would wish,  
They made as much merriment as any men could  
With laughter of ladies and jesting remarks.

1955 Both Gawain and the lord were ravished with joy  
As if the company had gone crazy or taken much drink.  
Both the lord and his retainers played many tricks  
Until the time came round when they must separate:  
Folk to their beds must betake them at last.

1960 Then humbly this noble knight first takes leave  
Of the lord, and graciously gives him thanks:  
“For such a wonderful stay as I have had here,  
Honored by you at this holy feast, may God repay you!  
I offer myself as your servant, if you agree,  
For I am compelled, as you know, to leave tomorrow,  
If you will assign someo me to show me, as you promised,  
The road to the Green Chapel, as God will allow me,  
To get what fate ordains for me on New Year’s Day.”  
“ln good faith,” said the lord, “very willingly,  
Everything I ever promised you I shall readily give.”

1970 There he appoints a servant to put Gawain on the road  
And guide him over the falls, so that he would not be delayed,  
To ride through the woods and take the shortest path  
in the trees.

1 bi the rode  I.e., by the Cross (on which Christ was crucified).

2 Gawayn ... other  The syntax of these two lines seems erratic.  
Instead of following so glad with a comparison “as if” the poet  
continues Bot if, meaning unless. The intended sense of the passage  
seems to be, “They could only have been more deliciously happy if  
the whole company had gone crazy or got drunk.”

3 I gef yow ... grene chapel  Gawain politely offers to become  
 Bertilak’s servant (on of yourez) if he will give him a man (take sum  
tolke) to guide him to the Green Chapel.

4 the dome of my wyrdes  The judgment of my fate.

5 to ferke thrugh the frith  To ride through the wood, as Gawain does  
at 2084. Bi greve refers to it again.
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Fitt 4

Review Copy

The lord Gawain con thonk,
Such worship he wolde hym weve.
Then at the ladyez wolond
The knyght hatz tan his leve.

With care and wyth kyssynge he carppez hem tille,
And fele thrwyande thonkkez he thrat hom to have,
And thay yelden hym agayn yepy that ilk.
Thay bikende hym to Kryst with ful colde sykyngez.
Sythen fro the meyny he mensky departe;
Uche mon that he mette, he made him 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 worthyly 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.
Yf he ne slepe soundlyly say ne dar I,
For he hade mucho on the morn to myyne, yf he wolde,
in thoght.
Let hym lyghthe there stille,
He hazt nere that he soght;
And ye wyl a whyle be stytle1
I schal telle yow how thay wroght.

Now neghez the Nw Yere, and the nyght passez,
The day dryvez to the derk, as Dryghtyn bidez;
Bot wylde wederez of the worlde wakned theroute,
Clowdes kesten keny the colde to the erthe,
Wyth nyghte innoghe of the northe the naked to tene.
The snawe sinitred ful snart, that snypped the wykyle;
The weberleand wynde wapped fro the hydge,
And drof uche dale ful of dryftes ful grete.
The leude lystened ful wel that ley in his bedde,
Thagh he lowkez his lidez, ful lytyel he slepes;
Bi iche kok that crue he kwaue wel the steven.
Deliverly he dressed up, or the sprenged,
For there watz light of a laump that lemed in his chambre;
He called to his chamberlayn, that cofly hym swared,

Gawain thanked the lord,
Payng him great respect;
Then from those noble ladies
Took leave, as was correct.

With tears and with kisses he addresses them both,
And begged them to accept many profuse thanks,
And they immediately returned the same words to him.
They commended him to Christ with many deep sighs.
Then from the household he takes courteous leave;
To each man whom he met he expressed his thanks
For his service and kindness and the personal pains
They had taken in busying themselves for his sake;
And each man was as sorry to part from him there
As if they had honorably lived with that nobleman ever.
Then with attendants and torches he was led to his room,
And cheerfully brought to his bed and his rest.
Whether or not he slept soundly I dare not say,
For he had much about the next day to turn over, if he wished,
in his mind.
Let him lie there undisturbed,

Now the New Year approaches and the night wears away,
The dawn presses against the darkness, as the Creator bids,
But rough weather blows up in the country outside,
Clouds empty their bitter cold contents on the earth,
With enough malice from the north to torment the ill-clad.
Snow pelted down spitefully, stinging the wild creatures;
The wind shrilly whistled down from the fells,
Choking the valleys with enormous drifts.
The knight lay in bed listening intently,
Although his eyelids are shut very little he sleeps;
Each cock-crow reminded him of his undertaking.
He got up quickly before the day dawned,
For there was light from a lamp burning in his room;
He called to his chamberlain, who answered him promptly.
And bede hym bryng hym his brune and his blonk sadel;
That other ferkez hym up and fecheth hym his wedez,
And graythez me Sir Gawayn upon a grett wyse.

First he clad hym in his clothez the colde for to were,
And sythyn his other harmayz, that holdely watz kepeth,
Bothe his paunce and his platez, piked ful clene,
The ryngez rokked of the roof of his riche brune;
And al watz fesh as upon fyrst, and he watz fayn thenne to thonk.

Hed was upon uche pece,
Wyppel ful wele and wlonke;  
The gayest unto Greke  
The burne bede bryng his blonk.

Whyle the wlownakest wedes he warp on hymselfen—
His cote wyth the conysance of the cler werkez
Ennumred upon velvet, vertuous stonez
Aboute beten and bounden, enbraided sernez,
And frayre furred within wyth freye pelures—
Yet laft he not the lace, the ladiez gifte,
That forgat not Gawayn for gode of hymselfen.
Bi he hade belted the bronde upon his balgha haunchez,
Thenn dressed he his druye double hym aboute,
Swythe swethled umbe his swange swetely that kyght
The gordel of the grene silk, that gay wel bisemez,
Upon that ryl red clothe that ryche watz to scheue.
Bot wered not this ilk wyghe for wele this gordel,
For pryde of the pendauntz, thagh poylst thay were,
And thagh the gylterande golde gleafn 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 Grynoget greythe, 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 swerzez:
“Here is a meyny in this mote that on menske thenkkez,
The mon hem mayteines, joy mot thay have;
The leve lady on lyfe lyf hir bityde;
Bade hym bring his mail-shirt and saddle his horse.
The man leaps out of bed and fetches him his clothes,
And gets Gawain ready in splendid attire.

