

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 *Prioress’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 *Ancrene 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.



Builders at work. Detail of illustration to Matthew Paris, *Historia Major* (c. 1240). Matthew Paris, a monk at the famous Benedictine Abbey of St. Alban's, near London, took over the chronicle kept by his abbey in 1235 and continued it until his death in 1259. He is one of the liveliest sources for all kinds of information on the mid-thirteenth century, and was among those who commented (with some disapproval) on the spread of the friars and, among other things, their extensive building projects as their orders grew ever larger.

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 Pehiez* (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 usefulness 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 Kings 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 contradictoriness 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 wrought”—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 *Contexts* 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.



Sir Gawayn and the Grene Knyght

FITT I

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

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*¹

PART I

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.

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

5 Hit watz Ennias the athel and his highe kynde¹
 That sithen depreced provinces, and patrounes bicom
 Welneghe of al the wele in the west iles.
 Fro riche Romulus to Rome ricchis hym swythe;
 With gret bobbaunce that burghes he biges upon fyrst,
 10 And nevenes hit his aune nome, as hit now hat;
 Tirius to Tuskan and teldes bigynnes,
 Langaberde in Lumbarde lyftes up homes,
 And fer over the French flod Felix Brutus
 On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez
 15 with wyne;
 Where werre and wrake and wonder
 Bi sythez hatz wont therinne,
 And oft both blysse and blunder
 Ful skete hatz skyfted synne.

20 Ande quen this Bretayn watz bigged bi this burn rych,
 Bolde bredden therinne, baret that lofden,
 In mony turned tyme tene that wroghten.
 Mo ferlyes on this folde han fallen here oft
 Then in any other that I wot, syn that ilk tyme.
 25 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 attle to schawe,
 That a selly in syght summe men hit holden,
 And an outrage awenture of Arthurez wonderez.
 30 If ye wyl lysten this laye 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,
 35 With lel letteres loken,
 In londe so hatz ben longe.

This kyng lay at Camylot upon Krystmasse
 With mony luffych lorde, ledez of the best,
 Rekenly of the Rounde Table alle tho rich brether,
 40 With rych revel oryght and rechles merthes.

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.

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,
 10 And calls it by his own name, which it still has.
 Tirius goes to Tuscany and sets up houses,
 Langobard in Lombardy establishes homes,
 And far over the French sea Felix Brutus
 On many broad hillsides settles Britain
 15 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.
 25 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.
 30 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,
 35 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,
 40 With rich revelry and carefree amusement, as was right.

³ *with tonge* Compare *wyth syght*, 197 and 226, and *meled with his muthe*, 447, for similar constructions.

⁴ *stad and stoken* Set down and fixed.

Ther tournayed tulkes by tyme 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,
 45 With alle the mete and the mirthe that men couthe avyse;
 Such glaume and gle glorious to here,
 Dere dyn upon day, daunsyng on nyghtes,
 Al watz hap upon heghe in hallez and chambrez
 With lordez and ladies, as levest him thoght.
 50 With all the wel of the worlde thay woned ther samen,
 The most kyd knyghtez under Krystes selven,
 And the lovelokkest ladies that ever lif haden,
 And he the comlokest kyng that the court haldes;
 For al watz this fayre folk in her first age,¹
 55 on sille,
 The hapnest under heven,
 Kyng hyghest mon of wylle;
 Hit were now gret nye to neven
 So hardy a here on hille.
 60 Wyle Nwe Yer watz so yep that hit watz nwe cummen,
 That day double on the dece watz the douth served.
 Fro the kyng watz cummen with knyghtes into the halle,
 The chauntré of the chapel cheved to an ende,
 Loude crye watz ther kest of clerkez and other,
 65 Nowel² nayted onewe, nevened ful ofte;
 And sythen riche forth runnen to reche hondeselle,
 Yeghed yeres-giftes on high, yelde hem bi hond,³
 Debated busyly aboute tho giftes;
 Ladies laghed ful loude, thogh thay lost haden,
 70 And he that wan watz not wrothe, that may ye wel trawe.⁴
 Alle this mirthe thay maden to the mete tyme;
 When thay had waschen worthyly thay wenten to sete,
 The best burne ay abof,⁵ as hit best semed,
 Whene Guenore, ful gay, graythed in the myddes,
 75 Dressed on the dere des, dubbed al aboute,
 Smal sendal bisides, a selure hir over
 Of tryed tolouse, 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 there the festival lasted the whole fifteen days
 45 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.
 50 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
 55 in the hall.
 Luckiest under heaven,
 King of loftiest mind;
 Hard it would be
 Bolder men to find.
 60 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,
 65 "Nowel" 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,
 70 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,
 75 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 *Nowel* I.e., Noël, a Christmas greeting.

³ *And sythen ... hond* Some have suggested that *hondeselle* are given to servants and *yeres-giftes* to equals. But Arthur is said figuratively to have received a *hanselle* at 491.

⁴ *Ladies ... trawe* The lines refer to some kind of Christmas game, perhaps involving guesses and paying a forfeit of kisses when the guess is wrong.

⁵ *The best burne ay abof* Members of the court are seated according to social degree, at the *hyghe table*, 107, or at *sidbordez*, 115. The reference to *lordes and ladis that longed to the Table*, 2515, suggests that the poet saw the Round Table as a social institution.

That were enbrawdred and beten wyth the best gemmes
 That myght be preved of prys¹ wyth penyes to bye,
 80 in daye.²
 The comlokest to discrye
 Ther glent with yghen gray,³
 A semloker that ever he syghe
 Soth moght no mon say.

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

Thus ther stondes in stale the stif kyng hisselven,
 Talkkande bifore the hyghe table of trifles ful hende.
 There gode Gawan⁴ watz graythed Gwenore bisyde,
 110 And Agravain à la dure mayn on that other syde sitted,
 Bothe the kynges sistersunes and ful siker knightes;
 Bischop Bawdewyn abof biginez the table,
 And Ywan, Uryn son, ette with hymselfen.
 Thise were dight on the des and derworthly served,
 115 And sithen mony siker segge at the sidbordez.

¹ *preved of prys* Proved of value.

² *in daye* Literally, ever.

³ *yghen gray* Virtually obligatory in medieval heroines.

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

85 But Arthur would not eat until everyone was served,
 He was so lively in his youth, and a little boyish.
 He hankered 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.
 90 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,
 95 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.
 100 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,
 105 Valiant in that New Year,
 Joking with them all.

So there the bold king himself keeps on his feet,
 Chatting before the high table of charming trifles.
 There good Gawain was seated beside Guenevere,
 110 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,
 115 And after them many a true man at the side tables.

⁴ *gode Gawan* So characterized throughout the story, even after his disgrace. The spelling of the hero's name varies considerably. He is *Gawan* consistently throughout Part 1. Later the poet or his scribe prefers the form *Gawayn* or *Gawayne*, which is used throughout Part 4. For alliterative purposes he is occasionally referred to as *Wawan*, *Wawen*, *Wowayn*, or *Wowen*. Less frequently he is *Gavan* or *Gavayn*.

Then the first cors come with crakkyng of trumpes,
 Wyth mony baner ful bryght that therbi henged;
 Nwe nakryn noyse with the noble pipes,
 Wylde werbles and wyght wakned lote,
 120 That mony hert ful highe hef at her towches.
 Dayntés dryven therwyth of ful dere metes,
 Foyssoun of the fresche, and on so fele disches
 That pine to fynde the place the peple bifome
 For to sette the sylveren that sere sewes halden
 125 on clothe.
 Iche lede as he loved hymselfe
 Ther laght withouten lothe;
 Ay two had disches twelve,
 Good ber and bryght wyn bothe.

Now wyl I of hor servise say yow no more,
 For uch wyghe may wel wit no wont that ther were.
 An other noyse ful newe neghed bilive
 That the lude myght haf leve liflode to cache;¹
 For unethe watz the noyce not a whyle sesed,
 135 And the fyrst cource in the court kyndely served,
 Ther haies in at the halle dor an aghlich mayster,
 On the most² on the molde on mesure hyghe;
 Fro the swyre to the swange so sware and so thik,
 And his lynes and his lymes so longe and so grete,
 140 Half etayn in erde I hope that he were,
 Bot mon most I algate mynn hym to bene,
 And that the myriest in his muckel that myght ride;
 For of his bak and his brest al were his bodi sturne,
 Both his wombe and his wast were worthily smale,
 145 And alle his fetures folyande, in forme that he hade,
 ful clene;
 For wonder of his hwe men hade,
 Set in his semblaunt sene;
 He ferde as freke were fade,
 150 And overal enker-grene.

And al grathed in grene this gome and his wedes:
 A strayte cote ful streght, that stek on his sides,
 A meré mantile abof, mensked withinne
 With pelure pured apert, the pane ful clene
 155 With blythe blaunner ful bryght, and his hode bothe,
 That watz laght fro his lokkez and layde on his schulderes;

¹ *haf leve liflode to cache* Arthur will not eat until he has *sen a selly*, 475, which is about to arrive.

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,
 120 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
 125 on the board.
 Each man who loved himself
 Took ungrudged, pair by pair,
 From a dozen tasty dishes,
 And drank good wine or beer.

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,
 135 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,
 140 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,
 145 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,
 150 Completely emerald green.

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
 155 With gay shining ermine, and his hood of the same
 Thrown back from his hair and laid over his shoulders.

² *On the most* Not “one of the biggest” but “the very biggest.”

Heme wel-haled hose of that same,
 That spenet on his sparlyr, and clene spures under
 Of bryght golde, upon silk bordes barred ful ryche,
 160 And scholes under schankes¹ there the schalk rides;
 And all his vesture verayly watz clene verdure,
 Bothe the barres of his belt and other blythe stones,
 That were richely rayled in his aray clene
 Aboutte hymself and his sadel, upon silk werkez.
 165 That were to tor for to telle of tryfles² the halve
 That were enbrauded abof, wyth bryddes and flyghes,
 With gay gaudi of grene, the gold ay inmyddes.
 The pendauntes of his payttrure, the proude cropure,
 His molaynes, and alle the metail anamayld was thenne,
 170 The steropes that he stod on stayned of the same,
 And his arsunz al after and his athel skyrtes,
 That ever glemered and glent al of grene stones;
 The fole that he ferkkes on fyn of that ilke,
 sertayn.
 175 A grene hors gret and thikke,
 A stede ful stif to strayne,
 In brawden brydel quik;
 To the gome he watz ful gayn.

Wel gay watz this gome gered in grene,
 180 And the here of his hed of his hors swete.
 Fayre fannand fax umbefoldes his schulderes;
 A much berd as a busk over his brest henges,
 That wyth his highlich here that of his hed rechtes
 Watz evesed al umbetorne abof his elbowes,
 185 That half his armes ther-under were halched in the wyse
 Of a kyngez capados³ that closes his swyre;
 The mane of that mayn hors much to hit lyke,
 Wel cresped and cemmed, wyth knottes ful mony
 Folden in with a fildore aboute the fayre grene,
 190 Ay a herle of the here, an other of golde;
 The tayl and his toppyng twynnen of a sute,
 And bounden bothe wyth a bande of a bryght grene,
 Dubbed wyth ful dere stonez, as the dok lasted,
 Sythen thrawen wyth a thwong a thwarle knot alofte,
 195 Ther mony bellez ful bryght of brende golde rungen.
 Such a fole upon folde, ne freke that hym rydes,

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-haled hose* of 157.

Neat tightly-drawn stockings colored to match
 Clinging to his calf, and shining spurs below
 Of bright gold, over embroidered and richly striped silk;
 160 And without shoes on his feet there the man rides.
 And truly all his clothing was brilliant green,
 Both the bars on his belt and other gay gems
 That were lavishly set in his shining array
 Round himself and his saddle, on embroidered silk.
 165 It would be hard to describe even half the fine work
 That was embroidered upon it, the butterflies and birds,
 With lovely beadwork of green, always centered upon gold.
 The pendants on the breast-trappings, the splendid crupper,
 The bosses on the bit, and all the metal enameled.
 170 The stirrups he stood in were colored the same,
 And his saddlebow behind him and his splendid skirts
 That constantly glittered and shone, all of green gems;
 The horse that he rides entirely of that color,
 in truth.
 175 A green horse huge and strong,
 A proud steed to restrain,
 Spirited under bridle,
 But obedient to the man.

Most attractive was this man attired in green,
 180 With the hair of his head matching his horse.
 Fine outspreading locks cover his shoulders;
 A great beard hangs down over his chest like a bush,
 That like the splendid hair that falls from his head
 Was clipped all around above his elbows,
 185 So that his upper arms were hidden, in the fashion
 Of a royal capados that covers the neck.
 That great horse's mane was treated much the same,
 Well curled and combed, with numerous knots
 Plaited with gold thread around the fine green,
 190 Always a strand of his hair with another of gold.
 His tail and his forelock were braided to match,
 Both tied with a ribbon of brilliant green,
 Studded with costly gems to the end of the tail,
 Then tightly bound with a thong to an intricate knot
 195 Where many bright bells of burnished gold rang.
 No such horse upon earth, nor such a rider indeed,

² *tryfles* Decorative emblems, such as are embroidered on Gawain's silk uryson, 611–12, and on the old lady's headdress, 960.

³ *capados* Hood.

Watz never sene in that sale wyth syght er that tyme,
with yghe.

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

Whether hade he no helme ne no hawbergh¹ nauther,
Ne no pysan ne no plate that pented to armes,
205 Ne no schafte ne no schelde to schwve ne to smyte,
Bot in his on honde he hade a holyn bobbe,
That is grattest in grene when grevez ar bare,
And an ax in his other, a hoge and unmete,
A spetos sparthe to expoun in spelle, quoso myght.
210 The lenkthe of an elnyerde the large hede hade,
The grayn al of grene stele and of golde hewen,
The bit burnyst bryght, with a brod egge
As wel schapen to schere as scharp rasores,
The stele of a stif staf the sturne hit bi grypte,
215 That watz wounden wyth yrn to the wandez ende,
And al bigraven with grene in gracios werkes;
A lace lapped aboute, that louked at the hede,
And so after the halme halched ful ofte,
Wyth tryed tasselez therto tacched innoghe
220 On botounz of the bryght grene brayden ful ryche.
This hathel heldez hym in and the halle entres,
Drivande to the heghe dece, dut he no wothe,
Haylsed he never one, bot heghe he over loked.
The fyrst word that he warp, "Where is," he sayd,
225 "The governour of this gyng? Gladly I wolde
Se that segg in syght, and with hymself speke
raysoun."²
To knyghtez he kest his yghe,
And reled hym up and down;
230 He stemmed, and con studie
Quo walt ther most renoun.

Ther watz lokyng on lenthe the lude to beholde,
For uch mon had mervayle quat hit mene myght

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

200 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-armor or plate belonging to arms,
205 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.
210 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,
215 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
220 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,
225 "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,
230 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

¹ *hawbergh* I.e., hauberk, coat of chain mail.

² *raysoun* Words, implicit in *speke* but evidently idiomatic.

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

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

That a knight and a horse might take such a color
 235 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;
 240 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
 245 at a word.
 Not just for fear, I think,
 But some for courtesy;
 Letting him whom all revere
 To that man reply.

250 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,
 255 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,
 260 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.
 265 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,
 270 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 courageous as everyone says,
 You will graciously grant me the game that I ask for
 by right."
 275 In answer Arthur said,
 "If you seek, courteous knight,

If thou crave batayl bare,¹
Here faylez thou not to fyght.”

280 “Nay, frayst I no fyght, in fayth I the telle,
Hit arn aboute on this bench bot berdlez chylder.
If I were hasped in armes on a heghe stede,
Here is no mon me to mach, for myghtez so wayke.
Forthy I crave in this court a Crystemas gomen,²
For hit is Yol and Nwe Yer, and here ar yep mony.
285 If any so hardy in this hous holdez hymselfen,
Be so bolde in his blod, brayn in hys hede,³
That dar stifly strike a strok for an other,
I schal gif hym of my gyft thys giserne ryche,
This ax, that is hevè innogh, to hondele as hym lykys,
290 And I schal bide the fyrst bur as bare as I sitte.⁴
If any freke be so felle to fonde that I telle,
Lepe lyghtly me to, and lach this weppen,
I quit-clayme hit for ever, kepe hit as his awen,
And I schal stonde hym a strok, stif on this flet,
295 Ellez thou wyl dight me the dom to dele hym an other
barlay;⁵
And yet gif hym respite
A twelmonyth and a day;
Now hyghe, and let se tite
300 Dar any herinne oght say.”

If he hem stoued upon fyrst, stiller were thanne
Alle the heredmen in halle, the hyghe and the lowe.
The renk on his rouncé hym ruched in his sadel,
And runischly his red yghen he reled aboute,
305 Bende his bresed browez, blycande grene,
Wayved his berde for to wayte quo-so wolde ryse.
When non wolde kepe hym with carp he coghed ful hyghe,
Ande rimed hym ful richely, and ryght hym to speke:
“What, is this Arthures hous?” quoth the hathel thenne,
310 “That al the rous rennes of thurgh ryalmes so mony?
Where is now your sourquydrye and your conquestes,
Your gryndellayk and your greme, and your grete wordes?

¹ *batayl bare* Either “without armor” (compare 290) or—as suggested by *thre bare mote*, 1141—“in single combat.”

² *a Crystemas 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.

A combat without armor,
You will not lack a fight.”

280 “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.
285 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;
290 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,
295 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
300 What any here dare say.”

If he petrified them at first, even stiller were then
All the courtiers in that place, the great and the small.
The man on the horse turned himself in his saddle,
Ferociously rolling his red eyes about,
305 Bunched up his eyebrows, bristling with green,
Swung his beard this way and that to see whoever would rise.
When no one would answer he cried out aloud,
Drew himself up grandly and started to speak.
“What, is this Arthur’s house?” said the man then,
310 “That everyone talks of in so many kingdoms?
Where are now your arrogance and your victories,
Your fierceness and wrath and your great speeches?

³ *brayn* Crazy, reckless; usually *braynwod*, as at 1461.

⁴ *as bare as I sitte* 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
 Overwalt wyth a worde of on wyghes speche,
 315 For al dares for drede withoute dynt schewed!
 Wyth this he laghes so loude that the lorde greved;
 The blod schot for scham into his schyre face
 and lere;
 He wex as wroth as wynde,
 320 So did alle that ther were.
 The kyng as kene bi kynde
 Then stod that stif mon nere,

And sayde, "Hathel, by heven, thy askyng is nys,
 And as thou foly hatz frayst, fynde the behoves.
 325 I know no gome that is gast of thy grete wordes,
 Gif me now thy geserne, upon Godez halve,
 And I schal baythen thy bone that thou boden habbes."
 Lyghtly lepez he him to, and laght at his honde,
 Then feersly that other freke upon fote lyghtis.
 330 Now hatz Arthur his axe, and the halme grypez,
 And sturnely sturez hit aboute, that stryke wyth hit thoght.
 The stif mon hym bifore stod upon hyght,
 Herre then ani in the hous by the hede and more.
 With sturne schere ther he stod he stroked his berde,
 335 And wyth a countenance dryghe he drogh down his cote,
 No more mate ne dismayd for hys mayn dintez¹
 Then any burne upon bench hade broght hym to drynk
 of wyne.
 Gawan, that sate bi the quene,
 340 To the kyng he can encline:
 "I beseche now with sayez sene
 This melly mot be myne."²

"Wolde ye, worthilych lorde," quoth Wawan to the kyng,
 "Bid me boghe fro this benche, and stonde by yow there,
 345 That I wythoute vylanye myght voyde this table,
 And that my legge lady lyked not ille,³
 I wolde com to your counseyl bifore your cort riche.
 For me think hit not semly, as hit is soth knawen,
 Ther such an askyng is hevened so hyghe in your sale,
 350 Thagh ye yourself be talenttyf, to take hit to yourselfen,
 Whil mony so bolde yow aboute upon bench sytten
 That under heven I hope non hagherer of wylle,
 Ne better bodyes on bent ther baret is rered.

¹ *for hys mayn dintez* Because of Arthur's great practice blows.

² *This melly mot be myne* Let this be my combat.

Now the revely and repute of the Round Table
 Are overthrown with a word from one man's mouth,
 315 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,
 320 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.
 325 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.
 330 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,
 335 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
 340 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,
 345 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,
 350 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.

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,
 355 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 nocht hit yow falles,
 And I have frayned hit at yow fyrst, foldez hit to me;
 360 And if I carp not comlyly, let alle this cort rych
 bout blame.”
 Ryche togeder con roun,
 And sythen thay redder alle same,
 To ryd the kyng wyth croun
 365 And gif Gawan the game.

Then comaunded the kyng the knyght for to ryse;
 And he ful radly upros, and ruchched hym fayre,
 Kneled down bifore the kyng, and cachez that weppen;
 And he lufflyly hit hym laft, and lyfte up his honde
 370 And gef hym Goddez blessing, 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 redez hym ryght, redly I trowe
 That thou schal byden the bur¹ that he schal bede after.”
 375 Gawan gotz to the gome with giserne in honde,
 And he baldly hym bydez, he bayst never the helder.
 Then carppez to Sir Gawan the knyght in the grene,
 “Refourme we oure forwardes, er we fyrre passe.
 Fyrst I ethe the, hathel, how that thou hattes
 380 That thou me telle truly, as I tryst may.”
 “In god fayth,” quoth the goode knyght, “Gawan I hatte,
 That bede the this buffét, quat-so bifallez after,
 And at this tyme twelmonyth take at the an other
 Wyth what weppen so thou wylt, and wyth no wygh ellez
 385 on lyve.”
 That other onswarez agayn,
 “Sir Gawan, so mot I thryve,
 As I am ferly fayn
 This dint that thou schal dryve.

390 “Bigog,” quoth the grene knyght, “Sir Gawan, me lykes
 That I schal fange at thy fust that I haf frayst here.²
 And thou hatz redily rehersed, bi resoun ful trwe,
 Clanly al the covenaut that I the kyng asked,
 Saf that thou schal siker me, segge, bi thi trawthe,

I am the weakest of them, I know, and the dullest-minded,
 355 So my death would be least loss, 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.
 360 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
 365 And Gawain take his place.

Then the king commanded Gawain to stand up,
 And he did so promptly, and moved forward with grace,
 Kneeled down before the king and laid hold of the weapon;
 And Arthur gave it up graciously, and lifting his hand
 370 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.”
 375 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
 380 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
 385 on earth.”
 The other man replied,
 “Sir Gawain, as I live,
 I am extremely glad
 This blow is yours to give.

390 By God,” said the Green Knight, “Sir Gawain, I am pleased
 That I shall get from your hands what I have asked for here.
 And you have fully repeated, in exact terms,
 Without omission the whole covenant I put to the king;
 Except that you shall assure me, sir, on your word,

¹ *thou schal byden the bur* You’ll be kept waiting for his blow.

² “*Bigog*,” ... *here* The Green Knight does not explain why he is especially pleased that Gawain accepts the challenge.

395 That thou schal seche me thiself, where-so thou hopes
 I may be funde upon folde, and foch the such wages
 As thou deles me to-day bfore this douthe ryche.”
 “Where schulde I wale the?” quoth Gawan, “Where is thy
 place?
 I wot never where thou wonyes, bi hym that me wrought,
 400 Ne I know not the, knyght, thy cort ne thi name.
 Bot teche me truly therto, and telle me how thou hattes,
 And I schal ware alle my wyt to wynne me theder,
 And that I swere the for sothe, and by my seker traweth.”
 “That is innogh in Nwe Yer,¹ hit nedes no more,”
 405 Quoth the gome in the grene to Gawan the hende;
 “Yif I the telle trwly quen I the tape have,
 And thou me smothely hatz smyten, smartly I the teche
 Of my hous and my home and myn owen nome,
 Then may thou frayst my fare and forwardez holde;
 410 And if I spende no speche, thenne spedez thou the better,
 For thou may leng in thy londe and layt no fyrr—
 bot slokes!
 Ta now thy grymme tole to the,
 And lat se how thou cnokez.”
 415 “Gladly, sir, for sothe,”
 Quoth Gawan: his ax he strokes.

The grene knyght upon grounde graythely hym dresses,
 A littel lut with the hed, the lere he discoverez,
 His longe lovelych lokkez he layd over his croun,
 420 Let the naked nec to the note schewe.
 Gawan gripped to his ax and gederes hit on hyght,
 The kay fot on the folde he before sette,
 Let hit doun lyghtly lyght on the naked,
 That the scharp of the schalk schyndered the bones,
 425 And schrank thurgh the schyire grece, and schade hit in twynne,
 That the bit of the broun² stel bot on the grounde.
 The fayre hede fro the halce hit to the erthe,
 That fele hit foyned wyth hir fete, there hit forth roled;
 The blod brayed from the body, that blykked on the grene;
 430 And nawther faltered ne fel the freke never the helder,
 Bot stythly he start forth upon styf schonkes,
 And runyschly he raght out, there as renkkez stoden,
 Laght to his lufly hed, and lyft hit up sone;
 And sythen bowez to his blonk, the brydel he cachchez,

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

395 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 Gawain, “Where is your
 dwelling?
 I have no idea where you live, by him who made me;
 400 Nor do I know you, sir, your court 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,”
 405 Said the man in green to the courteous Gawain,
 “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;
 410 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 fearsome weapon
 And let’s see how you smite.”
 415 Said Gawain, “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,
 420 In readiness letting the naked neck show.
 Gawain 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
 425 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,
 430 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,

² *broun* Burnished.

435 Steppez into stelbawe and strydez alofte,
 And his hede by the here in his honde haldez.
 And as sadly the segge hym in his sadel sette
 As non unhap had hym ayled, thagh hedlez he were
 in stedde.