While he dressed himself in his noblest clothes—
His coat with its finely embroidered badge
Set upon velvet, with stones of magical power
Inlaid and clasped round it, with embroidered seams,
And richly lined on the inside with beautiful furs—
He did not leave out the belt, the lady’s present:
For his own good Gawain did not forget that.
When he had buckled his sword on his curving hips,
That noble knight bound his love-token twice
Closely wrapped round his middle, with delight;

The girdle of green silk, whose color went well
Against that splendid red surcoat that showed so fine.
But the knight did not wear the belt for its costliness,
or for pride in its pendants, however they shone,
or because its edges gleamed with glittering gold,
But to safeguard himself when he had to submit,
To await death without sword to defend himself
Or blade.

When he was fully dressed
The knight hurries outside,
And pays that noble household
His debt of gratitude.

Then Gringolet was ready, that great horse and huge,
Who had been stabled securely, keeping him safe;
In such fine condition that he was eager to gallop.

The knight walks up to him and examines his coat,
And said gravely to himself, swearing by his true word,
“There is a company in the castle that keeps courtesy in mind;
And a lord who supports them, may he have joy,
And may the dear lady be loved all her life!
Yif thay for charyté cherysen a gest, 2055
And halden honour in her honde, the hathel hem yelde 2060
That haldez the heven upon hyghe, and also yow alle! 2065
And yif I myght lyf upon londe lede any quyle, 2070
I schulc rech yow sum rewarde redyly, if I myght.” 2075
That be the gynde of the man for prase, 2080
And lette the swynt for to launace. 2085
This kastel to kryst I kenne: 2090
He gef hit ay god chaunce. 2095
The brygge watz Brayed doun, and the brode gatex 2100
Unbarred and born open upon bothel halve. 2105
The burne blessed hym bilyve, and the brede passed— 2110
Prayes the portor before the prynce kneled, 2115
Gef hym God and goud day, that Gawyn he save— 2120
And went on his way with his wynge one, 2125
That schulde tche tehy to tourne to that tene place 2130
Ther the rufell race he schulde resaye. 2135
Thay bowen bi bonkkeyz ther boghez ar bare, 2140
Thay clomben bi cyffeiz ther clengez the colde. 2145
The heven watz uphult, bot ugly ther-under; 2150
Mist muged on the mor, malt on the mountez, 2155
Uche hille hade a hatte, a myst-hakel huge. 2160
Broked byled and breke bi bonkkeyz about, 2165
Schr yer schaterande on shorenz ther thay douen showved. 2170
Wela wylye watz the way ther thay bi wod schulden, 2175
Til hit watz some sesoun that the sunne ryxes 2180
that tyde. 2185
Thay were on a hille ful hyghe, 2190
The quyte snaw lay bisyde; 2195
The burne that rod hym by 2200
Bede his myster abide. 2205

“For I haf wonnen yow hider, wyghe, at this tyme, 2210
And now nar ye not fer fro that note place 2215
That ye han spied and spuryed so specially after; 2220
Bot I schal say yow for sothe, sythen I yow knowe, 2225

1 He gef hit ay god chaunce — Either Gawain wishes the castle lasting good fortune or, continuing his prayer in the previous line, hopes that Christ will do so. He gef then meaning “May he give.”
And ye are a lede upon lyve that I wel lovy,
Wolde ye warch bi my wytte, ye worthed the better
The place that ye prece to ful perelous is halden;
Ther wonez a wyghe in that waste, the worst upon erthe,
For he is stiffe and sturne, and to strike lowes,
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.
He chever that chaunce that the chapel grene,
Ther passes non bi that place so proude in his armes
That he ne dynege hym to deth with dynty of his honde;
For he is a mon methles, and mercy non uses,
For be hit chorde other chaplyn that bi the chapel rydes,
Monk other masseprest, other any mon elles,
Hym thynk as quemme hym to quelle as quyk go hymselven.

Forthy I say the, as sothe as ye in sadel sitte,
Com ye there, ye be kylled, I may the knyght rede;¹
Trawe ye me that truely, that ye had twenty lyves
to spende.
  He hatz wonyld here ful yore,
  On bent much baret bende,
  Agayn his dyntez 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 spedle,
And I schal hygh me hom agayn, and hete yow fyre
That I schal werre bi God and alle his gode halwez,
As help me God and the halydam, and othez innoghe,
That I schal sely yow layne,² and lance never tale
That ever ye fondet to fle for ffreke that I wyst."
"Grant merci," quoth Gawayn, and gruchyng he sayde,
"Wel worth the, wyghe, that woldez my gode,
And that lely me layne I leve wel thou woldez.
Bot helde thou hit never so holde, and I here passed,
Founded for fende for to fle, in fomme 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 tulke the tale that me lyste,

And you are a man whom I love dearly—
If you would follow my advice, it would be better for you.
The place you are going to is extremely dangerous;
There lives a man in that wilderness, the worst in the world,
For he is powerful and grim, and loves dealing blows,
And is bigger than any other man upon earth:
His body is mightier than the four strongest men
In Arthur’s household, Hector or any other.
He so brings it about at the Green Chapel
That no one passes that place, however valiant in arms,
Who is not battered to death by force of his hand;
For he is a pitiless man who never shows mercy.
For whether peasant or churchman passes his chapel,
Monk or mass-priest, or whatever man else,
To him killing seems as pleasant as enjoying his own life.
Therefore I tell you, as sure as you sit in your saddle,
If you go there you'll be killed, I warn you, sir knight,
Believe that for certain, though you had twenty lives
to lose.
  He has dwelt there long,
  And brought about much strife;
Against his brutal blows
Nothing can save your life.