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

For the hede in his honde he haldez up even,
 445 Toward the derrest on the dece he dressez the face,
 And hit lyfte up the yghe-lyddez and loked ful brode,
 And meled thus much with his muthe, as ye may now
 here:

“Loke, Gawan, thou be graythe to go as thou hettez,
 And layte as lelly til thou me, lude, fynde,
 450 As thou hatz hette in this halle, herande thise knyghtes;
 To the grene chapel thou chose, I charge the, to fotte
 Such a dunt as thou hatz dalt, diserved thou habbez
 To be yederly yolden on Nw Yeres morn.
 The knyght of the grene chapel men knowen me mony,
 455 Forthi 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 fole hoves.
 460 To quat kyth he becom knwe non there,
 Never more then thay wyste from quethen he watz wonnen.
 What thenne?
 The kyng and Gawan thare
 At that grene thay laghe and grenne;
 465 Yet breved watz hit ful bare
 A mervayl among tho menne.

Thagh Arther the hende kyng at hert hade wonder,
 He let no semblaunt be sene, bot sayde ful hyghe
 To the comlych quene wyth cortays speche,
 470 “Dere dame, to-day demay yow never;
 Wel bycommes such craft¹ upon Cristmasse,
 Laykyng of enterludez, to laghe and to syng,
 Among thise kynde caroles of knyghtez and ladyez.
 Never the lece to my mete I may me wel dres,

¹ *such craft* Display of skill. Arthur speaks as though the beheading had been a conjuring trick.

435 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.

440 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,
 445 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,
 450 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,
 455 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.
 460 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 Gawain grin;
 465 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,
 470 “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,

475 For I haf sen a selly, I may not forsake.”
 He glent upon Sir Gawen, and gaynly he sayde,
 “Now sir, heng up thyn ax,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,
 480 And bi trwe tytel therof to telle the wonder.
 Thenne thay bowed to a borde thise burnes togeder,
 The kyng and the gode knyght, and kene men hem served
 Of alle dayntyez double, as derrest myght falle;
 Wyth alle maner of mete and mynstralcie bothe,
 485 Wyth wele walt thay that day, til worthed an ende
 in londe.
 Now thenk wel, Sir Gawan,
 For wothe that thou ne wonde
 This aventure for to frayn
 490 That thou hatz tan on honde.

FITT 2

This hanselle hatz Arthur of aventurus on fyrst
 In yonge yer, for he yerned yelpyng to here.
 Thagh hym wordez were wane² when thay to sete wenten,
 Now ar thay stoken of sturne werk, stafful her hond.
 495 Gawan watz glad to begynne those gomnez in halle,
 Bot thagh the ende be hevvy 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 foldez ful selden.
 500 Forthi this Yol overyede, and the yere after,
 And uche sesoun serlepex 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 threpez,³
 505 Colde clengez adoun,⁴ cloudez upliften,
 Schyre schedez the rayn in schowrez ful warme,
 Fallez upon fayre flat, flowrez there schewen,
 Bothe groundez and the grevez grene ar her wedez,
 Bryddez busken to bylde, and bremlych syngen

¹ *heng up thyn ax* Arthur *gaynly* or aptly quotes a proverbial saying, meaning “end your strife.”

² *wordez were wane* Because the Green Knight had taken their breath away.

475 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,
 480 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
 485 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
 490 You have sworn to undertake.

PART 2

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.
 495 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.
 500 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 plainer nourishment;
 But then the weather on earth battles with winter,
 505 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

³ *wyth wynter hit threpez* The seasons do not simply follow each other quietly but fight for succession: see 525, where autumn wind *wastelez with the sunne*.

⁴ *Colde clengez adoun* Winter is driven down into the earth, waiting to emerge again.

510 For solace of the softe somer that sues therafter
 bi bonk;
 And blossomez bolne to blowe
 Bi rawez rych and ronk,
 Then notez noble innoghe
 515 Ar herde in wod so wlonk.

After the sesoun of somer wyth the soft wyndez,
 Quen Zeferus¹ syflez hymself on sedez and erbez,
 Wela wynne is the wort that waxes theroute,
 When the donkande dewe dropez of the levez,
 520 To bide a blyful blusch of the bryght sunne.
 Bot then hyghes hervest, and hardenes hym sone,
 Warnez hym for the wynter to wax ful rype.
 He dryves wyth droght the dust for to ryse
 Fro the face of the folde to flyghe ful hyghe;
 525 Wrothe wynde of the welkyn wrastelez with the sunne,
 The levez lancen fro the lynde and lyghten on the grounde,
 And al grayes the gres that grene watz ere.
 Thenne al rypez and rotez that ros upon fyrst,
 And thus yirnez the yere in yisterdayez mony,
 530 And wynter wyndez agayn, as the worlde askez,
 no fage;
 Til Meghelmas² mone
 Watz cumen wyth wynter wage;
 Then thenkkez Gawan ful sone
 535 Of his anious vyage.

Yet quyl Al-hal-day³ with Arther he lenges;
 And he made a fare on that fest for the frekez sake,
 With much revel and ryche of the Rounde Table.
 Knyghtez ful cortays and comlych ladies
 540 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 aftter mete with mourning he melez to his eme,
 And spekez of his passage, and pertly he sayde,
 545 “Now, lege lorde of my lyf, leve I yow ask;
 Ye knowe the cost of this cace, kepe I no more
 To telle yow tenez therof, never bot trifel;
 Bot I am boun to the bur barely to-mome
 To sech the gome of the grene, as God wyl me wysse.”
 550 Then the best of the burgh bowed togeder,

¹ *Zeferus* God of the West Wind.

² *Meghelmas* I.e., Michaelmas, the feast of St. Michael, celebrated on 29 September.

510 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
 515 From woodlands echo forth.

Then comes the summer season with gentle winds,
 When Zephyrus blows softly on seeding grasses and plants,
 Beautiful is the growth that springs from the seed,
 When the moistening dew drips from the leaves
 520 To await a joyful gleam of the bright sun.
 But then autumn comes quickly and urges it on,
 Warns 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;
 525 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,
 530 And winter comes round again, as custom requires,
 in truth;
 Until the Michaelmas moon
 Brought hint of winter's frost;
 And into Gawain's mind
 535 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
 540 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,
 545 “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.”
 550 Then the noblest in the court gathered together,

³ *Al-hal-day* I.e., All Hallows' Day, or All Saints' Day, celebrated 1 November.

Aywan and Errik, and other ful mony,
 Sir Doddinaival de Savage, the duc of Clarence,
 Launcelot and Lyonel, and Lucan the gode,
 Sir Boos and Sir Bydver, big men bothe,
 555 And mony other menskful, with Mador de la Port.
 Alle this compayny of court com the kyng nerre
 For to counseyl the knyght, with care at her hert.
 There watz much derve doel driven in the sale
 That so worthé as Wawan schulde wende on that ernde,
 560 To dryve a delful dynt, and dele no more
 wyth bronde.
 The knyght mad ay god chere,
 And sayde, "Quat schulde I wonde?
 Of destinés derf and dere
 565 What may mon do bot fonde?"

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

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

Ywain and Eric, and many others,
 Sir Dodinal le Sauvage, the duke of Clarence,
 Lancelot and Lionel, and Lucan the good,
 Sir Bors and Sir Bedevere, both powerful men,
 555 And several other worthy knights, including Mador de la Port.
 This group of courtiers approached the king,
 To give advice to Gawain with troubled hearts.
 Much deep sorrowing was heard in the hall
 That one as noble as Gawain should go on that quest,
 560 To stand a terrible blow, and never more brandish
 his sword.
 Keeping an unchanged face,
 "What should I fear?" he said;
 "For whether kind or harsh
 565 A man's fate must be tried."

He stays there 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.
 570 The brave knight 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 knight's feet,
 575 Clashed 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,
 580 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
 585 at that time;
 With costly coat-armor,
 His gold spurs worn with pride,
 Girt with a trusty sword,
 A silk belt round him tied.

590 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,

595 Lachez luffly his leve at lordez and ladyez;
 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 frenges,
 Ayquere naylet ful nwe, for that note ryched;
 600 The brydel barred aboute, with bryght golde bounden,
 The apparayl of the payttrure and of the proude skyrtez,
 The cropore and the covertor, acorded wyth the arsounez;
 And al watz rayled on red ryche golde naylez,
 That al glytered and glent as glem of the sunne.
 605 Thenne hentes he the helme, and hastily hit kysses,
 That watz stapled stifly, and stoffed wythinne.
 Hit watz hyghe on his hede, hasped bihynde,
 Wyth a lyghtly urysoun over the aventayle,
 Enbrawden and bounden wyth the best gemmez
 610 On brode sylkyn borde, and bryddez on semez,
 As papjayeze paynted peryng bitwene,
 Tortors and trulofez entayled so thyk
 As mony burde theraboute had ben seven wynter
 in toune.
 615 The cercle watz more o prys
 That umbeclypped hys croun,
 Of diamauntez a devys
 That bothe were bryght and broun.¹

Then thay schewed hym the schelde, that was of schyr goulez,
 620 Wyth the pentangel depaynt of pure gold hwez.
 He braydez hit by the bauderyk, aboute the hals kestes,
 That bisemed the segge semlyly fayre.
 And quy the pentangel apendez to that prynce noble
 I am in tent yow to telle, thof tary hyt me schulde:
 625 Hit is a syngne that Salomon set sumquyle
 In bytoknyng of trawthe, bi tytly that hit habbez,
 For hit is a figure that haldez fyve poyntez,
 And uche lyne umbelappez and loukez in other,
 And ayquere hit is endelez; and Englych hit callen
 630 Overal, as I here, the endeles knot.²
 Forthy hit acordez to this knyght and to his cler armez,
 For ay faythful in fyve and sere fyve sythez
 Gawan watz for gode knawen, and as golde pured,
 Voyded of uche vylany, wyth vertuez ennourned
 635 in mote;

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-

595 Graciously takes his leave of lords and ladies;
 And they kissed and escorted him, commending him to Christ.
 By then Gringolet was ready, fitted with a saddle
 That splendidly shone with many gold fringes,
 Newly studded all over for that special purpose;
 600 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.
 605 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
 610 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.
 615 A circlet 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,
 620 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.
 625 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
 630 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
 635 adorned.

ence to its place in *the best boke of romaunce*, l. 2521, the remark should probably be regarded as poetic license. The line does not alliterate.

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

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

640 Fyrst he watz funden fautlez in his fyve wyttez,
 And eft fayled never the freke in his fyve fyngrs,
 And alle his afaunce upon folde watz in the fyve woundez
 That Cryst caght on the croys, as the crede tellez;
 And quere-so-ever thys mon in melly watz stad,
 645 His thro thought watz in that, thurgh alle other thynges,
 That alle his forsnes he feng at the fyve joyez
 That the hende heven-quene had of hir chylde;
 At this cause the knyght comlyche hade
 In the inore half of his schelde hir image depaynted,
 650 That quen he blusched therto his belde never payred.
 The fyft fyve that I fynde that the frek used
 Watz fraunchyse and felaghschyp forbe al thyng,
 His clannes and his cortaysye croked were never,
 And pité,¹ that passez alle poyntez: thyse pure fyve
 655 Were harder happed on that hathel then on any other.
 Now alle these fyve sythez, for sothe, were fetled on this
 knyght,
 And uchone halched in other, that non ende hade,
 And fyched upon fyve poyntez, that fayld never,
 Ne samned never in no syde, ne sundred nouter,
 660 Withouten ende at any noke I oquere fynde,
 Wherever the gomen bygan, or glod to an ende.
 Therefore on his schene schelde schapen watz the knot
 Ryally wyth red golde upon rede gowlez,
 That is the pure pentaungel wyth the peple called
 665 with lore.
 Now graythed is Gawan gay,
 And laght his launce ryght thore,
 And gef them alle goud day,
 He wende for evermore.

640 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 wherever this man found himself in battle
 645 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,
 650 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
 655 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 separating either;
 660 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
 665 who know.
 Now Gawain, lance in hand,
 Is ready to depart;
 He bade them all farewell,
 Not to return, he thought.

670 He sperres the sted with the spurez and sprong on his way,
 So stif that the ston-fyr stroke out thereafter.
 Al that sey that semly syked in hert,
 And sayde sothly² al same segges til other,
 Carande for that comly, "Bi Kryst, hit is scathe
 675 That thou leude, schal be lost, that art of lyf noble!

670 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
 675 That your life must be squandered, noble as you are!

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

² *sothly* A dialect term meaning "quietly."

To fynde hys fere upon folde, in fayth, is not ethe.
 Warloker to haf wrought had more wyt bene,
 And haf dyght yonder dere a duk to have worthed;
 A lowande leder of ledez in londe hym wel semez,
 680 And so had better haf ben then britned to noght,
 Hadet wyth an alvisch mon, for angardez pryde.
 Who knew ever any kyng such counsel to take
 As knyghtez in cavelaciounz on Crystmasse gomnez!"
 Wel much watz the warme water that waltered of yghen,
 685 When that semly syre soght fro tho wonez
 thad daye.
 He made non abode,
 Bot wyghtly went hys way;
 Mony wylsum way he rode,
 690 The bok as I herde say.

Now ridez this renk thurgh the ryalme of Logres,¹
 Sir Gawan, on Godez halve, thagh hym no gomen thoght.
 Oft leudlez and alone he lengez on nyghtez
 Ther he fonde noght hym byfore the fare that he lyked.
 695 Hade he no fere bot his fole by frythez and dounez,
 Ne no gome bot God bi gate wyth to carp,
 Til that he neghed ful neghe into the Northe Walez.
 Alle the iles of Anglesay on lyft half he haldez,
 And farez over the fordez by the forlondez,
 700 Over at the Holy Hede, til he hade eft bonk
 In the wyldrenesse of Wyrre; wonde ther bot lyte
 That auther God other gome 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,
 705 In any grounde therabout, of the grene chapel;
 And al nykked hym wyth nay, that never in her lyve
 Thay seye never no segge that watz of suche hwez
 of grene.
 The knyght tok gates straunge
 710 In mony a bonk unbene,
 His cher ful oft con chaunge
 That chapel er he myght sene.

Mony klyf he overclambe in contrayez straunge,
 Fer floten fro his frendez fremedly he rydez.
 715 At uche warthe other water ther the wyghe passed
 He fonde a foo hym byfore, bot ferly hit were,
 And that so foule and so felle that feght hym byhode.
 So mony mervayl bi mount ther the mon fynde,

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,
 680 And would better have been so than battered to nothing,
 Beheaded by an ogreish 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
 685 When that elegant lord set out from the city
 that day.
 He did not linger there,
 But swiftly went his way;
 Taking perplexing roads
 690 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.
 695 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,
 700 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
 705 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
 710 Through many a dreary space,
 Turning from side to side
 To find the meeting-place.

Many fells he climbed over in territory strange,
 Far distant from his friends like an alien he rides.
 715 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.
 720 Sumwhyle wyth wormez he werrez, and with wolves als,
 Sumwhyle wyth wodwos that woned in the knarrez,
 Bothe wyth bullez and berez, and borez otherquyle,
 And etaynez that hym aneledede of the heghe felle;
 Nade he ben dughty and dryghe, and Dryghtyn had served,
 725 Douteles he hade ben ded and dreped ful ofte.
 For werre wrathed hym not so much that wynter nas wors,
 When the colde cler water fro the cloudez schadde,
 And fres er hit falle myght to the fale erthe.
 Ner slayn wyth the slete he sleped in his yrnas
 730 Mo nyghtez then innoghe in naked rokkez,
 Ther as claterande fro the crest the colde borne rennez,
 And hinged heghe over his hede in hard iisse-ikkles.
 Thus in peryl and payne and plytes ful harde
 Bi contray caryez this knyght, tyl Krystmasse even,
 735 al one;
 The knyght wel that tyde
 To Mary made his mone,
 That ho hym red to ryde
 And wysse hym to sum wone.

740 Bi a mounthe on the morne meryly he rydes
 Into a forest ful dep, that ferly watz wylde;
 Highe hillez on uche a halve, and holtwodez under
 Of hore okez ful hoge a hundreth togeder;
 The hasel and the haghthome were harled al samen,
 745 With roghe raged mosse rayled aywhere,
 With mony bryddez unblythe upon bare twyges,
 That pitosly ther piped for pyne of the colde.
 The gome upon Gryngolet glydez hem under,
 Thurgh mony misy and myre, mon al hym one,
 750 Carande for his costes, lest he ne kever schulde
 To se the servyse of that syre, that on that self nyght
 Of a burde watz borne, our baret to quelle;
 And therfore sykyng he sayde, "I beseche the, lorde,
 And Mary, that is myldest moder so dere,
 755 Of sum herber ther heghly I myght here masse,
 And thy matynez¹ to-morne, mekely I ask,
 And therto prestly I pray my pater² and ave³
 and crede."⁴

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 ...").

It would be tedious to recount the least part of them.
 720 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,
 725 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 faded earth.
 Half dead with the cold Gawain slept in his armor
 730 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
 735 alone.
 Earnestly Gawain then
 Prayed Mary that she send
 Him guidance to some place
 Where he might lodging find.

740 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,
 745 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 morass and swamp, a solitary figure,
 750 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,
 755 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."

³ *ave* Latin: hail; i.e., "Ave Maria" ("Hail Mary").

⁴ *crede* Latin: I believe ("The Creed").

He rode in his prayere,
 760 And cryed for his mysdede,
 He sayned hym in sythes sere,¹
 And sayde, "Cros Kryst me spedel!"

 Nade he sayned hymself, segge, bot thrye,
 Er he watz war in the wod of a wone in a mote,
 765 Abof a launde, on a lawe, loken under boghez
 Of mony borelych bole aboute bi the diche:
 A castle the comlokest that ever knyght aghte,
 Pyched on a prayere, a park al aboute,
 With a pyked palays pyned ful thik,
 770 That umbeteve mony tre mo then two myle.
 That holde on that on syde the hathel avyded
 As hit schemered and schon² thurgh the schyre okez;
 Thenne hatz he hendly of his helme, and heghly he thonkez
 Jesus and sayn Gilyan,³ that gentyle ar bothe,
 775 That cortaysly had hym kydde, and his cry herkened.
 "Now bone hostel,"⁴ cothe 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 bremly the burne to the bryge ende
 780 in haste.
 The bryge watz breme upbrayde,
 The gateg were stoken faste,
 The wallez were wel arayed
 Hit dut no wyndez blaste.

 785 The burne bode on blonk, that on bonk hoved
 Of the depe double dich that drof to the place;
 The walle wod in the water wonderly depe,
 And eft a ful huge heght hit haled upon lofte
 Of harde hewen ston up to the tablez,
 790 Enbaned under the abataylment in the best lawe;
 And sythen garytez ful gaye gered bitwene,
 Wyth mony luflych loupe that louked ful clene:
 A better barbican that burne blusched upon never.
 And innermore he behelde that halle ful hyghe,
 795 Towres telled bytwene, trochet ful thik,
 Fayre fylyolez that fyghed, and ferlyly long,

Bewailing his misdeeds,
 760 And praying as he rode,
 He often crossed himself
 Crying, "Prosper me, Christ's cross!"

 Hardly had he crossed himself, that man, three times,
 Before he caught sight through the trees of a moated building
 765 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
 770 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 oaks;
 Then graciously takes off his helmet, and devoutly thanks
 Jesus and St. Julian, who kindly are both,
 775 Who had treated him courteously, and listened to his prayer.
 "Now good lodging," said the man, "I beg you to grant!"
 Then he urged Gringolet 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
 780 with speed.
 The bridge was drawn up tight,
 The gates were bolted fast.
 The walls were strongly built,
 They feared no tempest's blast.

 785 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,
 790 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
 795 With towers set at intervals, richly ornate,
 Splendid pinnacles fitted into them, wonderfully tall,

¹ *in sythes sere* Every time he prayed.

² *hit schemered and schon* See also *that blenked 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 coprounez craftyly sleghe.¹
 Chalkwhyth chymnees ther ches he innoghe²
 Upon bastel rovez, that blenked ful quyte;
 800 So many pynakle paynted watz poudred ayquere,
 Among the castel carnelez clambred so thik
 That pared out of papure³ purely hit semed.
 The fre freke on the fole hit fayre innoghe thoght,
 If he myght kever to com the cloyster wythinne,
 805 To herber in that hostel whyl halyday lested,
 avinant.
 He calde, and son ther com
 A porter pure plesaunt,
 On the wal his ernde he nome,
 810 And haylsed the knyght erraunt.

 “Gode sir,” quoth Gawain, “woldez thou go myn ernde,
 To the hegh lorde of this hous, herber to crave?”
 “Ye, Peter,”⁴ quoth the porter, “and purely I trowee
 That ye be, wyghe, welcum to wone quyle yow lykez.”
 815 Then yede the wyghe yerne and com agayn swythe,
 And folke frely hym wyth, to fonge the knyght.
 Thay let down the grete draght and derely out yeden,
 And kneled down on her knes upon the colde erthe
 To welcum this ilk wygh as worthy hom thoght;
 820 Thay yolden hym the brode gate, yarked up wyde,
 And he hem raysed rekenly, and rod over the brygge.
 Sere segges hym sesed by sadel, quel he lyght,
 And sythen stabled his stede stif men innoghe.
 Knyghtez and swyerez comen down thenne
 825 For to bryng this buurne wyth blys into halle;
 Quen he hef up his helme, ther hyghed innoghe
 For to hent it at his honde, the hende to serven;
 His bronde and his blasoun both thay token.
 Then haylsed he ful hendly tho hatelez uchone,
 830 And many proud mon ther presed that prynde to honour.
 Alle hasped in his hegh wede to halle thay hym wonnen,

¹ *craftyly sleghe* The castle architecture abounds with craftsmanship. *Sleghe*, meaning skillful, intricate, subtle, is a term of some significance in the poem. Gawain’s fellow-guests hope to see *sleghtez of thewez*, 916, skillful displays of good manners; and after creeping into his bedchamber the lady calls him *a sleper unslyghe*, 1209 or unwary, a related term. On being told that he cannot be killed *for slyght upon erthe*, 1854, while wearing the belt, Gawain tells himself that such a *sleght were noble*, 1858. Here the word shades off towards modern “sleight,” with overtones of trickery or deceit appropriate to

Topped by carved crocketing, skillfully worked.
 Chalk-white chimneys he saw there without number
 On the roofs of the towers, that brilliantly shone.
 800 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,
 805 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
 810 Greeted the questing knight.

 “Good sir,” said Gawain, “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.”
 815 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.
 820 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
 825 To escort this man joyfully into the hall.
 When Gawain 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,
 830 And many proud men pressed forward to honor that noble.
 Still dressed in his armor they brought him into hall,

the story. But many passages of the poem illustrate the poet’s fondness for the elaborate craftsmanship or *wylyde werke* that is evident in his own writing, particularly in the *entrelacement* of Part 3.

² *ches he 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;
 835 He sayde, "Ye ar welcum to welde as yow lykez
 That here is: al is yowre awen, to have at yowre wyll
 and welde."
 "Graunt mercy," quoth Gawayn,
 "Ther Kryst hit yow foryelde."
 840 As frekez that semed fayn
 Ayther other in armez con felde.

Gawan glynte on the gome that godly hym gret,
 And thught hit a bolde burne that the burgh aghte;
 A hoge hathel for the nonez, and of hyghe eldee;
 845 Brode, bryght, watz his berde, and al bever-hwed,
 Sturne, stif on the stryththe on stalworth schonkez,
 Felle face as the fyre, and fre of hys speche,
 And wel hym semed, for sothe, as the segge thught,
 To lede a lortschyp in lee of leudez ful gode.
 850 The lorde hym charred to a chambre, and chefly cumaundez
 To delyver hym a leude, hym lowly to serve;
 And there were boun at his bode burnez innoghe,
 That broght hym to a bryght boure, ther beddyng was
 noble,
 Of cortynes of clere sylk wyth cler golde hemmez,
 855 And covertorez ful curious with comlych panez
 Of bryght blaunner above, enbrawddez bisydez,
 Rudelez rennande on ropez, red golde rynggez,
 Tapitez tyght to the wowe of tuly and tars,
 And under fete, on the flet, of folyande sute.
 860 Ther he watz dispoyled, wyth speches of myerthe,
 The burne of his bruny and of his bryght wedez.
 Ryche robes ful rad renkkez hym broghten,
 For to charge and to chaunge, and chose of the best.
 Sone as he on hent, and happed therinne,
 865 That sete on hym semly wyth saylande skyrttez,
 The ver by his visage verayly hit semed
 Welnegh to uche hathel, alle on hwes
 Lowande and lufly alle his lymmez under,
 That a comloker knyght never Kryst made,
 870 hem thocht.
 Whethen in worlde he were,
 Hit semed as he moht

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.
 835 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."
 840 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;
 845 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.
 850 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,
 855 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.
 860 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,
 865 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,
 870 it seemed.
 Wherever he came from,
 He must be, so they thought,

Be prynce withouten pere
In felde ther felle men foght.

A prince unparalleled
In field where warriors fought.

875 A cheyer¹ byfore the chemné, ther charcole brenned,
Watz grathed for Sir Gawan graythely with clothez,
Whyssynes upon queldepyntes that koynt wer bothe;
And thenne a meré mantyle watz on that mon cast
Of a broun bleeaunt, enbrauded ful ryche
880 And fayre furred wythinne with fellez of the best,
Alle of ermyne in erde, his hode of the same;
And he sette in that settel semlych ryche,
And achaufed hym chefly, and thenne his cher mended.
Sone watz telded up a tabil on trestez ful fayre,
885 Clad wyth a clene clothe that cler quyt schewed,
Sanap, and salure, and sylverin sponnez.
The wyghe wesche at his wylle and went to his mete:
Seggez hym served semly innoghe,
Wyth sere sewes and sete, sesounde of the best,
890 Double-felde, as hit fallez, and fele kyn fischez,²
Summe baken in bred, summe brad on the gledez,
Summe sothen, summe in sewe savered with spyces,
And ay sawes so sleghe that the segge lyked.
The freke calde hit a fest ful frely and ofte
895 Ful hendely, quen alle the hatheles rehayted hym at onez,
as hende,
“This penaunce now ye take,
And eft hit schal amende.”
That mon much merthe con make,
900 For wyn in his hed that wende.