"Therefore, good Sir Gawayn, let the man be,
And for God’s sake get away from here by some other road!
Ride through some other country, where Christ be your help,
And I will make my way home again, and further I vow
That I shall swear by God and all his virtuous saints—
As help me God and the holy thing, and many more oaths—
That I shall keep your secret truly, and never reveal
That ever you took flight from a man that I knew."
"Many thanks," replied Gawayn, and grudgingly he spoke,
"Good luck to you, man, who wishes my good,
And that you would loyally keep my secret I truly believe.
But however closely you kept it, if I avoided this place,
Took to my heels in fright, in the way you propose,
I should be a cowardly knight, and could not be excused.
But I will go to the chapel, whatever may chance,
And discuss with that man whatever matter I please,

¹ *I may the knyght rede* I can tell you, knight. The original text does not include the first personal pronoun.

² *I schal sely yow layne* The guide repeats Gawain’s promise to the lady at 1863.
Worth the hit wele other wo, as the wyrde lykez
hit hafe.
Thaghe he be a sturn knape
To stightel, and stad with stave,
Ful wel con Dryghtyn schape
His servauntez for to save."

“Maryl” quoth that other man, “now thou so much spellez
That thou wylt thyn awen nye nyme to thyselfen,
And the lyte lese thy lyf, the lette I ne kepe.
Haf here thi helme on thy hede, thi spere in thi honde,
And ryde me doun this ilke rake bi yon rokke syde,
Til thou be broght to the botthom 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 wele, on Godez half, Gawyn the noble!
For alle the golde upon grounde I nolde go wyth the,
Ne bere the felagshicth thrugh this fyth on fote fytre.”
Bi that the wygte in the wod wendez his byrdel,
Hit the hors with the helze as harde as he myght,
Lepez hym over the launde, and levez the knyght there
al one.
“Bi Goddez self,” quoth Gawyn,
“I wyl nauther grete ne grone;
To Goddez wyle I am ful bayn,
And to hym I haf me tone.”

Thenne gyrez he to Gryngolet, and gederez the rake,
Schowwez in bi a shorle at a schawe syde,
Ridez thrugh the roghe bonke tryght to the dale;
And thennhe he wayted hym aboute, and wykde hit hym thoght,
And seye no synynge of resette bisydez nowhere,
Bot hygte bonkezke and brent upon bothe halve,
And ruge knokled knarzef with knorned stonez;
The skwez of the scowtes skayned hym thoght.
Thenne he hoved, and wythlybye his hors at that tyde,
And ofte chauenged his cher the chapel to seche:
He seye non suche in no syde, and selly hym thoght,
Save, a lytte on a launde, a lawe as hit were;
A balgh berw bi a bonke the brymme bysyde,
Bi a forghe of a flode that ferked thare;
The borne blubred therinne as hit boyled hade.

Whether good or ill come of it, as destiny
decides.
Though an opponent grim
To deal with, club in hand,
His faithful servants God
Knows well how to defend.”

“Maryl” said the other man, “since your words make it clear
That you will deliberately bring harm on yourself,
And lose your life by your own wish, I won’t hinder you.
Put your helmet on your head, take your spear in your hand,
And ride down this track beside the rock over there
Until it brings you to the bottom of the wild valley;
Then look to your left, some way off in the glade,
And you will see in that dale the chapel itself,
And the giant of a man who inhabits the place.
Now in God’s name, noble Gawain, farewell!
For all the wealth in the world I would not go with you,
Nor keep you company through this wood one further step.”
With that the man at his side tugs at his bridle,
Struck his horse with his heels as hard as he could,
Gallops over the hillside and leaves the knight there
alone.
Said Gawain, “By God himself,
I shall not moan or cry;
My life is in his hands,
His will I shall obey.”

Then he sets spurs to Gringolet and picks up the path,
Makes his way down a slope at the edge of a wood,
Rides down the rugged hillside right to the valley,
And then looked about him, and it seemed a wild place,
And saw no sign of a building anywhere near,
But high and steep hillsides upon both sides,
And rough rocky crags of jagged stones:
The clouds grazing the jutting rocks, as it seemed.
Then he halted, and checked his horse for a while,
Often turning his face to look for the chapel.
He saw nothing of the kind anywhere, which he thought strange,
Except a way off in a glade, something like a mound;
A rounded hillock on the bank of a stream,
Near the bed of a torrent that tumbled there;
The water foamed in its course as though it had boiled.
The knight urges his horse and comes to the mound,
Lightez doun lustfylly, and at a lyncde tachez
The rayne and his riche with a rogh braunch.
Thenne he bowez to the berwe, aboute hit he walkez,
Debatande with hymselfe quart hit be myght.

Hit hede a hole on the ende, and on ather syde,
And overgrown with gress in glodes anywhere,
And al watz holw inwith, nobot an olde cave,\(^1\)
Or a crevisse of an olde cragge, he couthe the hit noght deme with spelle.

"We, lorde!" quoth the gently knyght,
"Whether this be the grene chapelle?
Here myght aboute mydnyght
The dele his matynnes telle!

"Now iwyse," quoth Wowayn, "wysty is here;
This oritise is ugly, with erbez overgrown;
Wel bisemerz the wyge wruxzed in grene
Delle here his devocioun on the develez wyse.
Now I fel hit is the fende, in my fye wyttez,
That hatz stoken me this steven to strye me here.

This is a chapel of meschaunce, that chekke hit bytyde!
Hit is the corsesest kyrk that ever I com inne!"
With hegh helme on his hede, his launce in his honde,
He ronze up to the roffe of the rogh wonez.
Thene herde he of that hygyhe hil, in a harde roche
Byonde the broke, in a bonk, a wonder breme noysze:
Quat! hit clatered in the cliffe, as hit cleve schulde,
As one upon a gryndelston hade groundun a sythe.
What! hit wharred and whette, as water at a malne;
What! hit ruscched and ronge, rawthe to here.

Thenne "Bi Godde," quoth Gawayn, "that gere, as I trowe,
Is ryched at the reverence me, renk, to mete bi rote."
Let God worche! 'We loo'
Hit helppze me not a mote.

My lif thagh I forgoor,
Drede dotz me no lote.

Thenne the knyght con calle ful hygyhe,
"Who stigh dez in this sted me steven to holde?

Alights nimbly, and makes fast to a tree
The reins and his noble steed with a rough branch.
Then he goes to the mound and walks around it,
Wondering to himself what it could be.