Thenne watz spyed and spured upon spare wyse
Bi prevé poyntez of that prynce, put to hymselfen,
That he biknew cortaysly of the court that he were
That athel Arthure the hende haldez hym one,
905 That is the ryche ryal kyng of the Rounde Table,
And hit watz Wawen hymself that in that won syttez,
Comen to that Krystmase, as case hym then lympez.
When the lorde hade lerned that he the leude hade,
Loude laghed he therat, so lef hit hym thoght,

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 bench*, 280, and by Gawain's request for permission to *boghe fro this benche*, 344.

875 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,
880 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,
885 Spread with a fine tablecloth, brilliantly white,
With overcloth and salt-cellar, 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,
890 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,
895 Courteously when the knights all urged him together,
as polite,
“Accept this penance now,
Soon you'll be better fed.”
Gawain grew full of mirth
900 As wine went to his head.

Then he was tactfully questioned and asked
By discreet enquiry addressed to that prince,
So that he must politely admit he belonged to the court
Which noble Arthur, that gracious man, rules alone,
905 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;

² *fele 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 penance, 897, and Gawain is promised something better on the next day, 898.

910 And alle the men in that mote maden much joye
 To apere in his presense prestly that tyme,
 That alle prys and prowes and pured thewes¹
 Apendes to hys persoun, and praysed is ever;
 Byfore alle men upon molde his mensk is the most.
 915 Uch segge ful softly sayde to his fere:
 “Now schal we semlych se sleghtez of thewez
 And the teccheles termes of talkyng noble,
 Wich spede is in speche unspurd may we lerne,²
 Syn we haf fonged that fyne fader of nurture.
 920 God hatz geven us his grace godly for sothe,
 That such a gest as Gawan grauntez us to have,
 When burnez blythe of his burthe schal sitte
 and synge.
 In menyng of manerez mere
 925 This burne now schal us bryng,
 I hope that may hym here
 Schal lerne of luf-talkyng.”

Bi that the diner watz done and the dere up
 Hit watz negh at the nyght neghed the tyme.
 930 Chaplaynez to the chapeles chosen the gate,
 Rungen ful rychely, ryght as thay schulden,
 To the hersum evensong of the hyghe tyde.
 The lorde loutes therto, and the lady als,
 Into a cumly closet coyntly ho entrez.
 935 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 wyghe of the worlde;
 And he hym thonkked throly, and ayther halched other,
 940 And seten soberly samen the servise quyle.
 Thenne lyst the lady to loke on the knyght,
 Thenne com ho of hir closet with mony cler burdez.
 Ho watz the fayrest in felle,³ of flesche and of lyre,
 And of compas and colour and costes, of all other,
 945 And wener then Wenore, as the wyght thoght.
 Ho ches thurgh the chaunsel to cheryche that hende:
 An other lady hir lad bi the lyft honde,
 That watz alder then ho, an auncian hit semed,
 And heghly honowred with hathelz aboute.

¹ *alle prys and prowes and pured thewes* Great excellence, military valor, and refined manners.

² *Wich spede is in speche unspurd may we lerne* We may learn without asking what success in conversation consists of.

910 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.
 915 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.
 920 Truly, God has been gracious to us indeed,
 In allowing us to receive such a guest as Gawain,
 Whose birth men will happily sit down and celebrate
 in song.
 In knowledge of fine manners
 925 This man has expertise;
 I think that those who hear him
 Will learn what love-talk is.”

When dinner was finished and Gawain had risen,
 The time had drawn on almost to night:
 930 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.
 935 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 welcomest guest in the world.
 Gawain thanked him heartily, and the two men embraced,
 940 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,
 945 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.

³ *the fayrest in felle* Literally, the most beautiful in skin.

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 perlez,
 955 Hir brest and hir bryght throte bare displayed,
 Schon schyrer then snawe that schedez on hillez;
 That other wyth a gorger watz gered over the swyre,
 Chymbled over hir blake chyn with chalkquyte vayles,
 Hir frount folden in sylk, enfoubled ayquere,
 960 Toreted and treleted with tryfles aboute,
 That nocht watz bare of that burde bot the blake browes,
 The tweyne yghen and the nase, the naked lyppez,
 And those were soure to se and sellyly blered;
 A mensk lady on molde mon may hire calle,
 965 for Gode!
 Hir body watz schort and thik,
 Hir buttokez balgh and brode,
 More lykkerwys on to lyk
 Watz that scho hade on lode.

970 When Gawayn glent on that gay, that graciously loked,
 Wyth leve laght of the lorde he lent hem agaynes;
 The alder he haylzes, heldande ful lowe,
 The loveloker he lappez a lyttel in armez,
 He kysses hir comlyly, and knyghtly he melez.
 975 Thay kallen hym of aquoyntaunce, and he hit quyk askez
 To be hir servaunt sothly, if hemsely lyked.
 Thay tan hym bytwene hem, wyth talkyng hym leden
 To chambre, to chemné, and chefly thay asken
 Spycez,¹ that unsparely men speded hom to bryng,
 980 And the wynnych wyne therwith uche tyme.
 The lorde luflych aloft lepez ful ofte,
 Mynned merthe to be made upon mony sythez,
 Hent heghly of his hode, and on a spere hinged,
 And wayned hom to wynne the worchip therof,
 985 That most myrthe myght meve that Crystenmasse whyle:²
 “And I schal fonde, bi my fayth, to fylter wyth the best
 Er me wont the wede, with help of my frendez.”
 Thus wyth laghande lotez the lorde hit tayt makez,
 For to glade Sir Gawayn with gomnez in halle
 990 that nyght,

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

950 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 kerchiefs of one,
 955 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 swarthy chin wrapped in chalkwhite veils,
 Her forehead enfolded in silk, muffled up everywhere,
 960 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,
 965 by God!
 With body squat and thick,
 And buttocks bulging broad,
 More delectable in looks
 Was the lady whom she led.

970 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.
 975 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,
 980 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,
 985 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
 990 that night,

² *Hent heghly ... Crystenmasse whyle* Another Christmas game, evidently a jumping contest, typically boisterous in character.

Til that hit watz tyme
 The lord comaundet lyght;
 Sir Gawen his leve con nyne
 And to his bed hym dight.

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

995 On the morne, as uch mon mynez that tyme
 That Dryghtyn for oure destyné to deye watz borne,
 Wele waxez in uche a won in world for his sake;
 So did hit there on that day thurgh dayntés mony.
 Bothe at mes and at mele messes ful quaynt¹
 1000 Derf men upon dece drest of the best.
 The olde auncian wyf heghest ho syttez,
 The lorde lufly her by lent, as I trowe;
 Gawan and the gay burde togeder thay seten,
 Even inmyddez, as the messe metely come,
 1005 And sythen thurgh al the sale as hem best semed.
 Bi uche grome at his degré graythely watz served,
 Ther watz mete, ther watz myrthe, ther watz much joye,
 That for to telle therof hit me tene were,
 And to poynte hit yet I pyned me paraventure.
 1010 Bot yet I wot that Wawen and the wale burde
 Such comfort of her compaynye caghten togeder
 Thurgh her dere dalyaunce of her derne wordez,
 Wyth clene cortays carp closed fro fylthe,
 That hor play watz passande uche prynce gomen,
 1015 in vayres.
 Trumpes and nakerys,
 Much pypyng ther repayres;
 Uche mon tented hys,²
 And thay two tented thayres.

995 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
 1000 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.
 Gawain and the lovely lady were seated together,
 Right in the middle of the table, where food duly came,
 1005 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.
 1010 Yet I know that Gawain 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,
 1015 for sure.
 Trumpets, kettledrums
 And piping roused all ears.
 Each man fulfilled his wishes,
 And those two followed theirs.

1020 Much dut watz ther dryven that day and that other,
 And the thryd as thro thronge in thereafter;
 The joye of sayn Jonez day³ watz gentyly to here,
 And watz the last of the layk, leudez ther thoghten.
 Ther wer gestes to go upon the gray morne,
 1025 Forthy wonderly thay woke, and the wyn dronken,
 Daunsed ful dreghly wyth dere carolez.
 At the last, when hit watz late, thay lachen her leve,
 Uchon to wende on his way that watz wyghe straunge.⁴

1020 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,
 1025 And so they reveled 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 *messes ful quaynt* Finely prepared meals, set out (*drest*) 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.

1030 Gawan gef hym god day, the godmon hym lachchez,
 Ledes hym to his awen chambre, the chemné bysyde,
 And there he drawez hym on dryghe, and derely hym thonkkez
 Of the wynne worschip that he hym wayved hade,
 As to honour his hous on that hygh tyde,
 And enbelyse his burgh with his bele chere.¹
 1035 “Iwysse, sir, quyl I leve, me worthez the better
 That Gawayn hatz ben my gest at Goddez awen fest.”
 “Grant merci, sir,” quoth Gawayn, “in god fayth hit is yowrez,
 Al the honour is your awen—the heghe kyng yow yelde!
 And I am wyghe at your wylle to worch youre hest,
 1040 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 Gawayn
 1045 Bi non way that he myght.²

Then frayed the freke ful fayre at himselven
 Quat derve dede had hym dryven at that dere tyme
 So kenly fro the kynggez kourt to kayre al his one,
 Er the halidayez holly were halet³ out of toun.
 1050 “For sothe, sir,” quoth the segge, “ye sayn bot the trawthe,
 A heghe ernde and a hasty me hade fro tho wonez,
 For I am sumned myselfe to sech to a place,
 I ne wot in the worlde whederwarde to wende hit to fynde.
 I nolde bot if I hit negh myght on Nw Yeres morne
 1055 For alle the londe inwyth Logres, so me oure lorde help!
 Forthy, sir, this enquest I require yow here,
 That ye telle me with trawthe if ever ye tale herde
 Of the grene chapel, quere hit on grounde stondez,
 And of the knyght that hit kepes, of colour of grene.
 1060 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 nekede now wontez,
 And I wolde loke on that lede, if God me let wolde,
 Gladloker, bi Goddez sun, then any god welde!
 1065 Forthi, iwysse, bi yowre wylle, wende me bihovos,
 Naf I now to busy bot bare thre dayez,
 And me als fayn to falle feye as fayly of myyn ernde.”
 Thenne laghande quoth the lorde, “Now leng the byhovos,

¹ *enbelyse ... 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.

Gawain bids goodbye to his host, who takes hold of him,
 1030 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.
 1035 “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,
 1040 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
 1045 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.
 1050 “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
 1055 For all the land in England, so help me our Lord!
 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.
 1060 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!
 1065 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,

³ *Er the halidayez holly were halet* Before the holidays were completely over. A curious remark. Gawain reaches the castle, Hautdesert, after a long journey (*towen fro ferre*, 1093) as the festivities are reaching their height, having left Camelot long before the holiday season began.

For I schal teche yow to that terme bi the tymes ende,
 1070 The grene chapayle upon grounde greve yow no more;
 Bot ye schal be in yowre bed, burne, at thyn ese,
 Quyle forth dayez, and ferk on the fyrst of the yere,
 And cum to that merk at mydmorn, to make quat yow likez
 in spenne.
 1075 Dowellez whyle New Yeres daye,
 And rys, and raykez thenne,
 Mon schal yow sette in waye,
 Hit is not two myle henne.”

Thenne watz Gawan ful glad, and gomenly he laghed:
 1080 “Now I think yow thryvandely thurgh alle other thyng,
 Now acheved is my chaunce, I schal at your wylle
 Dowelle, and ellez do quat ye demen.”
 Thenne sesed hym the syre and set hym bysyde,
 Let the ladies be fette to lyke hem the better.
 1085 Ther watz seme solace by hemself stille;
 The lorde let for luf lotez so myry
 As wygh that wolde of his wyte, ne wyst quat he myght.
 Thenne he carped to the knyght, criande loude,
 “Ye han demed to do the dede that I bidde;
 1090 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, “townen fro ferre,
 And sythen waked me wyth, ye arn not wel waryst
 1095 Nauther of sostnaunce ne of slepe, sothly I knowe;
 Ye schal lenge in your lofte, and lyghe in your ese
 To-morn quyle the messequyle, and to mete wende
 When ye wyl, wyth my wyf, that wyth yow schal sitte
 And comfort yow with companyny, til I to cort torne;
 1100 ye lende,
 And I schal erly ryse,
 On huntyng wyl I wende.”
 Gavayn grantez alle thyse,
 Hym heldande, as the hende.

1105 “Yet firre,” quoth the freke, “a forwarde we make:
 Quat-so-ever I wynne in the wod hit worthez to yourez,
 And quat chek so ye acheve¹ chaunge me therforne.
 Swete, swap we so, sware with trawthe,

¹ *quat chek so ye acheve* Whatever fortune you win. The remark is equivocal. *Chek* also has the sense of misfortune—see 1857 and 2195.

For I shall direct you to your meeting at the year’s end.
 1070 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.
 1075 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:
 1080 “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 seized him, set Gawain by his side,
 And bid the ladies be fetched to increase their delight.
 1085 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,
 “You have agreed to carry out whatever deed I ask;
 1090 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
 1095 Either 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.
 1100 You stay;
 And I shall rise at dawn
 And hunting will I go.”
 All this Gawain grants,
 With a well-mannered bow.

1105 “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,

Quether, leude, so lympe, lere other better."¹
 1110 "Bi God," quoth Gawain the gode, "I grant thertylle,
 And that yow lyst for to layke, lef hit me thynkes."
 "Who bryngez uus this beverage, this bargayn is maked":
 So sayde the lorde of that lede; thay laghed uchone,
 Thay dronken and dalyeden and dalten untyghtel,
 1115 Thise lordez and ladyez, quyle that hem lyked;
 And sythen with Frenkysch fare² and fele fayre lotez
 Thay stoden and stemed and styilly speken,
 Kysten ful comlyly and kaghten her leve.
 With mony leude ful lyght and lemande torches
 1120 Uche burne to his bed watz broght at the laste,
 ful softe.
 To bed yet er thay yede,
 Recorded covauntez ofte;
 The olde lorde of that leude
 1125 Cowthe wel halde layk alofte.

FITT 3

Ful erly bifore the day the folk uprysen,
 Gestes that go wolde hor gromez thay calden,
 And thay busken up bilyve blonkkez to sadel,
 Tyffen her takles, trussen her males,
 1130 Richen hem the rychest, to ryde alle arayde,
 Lepen up lightly, lachen her brydeles,
 Uche wyghe on his way ther hym wel lyked.
 The leve lorde of the londe watz not the last
 Arayed for the rydyng, with renkkes ful mony;
 1135 Ete a sop hastyly, when he hade herde masse,
 With bugle to bent-felde he buskez bylyve.
 By that any daylyght lemed upon erthe
 He with his hatheles on hyghe horsse were.
 Thenne thise cacheres that couthe cowpled hor houndez,
 1140 Unclosed the kenel dore and calde hem theroute,
 Blwe bygly in buglez thre bare mote;³
 Braches bayed therfore and breme noyse maked;
 And thay chastysed and charred on chasyng that went,

¹ *Quether, leude, so lympe, 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.

Whatever falls to our lot, worthless or better."
 1110 "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
 1115 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
 1120 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
 1125 Knew how to foster fun.

PART 3

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.
 1130 The noblest prepare themselves to ride finely dressed,
 Leap nimbly 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;
 1135 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,
 1140 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,

³ *thre bare mote* Three single notes on the horn, ordering the release of the hounds.

1145 A hundreth of hunteres, as I haf herde telle,
 of the best.
 To trystors vewters yod,¹
 Couples hunttes of kest;
 Ther ros for blastez gode
 Gret rurd in that forest.

 1150 At the fyrst quethe of the quest quaked the wylde;
 Der drof in the dale, doted for drede,
 Highed to the hyghe, bot heterly thay were
 Restayed with the stablye, that stoutly ascryed.
 Thay let the herttez haf the gate, with the hyghe hedes,
 1155 The breme bukkez also with hor brode paumez;
 For the fre lorde hade defende in fermysoun tyme
 That ther schulde no mon meve to the male dere.
 The hindez were halden in with hay! and war!
 The does dryven with gret dyn to the depe sladez.
 1160 Ther myght mon se, as thay slypte, slenting of arwes—
 At uche wende under wande wapped a flone—
 That bigly bote on the broun with ful brode hedez.
 What! thay brayen and bleden, bi bonkkez thay deyen,
 And ay rachches in a res radly hem folwes,
 1165 Hunterez wyth hyghe horne hasted hem after
 Wyth such a crakkande kry as klyffes haden brusten.
 What wylde so atwaped wyghes that schotten
 Watz al toraced and rent at the resayt,
 Bi thay were tened at the hyghe and taysed to the wattres;
 1170 The ledez were so lerned at the lowe trysteres,
 And the grehoundez so grete, that geten hem bylyve
 And hem tofylched, as fast as frekez myght loke,
 ther-ryght.
 The lorde for blys abloy
 1175 Ful ofte con launce and lyght,
 And drof that day wyth joy
 Thus to the derk nyght.

Thus laykez this lorde by lynde-wodez evez,
 And Gawain the god mon in gay bed lygez,
 1180 Lurkkez² quyl the daylight lemed on the wowes,
 Under covertour ful clere, cortyned aboute;
 And as in slomeryng he slode, sleghly he herde
 A littel dyn at his dor, and dernly upon;
 And he hevez up his hed out of the clothes,

¹ *To trystors vewters yod* Keepers of hounds went to their hunting-stations.

By a hundred hunters, as I have been told,
 1145 of the best.
 With keepers at their posts
 Huntsmen uncoupled hounds;
 Great clamor in the woods
 From mighty horn-blasts sounds.

 1150 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,
 1155 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.
 1160 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;
 1165 Hunters with screaming horns 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.
 1170 The men at the lower stations were so skilful,
 And the greyhounds so large, that they seized them quickly
 And tore them down as fast as men could number,
 right there.
 On horseback and on foot
 1175 The lord, filled with delight,
 Spent all that day in bliss
 Until the fall of night.

Thus this nobleman sports along the edges of woods,
 And the good man Gawain lies in his fine bed,
 1180 Lying snug while the daylight gleamed on the walls,
 Under a splendid coverlet, shut in by curtains.
 And as he lazily dozed, he heard slyly made
 A little noise at his door and it stealthily open;
 And he raised up his head from the bedclothes,

² *Lurkkez* Lay snug; but the term has pejorative overtones that are heard again at 1195.

1185 A corner of the cortyn he caght up a lyttel,
 And waytez warly thiderwarde quat hit be myght.
 Hit watz the ladi, loflyest to beholde,
 That drow the dor after hir ful dernly and style,
 And bowed towarde the bed; and the burne schamed,¹
 1190 And layde hym down lystyly and let as he slepte;
 And ho stepped stilly and stel to his bedde,
 Kest up the cortyn and creped withinne,
 And set hir ful softly on the bed-syde,
 And lenged there selly longe to loke quen he wakened.
 1195 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 aspye wyth my spelle in space quat ho wolde.”
 1200 Then he wakenede, and wroth, and to hir warde torned,
 And unlouked his yghe-lyddez, and let as hym wondered,
 And sayned hym, as bi his saghe the saver to worthe,
 with hande.
 Wyth chynne and cheke ful swete,
 1205 Both quit and red in blande,
 Ful luffly con ho lete
 Wyth lyppez smal laghande.

“God moroun, Sir Gawayn,” sayde that gay lady,
 “Ye ar a sleper unslyghe, that mon may slyde hider;
 1210 Now ar ye tan as-tyt!² Bot true uus may schape,
 I schal bynde yow in your bedde, that be ye trayst.”
 Al laghande the lady lanced tho bourdez.
 “Goud moroun, gay,” quoth Gawayn the blythe,
 “Me schal worthe at your wille, and that me wel lykez,³
 1215 For I yelde me yederly, and yeghe after grace,
 And that is the best, be my dome, for me byhovez nede”:
 And thus he bourded agayn with mony a blythe laghter.
 “Bot wolde ye, lady lovely, then leve me grante,
 And deprece your prysoun, and pray hym to ryse,
 1220 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,

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.

1185 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,
 1190 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.
 1195 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.”
 1200 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
 1205 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:
 1210 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 gaily,
 “You shall do with me as you wish, and that pleases me much,
 1215 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,
 1220 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,

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 half als,
 1225 And sythen karp wyth my knyght that I kaght have;
 For I wene wel, iwysse, Sir Wowen ye are,
 That alle the worlde worchipez quere-so ye ride;
 Your honour, your hendelayk is hendely praised
 With lordez, wyth ladyes, with alle that lyf bere.
 1230 And now ye are here, iwysse, and we bot oure one;
 My lorde and his ledez ar on lenthe faren,
 Other burnez in her bedde, and my burdez als,
 The dor drawen and dit with a derf haspe;
 And sythen I have in this hous hym that al lykez,
 1235 I schal ware my whyle wel, quyl hit lastez,
 with tale.
 Ye ar welcum to my cors,¹
 Yowre awen won to wale,
 Me behovez of fyne force
 1240 Your servaunt be, and schale.”

“In god fayth,” quoth Gawain, “gayn hit me thynkkez,
 Thagh I be not now he that ye of speken;
 To reche to such reverence as ye reherce here
 I am wyghe unworthy, I wot wel myselfen.
 1245 Bi God, I were glad, and yow god thoght,
 At saghe other at servyce that I sette myght
 To the plesaunce of your prys²—hit were a pure joye.”
 “In god fayth, Sir Gawain,” quoth the gay lady,
 “The prys and the prowes that plesez al other,
 1250 If I hit lakked other set at lyght, hit were little daynté;
 Bot hit ar ladyes innoghe that lever were nowthe
 Haf the, hende, in hor holde, as I the habbe here,
 To daly with derely your daynté wordez,
 Kever hem comfort and colen her carez,
 1255 Then much of the garysoun other gold that thay haven.
 Bot I louve that ilk lorde that the lyfte haldez
 I have hit holly in my honde that al desyres,
 thurghe grace.”
 Scho made hym so gret chere,
 1260 That watz so fayr of face,
 The knyght with speches skere
 Answered to uche a case.

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.

“You shall not leave your bed, I intend something better.
 I shall tuck you in here on both sides of the bed,
 1225 And then chat with my knight whom I have captured.
 For I know well, in truth, that you are Sir Gawain,
 Whom everyone reveres wherever you go;
 Your good name and courtesy are honorably praised
 By lords and by ladies and all folk alive.
 1230 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 hasp;
 And since I have under my roof the man everyone loves,
 1235 I shall spend my time well, while it lasts,
 with talk.
 You are welcome to me indeed,
 Take whatever you want;
 Circumstances force me
 1240 To be your true servant.”

“Truly,” replied Gawain, “I am greatly honored,
 Though I am not in fact such a man as you speak of.
 To deserve such respect as you have just described
 I am completely unworthy, I know very well.
 1245 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
 1250 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,
 1255 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
 1260 Great favor she conferred;
 The knight with virtuous speech
 Answered her every word.

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 myry mon, “Mary yow yelde,
 For I haf founden, in god fayth, yowre fraunchis nobele,
 1265 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 nocht bot wel connez.”
 “Bi Mary,” quod the menskful, “me thynk hit an other;
 For were I worth al the wone of wymmen alyve,
 1270 And al the wele of the worlde were in my honde,
 And I schulde chepen and chose to cheve me a lorde,
 For the costes that I haf knowen upon the, knyght, here,
 Of bewté and debonerté and blythe semblaunt,
 And that I haf er herkkened and halde hit here trwee,
 1275 Ther schulde no freke upon folde bifore yow be chosen.”
 “Iwysse, worthy,” quoth the wyghe, “ye haf waled wel
 better,¹
 Bot I am proude of the prys that ye put on me,
 And soberly your servaunt, my soverayn I holde yow,
 And yowre knyght I becom, and Kryst yow foryelde.”
 1280 Thus thay meled of muchquat til mydmorn paste,
 And ay the lady let lyk as hym loved mych.
 The freke ferde with defence, and feted ful fayre;
 Thagh ho were burde bryghtest the burne in mynde hade,²
 The lasse luf in his lode for lur that he soght
 1285 bout hone—
 The dunte that schulde hym deve,
 And nedez hit most be done.
 The lady thenn spek of leve,
 He granted hir ful sone.

1290 Thenne ho gef hym god day, and wyth a glent laghed,
 And as ho stod, ho stonyed hym wyth ful stor wordez:
 “Now he that spedez uche spech this disport yelde yow!
 Bot that ye be Gawan, hit gotz in mynde.”
 “Querfore?” quoth the freke, and freschly he askez,
 1295 Ferde lest he hade fayled in foume of his castes;
 Bot the burde hym blessed, and “Bi this skyl” sayde:
 “So god as Gawayn gaynly is halden,
 And cortaysye is closed so clene in hymselven,
 Couth not lightly haf lenged so long wyth a lady,
 1300 Bot he had craved a cosse, bi his courtayse,

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 burde bryghtest the burne in mynde hade* The frightening prospect facing Gawain (*the lur that he soght*, 1284) does

“Lady,” said the man pleasantly, “may Mary repay you,
 For I have truly made proof of your great generosity,
 1265 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,
 1270 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—
 1275 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.”
 1280 So they chatted of this and that until late morning,
 And always the lady behaved as if loving him much.
 The knight reacted 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
 1285 very soon—
 To stand a crushing blow,
 In helpless sufferance.
 Of leaving then she spoke,
 The knight agreed at once.

1290 Then she bade him goodbye, glanced at him and laughed,
 And as she stood astonished him with a forceful rebuke:
 “May he who prospers 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,
 1295 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 Gawain is rightly reputed,
 In whom courtesy is so completely embodied,
 Could not easily have spent so much time with a lady
 1300 Without begging a kiss, to comply with politeness,

not allow him to become distracted by the lady’s beauty, though her loveliness surpasses anything he can remember. The manuscript reading of this line, *Thagh I were burde bryghtest the burde in mynde hade*, is usually amended as shown.