It had a hole at the end and on either side,
And was covered all over with patches of grass,
And was all hollow inside; nothing but an old cave,
Or a fissure in an old rock: what to call it he hardly could tell.

"Good lord!" said the noble knyght,
"Can the Green Chapel be this place?
Here probably at midnight
The devil his matins says!

"Now truly," said Gawain, "this is a desolate place;
This chapel looks evil, with grass overgrown;
Here fitingly might the man dressed in green
Perform his devotions, in devilish ways.
Now all my senses tell me that the devil himself
Has forced this agreement on me, to destroy me here!

This is a chapel of disaster, may ill-luck befall it!
It is the most damnable church I was ever inside."
With tall helmet on head, his lance in his hand,
He climbs to the top of that primitive dwelling.
Then he heard up the hillside, from behind a great rock,
On the slope across the stream, a deafening noise:
What! it echoed in the cliffs, as though they would split,
As if someone with a grindstone were sharpening a scythe.
What! it whirred and sang, like water at a mill;
What! it rasped and it rang, terrible to hear.

Then said Gawain, "By God, these doings, I suppose,
Are a welcoming ceremony, arranged in my honor
as a knight.
God's will be done: 'Alas'
Helps me no whit here.
Although my life be lost,
Noise cannot make me fear."

Then the knight shouted at the top of his voice,
"Who is master of this place, to keep tryst with me?

\(^1\) nobot an olde cave  An unlikely guess. The hollow mound half-covered with grass, with a hole on the end and on ather side, has the characteristic form of a prehistoric burial chamber.
For now is gode Gawain goande rght here.¹

If any wyghe oght wyl, wynne hider fast,
Other now other never, his nedez to spede.”
“Abide,” quoth on on the bonke aboven his hede,
“And thou schal hafl an in hast that I the hyght ones.”
Yet he rushad on that runde rapely a throwe,
And wyth quettynge awharf, er he wolde lyght;
And sythe he kevrez 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 ylde,
With a borelych bytee bende bi the halme,
Fyled in a fylor, foure foot large—
Hit watz no lasse bi the lace that lemed ful bryght—²
And the goome in the grene gered as fryst,
Bothe the lyre and the leggez, lokkez and berde,
Save that fryre 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 noilde,
He hynped over on hys ax, and opeedy srydez,
Bremly brothe on a bent that brode watz aboute,
on snawe.
Sir Gawyn the knyght con mete,
He ne lut hym noryng lowe;
That other sayde, “Now, sir swete,
Of steven mon may the trowe.

“Gawyn,” quoth that grene gome,”“God the mot loke!
Iwysse thou art welcom, wyghe, to my place,
And thou haz tymed thi travayl as truce mon schulde,
And thou knowez the covenanuntz kest uus bytwene:
At this tyme twelmonth thou toke that the falled,
And I schulde at this Nwe Yere yeply the quyte.
And we ar in this valay vearly oure one;
Here are no renkes us to rydde, rele as uus lykez.
Haf thy helme of thy hede, and haf here thy pay.
Buske no more debate then I the bede thenne
When thou wyped of my hede at a wap one.”
“Nay, bi God,” quoth Gawyn, “that me gost lante,
For now is good Gawain waiting right here.
If anyone wants something, let him hurry here fast, Either now or never, to settle his affairst.
“Wait,” said someone on the hillside above,
“And you shall quickly have all that I promised you once.”
Yet he kept making that whirring noise for a while,
And turned back to his whetting before he would come down;
And then makes his way among the rocks, bursting out of a hole, Whirling out of a nook with a fearsome weapon—
A Danish axe newly made—for dealing the blow, With a massive blade curving back on the shaft,
Honed with a whestone, four feet across—
No less than that, despite the gleaming green girdle—
And the man in the green, dressed as at first,
Both his flesh and his legs, hair and beard, Except that grandly on foot he stalked on the earth,
Set the handle to the ground and walked beside it.
When he came to the stream he refused to wade:
He hopped over on his axe and forcefully strides,
Fiercely grim on a clearing that stretched wide about, under snow.
Sir Gawyn met the knight,
Made him a frosty bow;
The other said, “Good sir, A man may trust your vow.

“Gawyn,” said that green man, “may God protect you!
You are indeed welcome, sir, to my place;
You have timed your journey as a true man should, And you know the agreement settled between us:
A twelvemonth ago you took what fell to your lot, And I was to repay you promptly at this New Year.
And we are in this valley truly by ourselves,
With no knights to separate us, so we can fight as we please.
Take your helmet off your head, and here get your pay.
Make no more argument than I offered you then, When you slashed off my head with a single stroke.”
“No, by God,” said Gawain, “who gave me a soul,

¹ goande rght here  Walking right here, with a suggestion of being ready to leave immediately if no one answers.

² Hit watz no lasse bi that lace that lemed ful bryght  Commentators disagree about which lace the poet is referring to. The axe used by Gawain has a lace lapped aboute, that leked at the hede, 217 as part of its decoration. But the axe which the Green Knight has just finished sharpening is a different weapon, newly made and not apparently decorated. The other lace is the green girdle or lyf-lace; see 1830, a lace … that leke umbhe hir rydea, and 2030, the lace, the ladises gife. The belt is so designated at least eight times between 1830 and 2505, while lace in the first sense is not clearly mentioned again after 217. The more likely reading of the line is that the axe seemed enormous to Gawain, despite the assurance of the green belt, whose glyterande golde decoration explains lemed ful bryght.
I schal gruche the no gryve for grem that falleth. Bot styghtel the upon on strok, and I schal stonde styyfe And warpe the no wernynge to worch as the lykkez, nowhere."

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

Then the come in the grene graythe hym swythe, Gederuz up his Grymm tole Gawain to smyte; With alle the bur in his body he ber hit on lofe, Munt as maghtyly as mare hym he wolde; Hade hym dryven adoun as dregh as he atled, Ther hade ben ded of his dynt that doghty watz ever.2

Bot Gawain on that giserne glyfe hym bysode, As hit com glyndande adoun on glode hym to schende, And scharneke a lytel with the schukleres for the sharp yrne, That other schalk wyth a schunt the schene wythhaldez, And thenne reprefd he the prynce with mony powde wordez: "Thou art not Gawain," 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 hoze Arthur. My hede flagh to my fote, and yet flagh I never; And thou, er any harme hent, arghex in hert. Wherfore the better burne me burde be called therfore."

Quoth Gawain, "I schunt onez, And so wyly I no more; Bot thagh my hede falle on the stonez, I con not hit restore.

"But buske, burne, bi thi fayth, and byng me to the poynyt. Dele to me my destyné, and do hit out of honde.3 For I schal stonde the a strok, and start no more Til thy ax have me hitte: haf here my trawthe." "Haf at the thennel" quoth that other, and hevez hit alofte, And waytez as worshedly as he wode were.

I shall bar you no grudge at all, whatever hurt comes about. Just limit yourself to one blow, and I will stand still And not resist whatever it pleases you to do at all." He bent his neck and bowed, Showing the flesh all bare, And seeming unafraid; He would not shrink in fear.

Then the man dressed in green quickly got ready, Raised his terrible axe to give Gawain the blow; With all the strength in his body he headed it in the air, Swung it as fiercely as if meaning to mangle him. Had he brought the axe down as forcibly as he acted, That courageous knight would have been killed by the blow; But Gawain glanced sideways at that battle-axe As it came sweeping down to destroy him there, And hunches his shoulders a little to resist the sharp blade. The other man checked the bright steel with a jerk, And then rebuked the prince with arrogant words: "You're not Gawain," said the man, "who is reputed so good, Who never quailed from an army, on valley or on hill, And now flinches for fear before he feels any hurt! I never heard of such cowardice shown by that knight. I neither flinched nor fled, at the time you aimed one at me, Nor raised any objections in King Arthur’s house. My head fell to the floor, yet I gave no ground; But you, though not wounded, are trembling at heart, So I deserve to be reckoned the better man for that."

Gawain said, "I flinched once, But won’t twice hunch my neck, Though if my head should fall I cannot put it back." "But hurry up, man, by your faith, and come to the point. Deal out my fate to me, and do it out of hand, For I shall let you strike a blow, and not move again Until your axe has hit me, take my true word." "Have at you then!" said the other, and raises it up, Contorting his face as though he were enraged.

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1 *nowhere*  Anywhere you like. Gawain is only concerned that the Green Knight shall restrict himself to one stroke (I. 2253).

2 *that doghty watz ever*  The man who was always brave.

3 *out of honde*  I.e., out of hand: at once. The first recorded use of the phrase.
He myntez at hym maghtyly, bot not the mon rynec,  
Withhelde hetyr his honde er hit hurt myght.  
Gawyn graythely hit bydez, and glent with no membre,  
Bot stode stytle as the ston, other a stubbe auther  
That ratheled is in roch eyrlym with rotez a hundreth.  
Then muryly eft con he mele, the mon in the grene,  
“So, now thou haz thy hert holle, hitte me bihows. 
Halde the now the hyghese hode that Arthur the rathg,  
And kepe thy kanel at this kest, yif hit kever may.”  
Gawyn ful gryndelly with greme thenne sayde:  
“Wy! thrersch on, thou thro mon, thou thietez to longe;  
I hope that thy hert arghe wryth thyn wven awen.”  
“For sothe,” quoth that other freke, “so felly thou spekez,  
I wyl no lenger on lyte lette thin emde¹  
right nowe.”  

Thenne tas he hym strythe to stryke,  
And fronsez bothe lype and browe,  
No mervayle thagh hym myslyke  
That hoped of no rescowe.

He lyfes lyghtly his lome, and let hit doune fayre  
With the barbe of the bitte bi the bare nek;  
Thagh he homered heryt, hurt hym no more  
Bot snyt hym on that on syde, that severed the hyde.  
The scharp schrank to the flesche thurgh the schyre grece  
That the schene bloed over his schulderes schot to the ethre;  
And quen the burne sey the blode blenk on the snawe,  
He spirt fortha a spenne-fote² more then a spere lenth,  
Hent hetherly his helme, and his hed cast,  
Schot with his schulderes his fayre schelde under,  
Braydez ou a bryght swordre, and bremlly he spekez—  
Never syn that he watz burne borne of his moder  
Watz he never in this worlde wygte half so blythe—  
“Blyrne, burne, of thy bur, bede me no mo!  
I haf a stroke in this sted without stryf hent,  
And if thou rechez me any mo, I redylly schal quyte,  
And yelde yederly agayn—and therto ye tryst—  
and foo.  
Bot on stroke here me fallæ—  
The covenant right schop so,  
Fermed in Arthurez halæz—  
And therfore, hende, now hoo!”

He swings the axe at him savagely, without harming the man,  
Checked his blow suddenly before it could inflict hurt.  
Gawain awaits it submissively, not moving a limb,  
But stood as still as a stone, or the stump of a tree  
Anchored in rocky ground by hundreds of roots.  
Then the man in green spoke mockingly again,  
“So, now you have found courage it is time for the blow.  
Now may the order of knighthood given you by Arthur  
Preserve you and your neck this time, if it has power!”  
Then Gawain replied angrily, mortified deeply,  
“What, why strike away, you fierce man, you waste time in threats;  
I think you have frightened yourself with your words.”  
“Indeed,” said that other man, “you speak so aggressively  
That I will no longer delay or hinder your business  
at all.”  
He takes his stance to strike,  
Puckering mouth and brow;  
No wonder if Gawain feels  
No hope of rescue now.

He swiftly raises his weapon, and brings it down straight  
With the cutting edge of the blade over Gawain’s bare neck;  
Although he struck fiercely, he hurt him no more  
Than to slash the back of his neck, laying open the skin.  
The blade cut into the body through the fair flesh  
So that bright blood shot over his shoulders to the ground.  
And when the knight saw his blood spatter the snow  
He leapt forward with both feet more than a spear’s length,  
Snatched up his helmet and crammed it on his head,  
Jerked his shoulders to bring his splendid shield down,  
Drew out a gleaming sword and fiercely he speaks—  
Never since that man was born of his mother  
Had he ever in the world felt half so relieved—  
“Hold your attack, sir, don’t try it again!  
I have passively taken a blow in this place,  
And if you offer me another I shall repay it promptly  
And return it at once—be certain of that—  
with force.  
One single blow is due;  
The contract is my proof,  
Witnessed in Arthur’s hall;  
And therefore, sir, enough!”