Bi sum towch of summe tryfle at sum talez ende."
 Then quoth Woven, "Iwysse, worthe as yow lykez;
 I schal kysse at your comaundement, as a knyght fallez,
 And fire, lest he displese yow, so plede hit no more."
 1305 Ho comes nerre with that and cachez hym in armez,
 Loutez lufflych adoun and the leude kysses.
 Thay comly bykennen to Kryst ayther other;
 Ho dos hir forth at the dore withouten dyn more;
 And he ryches hym to ryse and rapes hym sone,
 1310 Clepes to his chamberlayn, choses his wede,
 Bowez forth, quen he watz boun, blythely to masse;
 And thenne he meved to his mete that menskly hym keped,
 And made myry al day, til the mone ryсед,
 with game.
 1315 Watz never freke fayrer fonge
 Bitwene two so dyngne dame,
 The alder and the yonge;
 Much solace set thay same.

And ay the lorde of the londe is lent on his gamnez,
 1320 To hunt in holtez and hethe at hyndez barayne;
 Such a sowme he ther slowe bi that the sunne heldet,
 Of dos and of other dere, to deme were wonder.
 Thenne fersly thay flokked in folk at the laste,
 And quykly of the quelled dere a querré thay maked.
 1325 The best bowed therto with burnez innoghe,
 Gedered the grattest of gres that ther were,
 And didden hem derely undo as the dede askez;
 Serched hem at the asay summe that ther were,
 Two fyngeres thay fonde of the fowlest of alle.
 1330 Sythen thay slyt the slot, sesed the erber,
 Schaved wyth a scharp knyf, and the schyre knitten;
 Sythen rytte thay the four lymmes, and rent of the hyde,
 Then brek thay the balé, the bowelez out token
 Lystily for laucyng the lere of the knot;
 1335 Thay gryped to the gargulun, and graythely departed
 The wesaunt fro the wynt-hole, and walt out the guttez;
 Then scher thay out the schulderes with her scharp knyvez,
 Haled hem by a lyttel hole to have hole sydes.
 Sithen britned thay the brest and brayden hit in twynne,
 1340 And eft at the gargulun bigynez on thenne,
 Ryvez hit up radly ryght to the byght,
 Voydez out the avanters, and verayly therafter
 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 displese you, so urge it no further."
 1305 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,
 1310 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.
 1315 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,
 1320 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 flocked together at the end,
 And quickly made a quarry of the slaughtered deer.
 1325 The noblest pressed forward with many attendants,
 Gathered together the fattest 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.
 1330 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.
 1335 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,
 1340 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

1345 Evenden to the haunche, that hinged al samen,
 And heven it up al hole, and hwen hit of there,
 And that thay neme for the noumbles bi nome, as I trowe,
 bi kynde;
 Bi the byght al of the thyghes
 1350 The lappez thay lance bihynde;
 To hewe hit in two thay hyghes,
 Bi the bakbon to unbynde.

Bothe the hede and the hals thay hwen of thenne,
 And sythen sunder thay the sydez swyft fro the chyne,
 1355 And the corbeles fee¹ thay kest in a greve;
 Thenn thurled they ayther thik side thurgh bi the rybbe,
 And hinged thenne ayther bi hoghes of the fourchez,
 Uche freke for his fee, as fallez for to have.
 Upon a felle of the fayre best fede thay thayr houndes
 1360 Wyth the lyver and the lyghtez, the lether of the paunchez,
 And bred bathed in blod blende theramongez.
 Baldely thay blw prys,² bayed thayr rachchez,
 Sythen fonge thay her flesche, folden to home,
 Strakande ful stoutly mony stif motez.
 1365 Bi that the daylyght watz done the douthe watz al wonen
 Into the comly castel, ther the knyght bidez
 ful stille,
 Wyth blys and bryght fyr bette.
 The lorde is comen thertylle;
 1370 When Gawayn wyth hym mette
 Ther watz bot wele at wyлле.

Thenne comaunded the lorde in that sale to samen alle the
 meny,
 Bothe the ladyes on lowe to lyght with her burdes
 Bifore alle the folk on the flette, frekez he beddez
 1375 Verayly his venysoun to fech hym byforne,
 And al godly in gomen Gawayn he called,
 Techez hym to the tayles³ of ful tait bestes,
 Schewez hym the schyree grece schorne upon rybbes.
 “How payez yow this play? Haf I prys wonnen?
 1380 Have I thryvandely thonk thurgh my craft served?”
 “Ye, iwysse,” quoth that other wyghe, “here is wayth fayrest
 That I sey this seven yere in sesoun of wynter.”
 “And al I gif yow, Gawayn,” quoth the gome thenne,

¹ *the corbeles fee* A piece of gristle thrown to the birds as part of the ritual.

² *blw prys* A blast on the horn when the quarry is taken.

1345 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 numbles, I believe,
 as is right.
 Then where the hind legs fork
 1350 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;
 1355 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—
 1360 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.
 1365 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
 1370 Came, and the two men met
 In joyfullest 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
 1375 To lay out his venison truly before him;
 And with playful courtesy he called Gawain 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?
 1380 Do I deserve hearty thanks for my hunting skill?”
 “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, Gawain,” said the man then,

³ *the tayles* Left on the carcasses to facilitate the tally, or count.

“For by acorde of covenaut ye crave hit as your awen.”
 1385 “This is soth,” quoth the segge, “I say yow that ilke:
 That I haf worthyly wonnen this wonez wythinne,
 Iwysse with as god wylle hit worthez to yourez.”
 He hasppez his fayre hals his armez wythinne,
 And kysses hym as comlyly as he couthe awyse:
 1390 “Tas yow there my chevicaunce, I cheved no more;
 I wowche hit saf fynly, thagh feler hit were.”
 “Hit is god,” quoth the godmon, “grant mercy therfore.
 Hit may be such hit is the better, and ye me breve wolde
 Where ye wan this ilk wele bi wytte of yorselven.”
 1395 “That watz not forward,” quoth he, “frayst me no more.
 For ye haf tan that yow tydez, trawe non other
 ye mowe.”
 Thay laghed, and made hem blythe
 Wyth lotez that were to lowe;
 1400 To soper thay yede as-swythe,
 Wyth dayntés nwe innowe.

And sythen by the chymné in chamber thay seten,
 Wyghez the walle wyn wegged to hem oft,
 And efte in her bourdyng thay baythen in the morn
 1405 To fylle the same forwardez that thay byfore maden:
 Wat chaunce so bytydez hor chevysaunce to chaunge,
 What nwez so thay nome, at naght quen thay metten.
 Thay acorded of the covenantez byfore the court alle;
 The beverage watz broght forth in bourde at that tyme,
 1410 Thenne thay lovelych leghten leve at the last,
 Uche burne to his bedde busked bylyve.
 Bi that the coke hade crowen and cakled bot thryse¹
 The lorde watz lopen of his bedde, the leudez uchone;
 So that the mete and the masse watz metely delyvered,
 1415 The douthe dressed to the wod er any day sprenged,
 to chace;
 Hegh with hunte and hornez
 Thurgh playnez thay passe in space,
 Uncoupled among tho thornez
 1420 Rachez that ran on race.

Sone thay calle of a quest in a ker syde,
 The hunt rehayted the houndez that hit fyrst mynged,
 Wylde wordez hym warp wyth a wrast noyce;
 The howndez that hit herde hastid thider swythe,

“For by the terms of our compact you may claim it as yours.”
 1385 “That is true,” said the knight, “and I say the same to you:
 What I have honorably won inside this castle,
 With as much good will truly shall be yours.”
 He takes the other’s strong neck in his arms,
 And kisses him as pleasantly as he could devise.
 1390 “Take here my winnings, I obtained nothing else;
 I bestow it on you freely, and would do so were it more.”
 “It is excellent,” said the lord, “many thanks indeed.
 It could be even better if you would inform me
 Where you won this same prize by your cleverness.”
 1395 “That was not in our agreement,” said he, “ask nothing else;
 For you have had what is due to you, expect to receive
 nothing more.”
 They laughed and joked awhile
 In speech deserving praise;
 1400 Then quickly went to sup
 On new delicacies.

Afterwards they sat by the fire in the lord’s chamber,
 And servants many times brought in marvelous wine;
 And once again in their jesting they agreed the next day
 1405 To observe the same covenant as they had made before:
 Whatever fortune befell them, to exchange what they won,
 Whatever new things they were, at night when they met.
 They renewed the agreement before the whole court—
 The pledge-drink was brought in with jokes at that time—
 1410 Then they graciously took leave of each other at last,
 Every man hastening quickly to bed.
 By the time cock-crow had sounded three times
 The lord had leapt out of bed and each of his men,
 So that breakfast and mass were duly done,
 1415 And long before daybreak they were all on their way
 to the chase.
 Through fields they canter soon,
 Loud with hunting-horns;
 Headlong the hounds run
 1420 Uncoupled among the thorns.

Soon they give tongue at the edge of a marsh;
 The huntsman urged on the hounds that found the scent first,
 Shouting at them wildly in a loud voice.
 The hounds who heard him raced there in haste

¹ *crowen ... bot thryse* Cocks supposedly crowed at midnight, 3 a.m., and 6 a.m.

1425 And fellen as fast to the fuyt, fourty at ones;
 Thenne such a glaver ande glam of gedered rachchez
 Ros that the rocherez rungen aboute;
 Hunterez hem hardened with horne and wyth muthe.
 Then al in a semblé sweyed togeder
 1430 Bitwene a flosche in that fryth and a foo cragge;
 In a knot bi a clyffe, at the kerre syde,
 Ther as the rogh rocher unrydely was fallen,
 Thay ferden to the fyndyng, and frekez hem after;
 Thay umbekesten the knarre and the knot bothe,
 1435 Wyghez, whyl thay wysten wel wythinne hem it were,
 The best that ther breved watz wyth the blodhoundez.
 Thenne thay beten on the buskez, and bede hym upryse,
 And he unsoundly out soght seggez overthwert;
 On the sellokest swyn swenged out there,
 1440 Long sythen fro the sounder that sighed for olde,
 For he watz borelych and brode, bor alther-grattest,
 Ful grymme quen he gronyed; thenne greved mony,
 For thre at the fyrst thrast he thryght to the erthe,
 And sparrd forth good sped boutte spyt more.
 1445 Thise other halowed hyghe! ful hyghe, and hay! hay!
 cryed,
 Haden hornes to mouthe, heterly rechated;
 Mony watz the myry mouthe of men and of houndez
 That buskkez after this bor with bost and wyth noyse
 to quelle.
 1450 Ful ofte he bydez the baye,
 And maymez the mute inn melle;
 He hurtez of the houndez, and thay
 Ful yomerly yaule and yelle.

 Schalkez to shote at hym schowen to thenne,
 1455 Haled to hym of her arewez, hitten hym oft;
 Bot the poyntez payred at the pyth that pyght in his scheldez,
 And the barbez of his browe bite non wolde;
 Thagh the schaven schafte schyndered in pieces,
 The hede hypped agayn were-so-ever hit hitte.
 1460 Bot quen the dyntez hym dered of her dryghe strokez,
 Then, braynwod for bate, on burnez he rasez,
 Hurtz hem ful heterly ther he forth hyghez,
 And mony arghed therat, and on lyte droghen.
 Bot the lorde on a lyght horce launces hym after,
 1465 As burne bolde upon bent his bugle he blowez,
 He rechated, and rode thurgh ronez ful thyk,
 Suande this wylde swyn til the sunne schafted.

1425 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
 1430 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
 1435 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,
 1440 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.
 1445 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.
 1450 Often he stands at bay,
 And maims the circling pack,
 Wounding many hounds
 That piteously yelp and bark.

 Men press forward to shoot at him then,
 1455 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.
 1460 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,
 1465 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 thay dryven on this wyse,
 Whyle oure lufflych lede lys in his bedde,
 1470 Gawayn graythely at home, in gerez ful ryche
 of hewe.
 The lady noght forgate
 Com to hym to salue;
 Ful erly ho watz hym ate¹
 1475 His mode for to remwe.

Ho commes to the cortyn, and at the knyght totes.
 Sir Wawen her welcumed worthy on fyrst,
 And ho hym yeldez agayn ful yerne of hir wordez,
 Settez hir softly by his syde, and swythely ho laghez,
 1480 And wyth a lufflych loke ho layde hym thyse wordez:
 “Sir, yif ye be Wawen, wonder me thynkkez,
 Wÿghe that is so wel wrast alway to god,
 And connez not of compaynye² the costez undertake;
 And if mon kennes yow hom to knowe, ye kest hom of
 our mynde;
 1485 Thou hatz foryeten yederly that yisterday I taght te
 Bi alder-trest token of talk that I cowthe.”
 “What is that?” quoth the wyghe, “Iwysse I wot never;
 If hit be sothe that ye breve, the blame is myn awen.”
 “Yet I kende yow of kyssyng,” quoth the clere thenne,
 1490 “Quere-so countenaunce is couthe³ quikly to clayme;
 That bicumes uche a knyght that cortaysy uses.”
 “Do way,” quoth that derf mon, “my dere, that speche;
 For that durst I not do, lest I devayed⁴ were.
 If I were werned, I were wrang, iwysse, yif I profered.”
 1495 “Ma fay,”⁵ quoth the meré wyf, “ye may not be werned,
 Ye ar stif innoghe to constrayne wyth strenkthe, yif yow lykez,
 Yif any were so vilanous that yow devaye wolde.”
 “Ye, be God,” quoth Gawayn, “good is your speche;
 Bot threte is unthryvande in thede ther I lende,
 1500 And uche gift that is geven not with goud wylle.
 I am at your comaundement, to kysse quen yow lykez,
 Ye may lach quen yow lyst, and leve quen yow thynkkez,
 in space.”
 The lady loutez adoun
 1505 And comlyly kysses his face;

¹ *watz hym ate* At him in one of two senses or both: in his bedchamber, and bothering him.