¹ I wyl no lenger on lyte lette thin emde Literally: I will no longer in delay hinder your mission.  
² spenne-fote With feet together.
The hathel heldeth hym fro, and on his ax rested,
Sette the schaft upon shore, and to the sharp lened,
And loked to the leude that on the launde yede,
How that doghty, drelles, derefly ther stondez.

Armed, ful agles: in hert hit hym lycez.
Thenn he melez muruly wyth a much steven,
And with a rynkande rurde he to the renk sayde:
“Bolde burne, on this bent be not so gyndel.
No mon here unmanerly the mysboden habbez,
Ne kyld bot as covenaunde at kynges kert schaped.
I hyght the a strok and thou hit harsz, halde the wel payed;
I relece the of the remnaunt of ryghtes alle other.
If I deliver had bene, a boffet paraunter
I couthe wrotheloker haf were, to the haf wroght anger.

Fyrst I mansed the muruly with a mynt one,
And nowe the wyth no rofe-sore, with ryght I the profer
For the forwarde that we fest in the fyrst nyght.\(^1\)
And thou trystlye the trawthe and trwyly me haldez,
Al the gayme thoue me gef, as god mon shulde.

That other munt for the morne, mon, I the profered,
Thou kysesedes my clere wyf—the cosses me rathet.
For bote the two here I the bede bot two bare mynteys
boute scathe.\(^2\)

“Trwe mon trwe restore,
Thenne thon mon drede no wathye.
At the thrid thoue fayted thore,
And therefor that tappe ta the.

“For hit is my wede that thou weren, that ilke wovyn girdel,
Myn owen wyf hit the weved, I wot wel for sothe.

Now know I wel thy cosses, and thy costes als,
And the wouynge of my wyf: I wroght it myselven.
I sende hir to asy the, and solde thy thynkkes
On the faulfest freke that ever on fote yde;
As perle bi the quite pese is of pryys more,
So is Gawayn, in god fayth, bi other gay knyghtez.
Bot here yow lakled a lytel, sir, and lewte yow wondet;
Bot that watz for no wylyde werke,\(^3\) ne wowyng nauther,
Bot for ye lufed thy lyf; the lase I yow blame.”
That other stif mon in study\(^4\) stod a gret whyle,
So aegred for greme he gryed withinne;
Alle the blod of his brest blende in his face,

The knight kept his distance, and rested on his axe,
Set the shaft on the ground and leaned on the blade,
Contemplating the man before him in the glade;
Seeing how valiant, fearlessly bold he stood there

Armed and undaunted, he admired him much.
Then he spoke to him pleasantly in a loud voice,
And said to the knight in a resounding tone,
“Brave sir, don’t act so warthfully in this place.
No one has discourteously mistreated you here,

Or acted contrary to the covenant sworn at the king’s court.
I promised you a blow and you have it; think yourself well paid;
I free you from the rest of all other obligations.
Had I been more dextrous, maybe I could
Have dealt you a more spiteful blow, to have roused your anger.

First I threatened you playfully with a pretence,
And avoided giving you a gash, doing so rightly
Because of the agreement we made on the first night,
When you faithfully and truly kept your pledged word,
Gave me all your winnings, as an honest man should.

That other feint, sir, I gave you for the next day,
When you kissed my lovely wife and gave me those kisses.
For both occasions I aimed at you two mere mock blows
without harm.

True man must pay back truly,

Then he need nothing fear;
You failed me the third time
And took that blow therefore.

“For it is my belt you are wearing, that same woven girdle,
My own wife gave it to you, I know well in truth.

I know all about your kisses, and your courteous manners,
And my wife’s wooing of you: I arranged it myself.
I sent her to test you, and to me truly you seem
One of the most perfect men who ever walked on the earth.
As pearls are more valuable than the white peas,

So is Gawain, in all truth, before other fair knights.
Only here you fell short a little, sir, and lacked fidelity,
But that was not for fine craftsmanship, nor wooing either,
But because you wanted to live: so I blame you the less.”
That other brave man stood speechless a long while,
So mortified and crushed that he inwardly squirmed;
All the blood in his body burned in his face.

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\(^1\) first nyght  The night before the first hunt.
\(^2\) boute scathe  Without injury, unscathed.
\(^3\) wylyde werke  Intricate workmanship (of the belt).
\(^4\) in study  Lost in thought, speechless.
That al he schranke for schome that the schalk talked.
The forme worde upon folde that the freke meled:
"Coresd worth cowardlyse and covetysse bothe!
In yow is vylany and vysse that vertue distreyz.
Thenne he kagh to the knot, and the kest lawsez,
Brayde brothely the belt to the burne selven:
"Lo, ther the falsynge, foule mot hit falle!
For care of thy knokke cowardyse me taught.
To acorde me with covetysse, my kynde to forsake,
That is larges and lewe that longez to knyghtez.
Now am I fawty and falte, and ferde haf ben ever
Of trecherye and untrawthe: bothe bityde sorrow
and care!
I biknowe yow, knyght, here stylke,
Al fawty is my fare;
Letez me overtake your wyll
And efe I schal be ware."

The loghe that other leude and luflyly sayde,
"I halde hit hardly hole, the harme that I hade.
Thou art confessed so clene, beknonen of thy mysses,
And hatz the pennaunce apert of the poynyt of myn egge,
I halde the polysed of that plyght, and purled as clene
As thou hadez never forfetet sythen thou watz fyrst borne;
And I gif the, sir, the gurdel that is golde-hemmed;
For hit is grene as my goune, Sir Gawayn, ye maye
Thenk upon this ilke threpe, ther thou forth thryngez
Among prynces of prys, and this a pure token
Of the chaunce of the grene chapel at chevalrous
knyghtez.
And ye schal in this Nwe Yer agayn to my wonez,
And we schyn revel the remmaunt 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 sege, and seseyd his helme,
And hatz hit of hendely, and the hathel thonkez,
"I haf sojomed sadly; sele yow bytyde
And he yeleth hit yow yare that yarkkez al menskes!
And comaundez me to that courtays, your comlych fere,
Bothe that on and that other, myn honourdez ladyez,
So that he winced with shame at what the man said.
The first words that the knight uttered there
Were, "A curse upon cowardice and covetousness!
You breed boorishness and vice that ruin vertue."  
Then he took hold of the knot and looses the buckle,
Flung the belt violently towards that man:
"There it is, the false thing, may the devil take it!
For fear of your blow taught me cowardice,
To give way to covetousness, be false to my nature,
The generosity and fidelity expected of knights.
Now I am false and unworthy, and have always dreaded
Treachery and deceit: may misfortune and grief
befall both!
Sir, humbly I confess
My good name is marred.
Let me regain your trust,
Next time I'll be on guard."

Then the other man laughed, and graciously said,
"The wrong you did me I consider wiped out.
You have so cleanly confessed yourself, admitted your fault,
And done honest penance on the edge of my blade.
I declare you absolved of that offence, and washed as clean
As if you had never transgressed since the day you were born.
And I make you a gift, sir, of my gold-bordered belt;
Since it is green like my gown, Sir Gawain, you may
Remember this meeting in the world where you mingle
With princes of rank: it will be a true token
Of the exploit of the Green Chapel among chivalrous
knight.
And you shall come back to my castle at this New Year,
And we will see out the revelry of this high feast
with joy."
 He pressed him earnestly
And said, "We shall, I know,
Reconcile you with my wife,
Who was your cunning foe."

"No, indeed," said the knight, and seizing his helmet
Takes it off politely and gives the lord thanks;
"I have stayed long enough: good fortune attend you,
And may he who gives all honors soon send you reward!
And commend me to that gracious one, your lovely wife,
Both the one and the other of those honorable ladies

\footnote{1 the harme that I hade  I.e., being cheated of his winnings.}
That thus hor knyght wyth hor krest han koynty bigyled.
Bot hit is no ferly thagh a folde madde,

And thurgh wyles of wymmen be wonen to sorwe,
For so watz Adam in erde with one bigyled,
And Salomon with fele seere, and Samson eftsonez—
Dalysa dalt hym hys wyrde—and Davyth thereafter
Watz blynded with Barsabe, that much bale tholed.¹

Now these were wrathwyth her wyls, hit were a wynne huge
To luf hom wel and leve hem not, a leude that couthe.
For thes wer forne the freest, that folwed alle the sele
Exellently of alle thysy other, under hevenryche
that mused;

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

“Bot your gorde,” quoth Gawayn, “God yow forylde!
That wyl I welde wyth goud wylle, not for the wynne golde,
Ne the saynt, ne the sylke, ne for syde pendaundes,
For wele ne for worchyp, ne for the wlonk wylkerke,
Bot in synge of my surfte I schal se hit ofte,
When I ride in renoun, remorde to myselfen
The faute and the faunte of the flesche crabbed,
How tender hit is to enyse teches of fylthe;
And thus, quen pryde schal me pryk for prowes of armes,
The loke to this luf-lace schal leth me hert.
Bot on I wolde yow pray, displeses yow never.

Syn ye be lorde of the yonder londe her I haf lenti inne
Wyth yow wyth wyrche—wyth the wyghe hit yow yelde
That uphaldes the heven and on hygh sittez—
How norne ye yowre ryght nome, and thenne no more?”
“That schal I telle the trwly,” quoth that other thenne,

“Bertilak de Hautdesert I hat in this londe.
Thurgh myght of Morgne la Faye, that in my hous lengers,
And koynyte of cleryge, bi crafes wel lerned,
The maystreis of Merlyn mony hatz taken—
For ho hazt dalt drwyf ful dere sumtyme
With that conable clerk, that knowes alle your knyghtez
at hame.
Morgne the goddes
Therfore hit is hir name;
Weldez non so hygye hawtesses
That ho ne con make ful tame—

Who have so cleverly deluded their knight with their game.
But it is no wonder if a fool acts insanely

And is brought to grief through womanly wiles;
For so was Adam beguiled by one, here on earth,
Solomon by several women, and Samson was another—
Dellilah was cause of his fate—and afterwards David
Was deluded by Bathsheba, and suffered much grief.

Since these were ruined by their wiles, it would be a great gain
To love women and not trust them, if a man knew how.
For these were the noblest of old, whom fortune favored
Above all others on earth, or who dwelt
under heaven.

Beguiled were they all
By women they thought kind.
Since I too have been tricked
Then I should pardon find.

“But for your belt,” said Gawain, “God repay you for that!
I accept it gratefully, not for its wonderful gold,
Nor for the girdle itself nor its silk, nor its long pendants,
Nor its value nor the honor it confers, nor its fine workmanship.
But I shall look at it often as a sign of my failing,

And when I ride in triumph, recall with remorse
The corruption and frailty of the perverse flesh,
How quick it is to pick up blotches of sin.
And so, when pride in my knightly valor stirs me,
A glance at this girdle will humble my heart.
Just one thing I would ask, if it would not offend you,
Since you are the lord of the country that I have dwelt in,
Honorably treated in your house—may he reward you
Who holds up the heavens and sits upon high!—
What do you call yourself rightly, and then no more demands?”

“I will tell you that truthfully,” replied that other man,

“Bertilak of Hautdesert I am called in this land.
Through the power of Morgan le Fay, who lives under my roof,
And her skill in learning, well taught in magic arts,
She has acquired many of Merlin’s occult powers—
For she had love-dealings at an earlier time
With that accomplished scholar, as all your knights know
at home.
Morgan the goddess
Therefore is her name;
No one, however haughty
Or proud she cannot tame.

¹ Famous stories of female betrayal from the Old Testament.
“Ho wayned me upon this wyse to your wynne halle
For to assay the surqirdre, yif hit soit were
That rennes of the grete renowne of the Rounde Table.
Ho wayned me this wonder your wyttez to reve,
For to have greved Gaynour and gart hir to dygne
With glopnyng of that ilke gome that gostlych sp ked
With his hede in his honde biforn the hygh table.
That is ho that is at home, the auncian lady;
Ho is even thyn aunt, Arthurex 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 lowyes,
And I wol the as wel, wyghe, bi my faythe,
As any gome under God for thy grete traunte.”
And he nikked hym naye, he holde bi no wayes.
Thay acolen and kyssen and kenne anytther other
To the prynce of paradise, and parrent ryght there
on coole;
Gawyn on blonk ful bene
To the kyngez burgh buskez bolde,
And the knyght in the enker-gene
Whiderwarde-so-ever he wolde.

Wylde wayez in the worlde Wowen now rydez
On Gryngolet, that the grace hade geten of his lyve;
Ofte he herbered in house and ofte al theroutte,
And mony aventure in vale, and venquyst ofte,
That I ne tycyth at this tyme in tale to remene.
The hurt watz hole that he hade hent in his nek,
And the blykkanede belt he bere theraboute
Abelef as a bauderyk bounden by his syde,
Loken under his lyfte arme, the lace, with a knot,
In tokeneyng 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 Gawyn watz commen; gayn hit hym thought.
The kyng kysses the knyght, and the whene alce,
And sythen mony syker knyght that soght hym to haylce,
Of his fare that hym frayned; and feruly he telles,
Biknowe 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

“She sent me in this shape to your splendid hall
To make trial of your pride, and to judge the truth
Of the great reputation attached to the Round Table.
She sent me to drive you demented with this marvel,
To have terrified Guenevere and caused her to die
With horror at that figure who spoke like a specter
With his head in his hand before the high table.
That is she who is in my castle, the very old lady,
Who is actually your aunt, Arthur’s half-sister,
The duchess of Tintagel’s daughter, whom noble Uther
Afterwards begot Arthur upon, who now is king.
So I entreat you, good sir, to visit your aunt
And make merry in my house: my servants all love you,
And so will I too, sir, on my honor,
As much as any man on earth for your great truth.”
But Gawain told him no, not for any persuasion.
They embrace and kiss, and commend each other
To the prince of paradise, and separate there
in the cold;
On his great horse Gawain
To the king’s court quickly goes,
And the knight in emerald green
Went wheresoever he chose.

Over wild country Gawain now makes his way
On Gringolet, after his life had been mercifully spared.
Sometimes he lodged in a house and often out of doors,
And was vanquisher often in many encounters
Which at this time I do not intend to relate.
The injury he had received in his neck was healed,
And over it he wore the gleaming belt
Across his body like a baldric, fastened at his side,
And this girdle tied under his left arm with a knot,
To signify he had been dishonored by a slip.
And so safe and sound he arrives at the court.
Joy spread through the castle when the nobles learnt
That good Gawain had returned: they thought it a wonder.
The king kisses the knight, and the queen too,
And then many true knights who came to embrace him,
Asking how he had fared; he tells a marvelous story,
Describes all the hardships he had endured,
What happened at the chapel, the Green Knight’s behavior,
The lady’s wooing, and finally the belt.
He showed them the scar on his bare neck.
That he laight for his unleuté at the leudes hondes
for blame.
He teneed quen he schulde telle,
He groned for greif and grame;
The blod in his face con melle,
When he hit schulde schewe, for schame.

“This, lord,” quoth the leude, and the lace hondeled,
“This is the bende of this blame I bere in my nek,
This is the lathe and the losse that I laighe have
Of cowardise and covetese 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 twyrrne wil hit never.”
The kyng comforthez the knyght, and alle the court als
Lagen loude therat, and luftly acorden
That lordses and ladis that longed to the Table,
Uche burne of the brotherhede, a bauderyk schulde have,
A bende abelev hym aboute of a bryght grene,
And that, for sake of that segge, in swete to were.
For that watz acorden the renoun of the Rounde Table,
And he honourede that hit hade evermore after,
As hit is breved in the best boke of romaunce.
Thus in Artherus day this aunter bitiddle,
The Brutus bokez therof beres wyttennesse;
Sythyn Brutus, the bolde burne, bowed hider fyrst,
After the segge and the asaute watz sesez at Troye,
Iwyssse,
Mony aunterez here-biforne
Haf fallen suche er this.
Now that bere the crown of thorne
He bryng uus to his blyssel AMEN.

Hony soyt qui mal pence.?

That he received for his dishonesty at the lord’s hands
in rebuke.
Tormented by his tale
He groaned for grief and hurt;
The blood burned in his face
When he showed the shameful cut.

“See, my lord,” said the man, and held up the girdle,
“This belt caused the scar that I bear on my neck;
This is the injury and damage that I have suffered
For the cowardice and covetousness that seized me there;
This is the token of the dishonesty I was caught committing,
And now I must wear it as long as I live.
For a man may hide his misdeed, but never erase it,
For where once it takes root the stain can never be lifted.”
The king consoles the knight, and the whole court
Laughs loudly about it, and courteously agrees
That lords and ladies who belong to the Table,
Each member of the brotherhood, should wear such a belt,
A baldric of bright green crosswise on the body,
Similar to Sir Gawain’s and worn for his sake:
And that became part of the renown of the Round Table,
And whoever afterwards wore it was always honored,
As is set down in the most reputable books of romance.
So in the time of Arthur this adventure happened,
And the chronicles of Britain bear witness to it;
After the brave hero Brutus first arrived here,
When the siege and the assault were ended at Troy,
indeed.
Many exploits before now
Have happened much like this.
Now may the thorn-crowned God
Bring us to his bliss! AMEN.

Hony soyt qui mal y pense.

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1. After the sege and the asaute watz sesez at Troye  The last long line
of the poem repeats the first one, as though bringing the story full
circle after its hundred and one stanzas.
2. Hony Soyt Qui Mal Pence  Old French: evil be to him who evil
thinks, the motto embroidered on the blue velvet garter worn by
Knights of the Garter, the highest order of English knighthood
bestowed by the sovereign. According to Froissart, the order was
instituted about 1344. The poet’s use of the motto has not been
accounted for.