² *compaynye* Critics have suggested that the term may have amorous connotations.

So they spent the day in this manner, in this wild chase,
 While our gracious knight lies in his bed:
 1470 Gawain, happily at home amid bright-colored bedding
 so rich.
 Nor did the lady fail
 To wish her guest good day;
 Early she was there
 1475 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,
 1480 And with a charming glance at him uttered these words:
 “Sir, 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.
 1485 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,
 1490 “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.”
 1495 “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,
 1500 And so is 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
 1505 And gives the knight a kiss;

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 thay ther expoun
Of druryes greme and grace.

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

“I woled wyt at yow, wyghe,” that worthy then sayde,
“And yow wrathed not therwyth, what were the skylle
1510 That so yong and so yepe as ye at this tyme,
So cortayse, so knyghtly, as ye ar knowen oute—
And of alle chevalry to chose, the chef thyng alosed
Is the lel layk of luf, the lettrure of armes;
For to telle of this tevelyng of this trwe knyghtez,
1515 Hit is the tytelet token and tyxt of her werkkez;
How ledes for her lel lufe hor lyvez han auntered,
Endured for her drury dulful stoundez,
And after wenged with her walour and voyded her care,
And broght blysse into boure¹ with bountees hor awen—
1520 And ye ar knyght comlokest kyd of your elde,
Your worde and your worchip walkez ayquere,
And I haf seten by yourself here sere twyes,
Yet herde I never of your hed helde no wordez
That ever longed to luf, lasse ne more;
1525 And ye, that are so cortays and coynt of your hetes,²
Oghe to a yonke thynk yern to schewe
And teche sum tokenez of trweluf craftes.
Why, ar ye lewed, that alle the los weldez?
Other elles ye demen me to dille your dalyaunce to herken?
1530 For schame!
I com hider sengel, and sitte
To lerne at yow sum game;
Dos, techez me of your wytte
Whil my lorde is fro hame.”

“I would learn from you, sir,” said that gentle lady,
“If the question was not irksome, what the reason was
1510 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,
1515 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—
1520 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.
1525 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?
1530 For shame!
I come here alone, and sit
To learn your special play;
Show me your expertise
While my husband is away.”

1535 “In goud faythe,” quoth Gawain, “God yow foryelde!
Gret is the gode gle, and gomen to me huge,
That so worthy as ye wolde wynne hidere,
And pyne yow with so pouer a man, as play wyth your
knyght
With anys kynnez countenaunce, hit keverez me ese;
1540 Bot to take the torvayle to myself to trwluf expoun,
And towche the temez of tyxt and talez of armez
To yow that, I wot wel, weldez more slyght
Of that art, bi the half, or a hundreth of seche
As I am, other ever schal, in erde ther I leve,
1545 Hit were a folé felefolde, my fre, by my trawthe.

1535 “In good faith,” said Gawain, “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.
1540 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,
1545 Would be absolute folly, noble lady, on my word.

¹ *into boure* Into the lady's bower.

² *coynt of your hetes* Gracious in your promises of knightly service.

I wolde yowre wylnyng worche at my myght,
 As I am hyghly bihalden, and evermore wylle
 Be servaunt to yourselven, so save me Dryghtyn!"
 Thus hym frayned that fre, and fondet hym ofte,
 1550 For to haf wonnen hym to woghe,¹ what-so scho thoght ellez;
 Bot he defended hym so fayr that no faut semed,
 Ne non evel on nawther halve, nawther thay wysten
 bot blysse.
 They laghed and layked long;
 1555 At the last scho con hym kysse,
 Hir leve fayre con scho fonge,
 And went hir waye, iwysse.

Then ruthes hym the renk and ryses to the masse,
 And sithen hor diner watz dyght and derely served.
 1560 The lede with the ladyez layked alle day,
 Bot the lorde over the londez launced ful ofte,
 Swez his uncely swyn, that swyngez bi the bonkkez
 And bote the best of his braches the bakkez in sunder
 Ther he bode in his bay, tel bawemen hit breken,
 1565 And madee hym mawgref his hed² for to mwe utter,
 So felle flonez ther flete when the folk gedered.
 Bot yet the styffest to start bi stoundez he made,
 Til at the last he watz so mat he myght no more renne,
 Bot in the hast that he myght he to a hole wynnez
 1570 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 tuschez; with hym then irked
 Alle the burnez so bolde that hym by stoden
 1575 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
 1580 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 lufflych adoun, levez his corsour,
 Braydez out a bryght bront and bigly forth strydez,
 1585 Foundez fast thurgh the forth ther the felle bydez.

¹ *to haf wonnen hym to woghe* It is uncertain whether *woghe* means "wrong" or "woo."

² *mawgref his hed* In spite of himself.

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
 1550 To have led him 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 bantered long;
 1555 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.
 1560 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 bit the backs of his bravest hounds asunder
 Where he stood at bay, until archers broke it,
 1565 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
 1570 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 trying
 1575 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
 1580 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,
 1585 Hastens quickly through the stream towards the waiting boar.

³ *bigynez to scrape* Angrily scrapes (the earth with his feet).

The wyld watz war of the wyghe with weppen in honde,
 Hef heghly the here, so hetterly he fnast
 That fele ferde for the freke, lest felle hym the worre.
 The swyn settez hym out on the segge even,
 1590 That the burne and the bor were both upon hepez
 In the wyghtest of the water: the worre hade that other,
 For the mon merkkez hym wel, as thay mette fyrst,
 Set sadly the scharp in the slot even,
 Hit hym up to the hult, that the hert schyndered,
 1595 And he yarrande hym yelde, and yedoun the water
 ful tyt.
 A hundreth houndez hym hent,
 That bremely con hym bite,
 Burnez him broght to bent,
 1600 And doggez to dethe endite.

There watz blawyn of prys in mony breme horne,
 Heghe halowing on highe with hatelez that myght;
 Brachetes bayed that best, as bidden the maysterez
 Of that chargeaunt chace that were chef huntres.
 1605 Thenne a wyghe that watz wys upon wodcrafez
 To unlace this bor lufly bigynnez.
 Fyrst he hewes of his hed and on highe settez,
 And sythen rendez him al roghe bi the rygge after,
 Braydez out the boweles, brennez hom on glede,
 1610 With bred blent therwith his braches rewardez.
 Sythen he britnez out the brawen in bryght brode cheldez,
 And hatz out the hastlettez, as highly bisemez;
 And yet hem halchez al hole the halvez togeder,
 And sythen on a stif stange stoutly hem henges.
 1615 Now with this ilk swyn thay swengen to home;
 The bores hed watz borne bifore the burnes selven
 That him forferde in the forthe thurgh forse of his honde
 so stronge.
 Til he seye Sir Gawayne
 1620 In halle hym thoght ful longe;
 He calde, and he com gayn
 His feez ther for to fonge.

The lorde ful lowde with lote and laghter myry,
 When he seye Sir Gawayn, with solace he spekez;
 1625 The goude ladyez were geten, and gedered the
 meyny,
 He schewez hem the scheldez, and schapes hem the tale
 Of the largesse and the lenthe, the lithemez else

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,
 1590 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,
 1595 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,
 1600 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.
 1605 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,
 1610 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.
 1615 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
 1620 It seemed a tedious time,
 He gladly came when called,
 His due reward to claim.

The lord, noisy with speech and merry laughter,
 Joyfully exclaims at the sight of Sir Gawain.
 1625 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 wyld swyn in wod ther he fled.
 That other knyght ful comly comended his dedez,
 1630 And praysed 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 segh he never are.
 Thenne hondeled thay the hoge hed, the hende mon hit
 praysed,
 And let lodly therat the lorde for to here.
 1635 "Now, Gawain," 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 trawthe."
 He hent the hathel aboute the halse, and hendely hym
 kysses,
 1640 And eftersones of the same he served hym there.
 "Now ar we even," quoth the hathel, "in this eventide,
 Of alle the covauntes that we knyrt, sythen I com hider,
 bi lawe."
 The lorde sayde, "Bi saynt Gile,
 1645 Ye ar the best that I knowe!
 Ye ben ryche in a whyle,
 Such chaffer and ye drowe."¹

Thenne thay teldet tablez trestes alofte,
 Kesten clothez upon; clere lyght thenne
 1650 Wakned by wowes, 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,
 1655 As coundutes of Krystmasse and carolez newe,
 With al the manerly merthe that mon may of telle.
 And ever oure luflych knyght the lady bisyde,
 Such semblaunt to that segge semly ho made
 Wyth stille stollen countenaunce, that stalworth to plese,
 1660 That al forwondered watz the wyghe, and wroth with hymselfen,
 Bot he nolde not for his nurture nurne hir agaynez,
 Bot dalt with hir al in daynté, how-se-ever the dede turned
 towrast.
 Quen thay hade played in halle
 1665 As longe as hor wylle hom last,

Of the fight with the beast in the wood where he fled.
 The other knight warmly commended his deeds,
 1630 And praised his action as proof of his excellence,
 For such boar's-meat, the brave knight 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.
 1635 "Now, Gawain," said his host, "this quarry is all yours,
 By fully ratified covenant, as you well know."
 "That is so," said the knight, "and just 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,
 1640 And then a second time treated him in the same way.
 "Now 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,
 1645 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
 1650 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,
 1655 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,
 1660 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
 1665 Had lasted long enough,

¹ *Such chaffer and ye drowe* 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 ll. 1938–39.

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

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

Ande ther thay dronken, and dalten, and demed eft nwe
To norne on the same note on Nwe Yerez even;
1670 Bot the knyght craved leve to kayre on the morn,
For hit watz neghe at the terme that he to schulde.
The lorde hym letted of that, to lenge hym resteyed,
And sayde, "As I am trwe segge, I siker my trawthe
Thou schal cheve to the grene chapel thy charres to make,
1675 Leude, on Nw Yeres lyght, longe bifore pryme.¹
Forthy thou lye in thy loft and lach thyn ese,
And I schal hunt in this holt, and halde the towchez,²
Chaunge wyth the chevisaunce, bi that I charre hider;
For I haf fraysted the twys, and faythful I fynde the.
1680 Now 'thrid tyme throwe best' thenk on the morne,
Make we mery quyl we may and mynne upon joye,
For the lur may lach when-so mon lykez."
This watz graythely graunted, and Gawain is lenged,
Blithe broght watz hym drynk, and thay to bedde yeden
1685 with light.
Sir Gawain lis and slepes
Ful stille and softe al night;
The lorde that his craftes kepes,³
Ful erly he watz dight.

1690 After messe a morsel he and his men token;
Miry watz the mornynge, his mounture he askes.
Alle the hatheles that on horse schulde helden hym after
Were boun busked on hor blonkkez bifore the halle gatez.
Ferly fayre watz the folde, for the forst clenged;
1695 In red rudede upon rak rises the sunne,
And ful clere castez the clowdes of the welkyn.
Hunteres unhardeled bi a holt syde,
Rocheres rounge bi rys for rurde of her hornes;
Summe fel in the fute ther the fox bade,
1700 Traylez ofte a traveres⁴ bi traunt of her wyles;
A kenet kryes therof, a hunt on hym calles;
His felawes fallen hym to, that frasted ful thike,
Runnen forth in a rabel in his ryght fare,

¹ *Thou schal cheve ... bifore pryme* Prime begins either at 6 a.m. or at sunrise. At 1073 Bertilak promises that Gawain will *cum to that merk at mydmorn*, 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.

And there they drank and chatted, and spoke once again
To repeat the arrangement on New Year's Eve;
1670 But the knight begged leave to depart the next day,
For it was near time for the appointment that he had to keep.
The lord held him back, begging him to remain,
And said, "As I am an honest man, I give you my word
That you shall reach the Green Chapel to settle your affairs,
1675 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.
1680 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
1685 to their beds.
Sir Gawain lies and sleeps
All night taking his rest;
While eager for his sport
By dawn the lord was dressed.

1690 After mass he and his men snatched 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, gripped by the frost;
1695 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,
1700 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.

² *halde the towchez* Keep the terms of the agreement.

³ *that his craftes 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,
 1705 And quen thay seghe hym with syght thay sued hym fast,
 Wreghande hym ful weterly with a wroth noyse;
 And he trantes and tornayeez thurgh mony tene greve,
 Havilounez, and herkenez bi hegges ful ofte.
 At the last bi a littel dich he lepez over a spenne,
 1710 Stelez out ful stilly bi a strothe rande,
 Went half wylt of the wode¹ with wylez fro the houndes;
 Thenne watz he went, er he wyst, to a wale tryster,
 Ther thre thro at a thrich thrat hym at ones,
 al graye.
 1715 He blenched 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 lif to lythen the houndez,
 1720 When alle the mute hade hym met, menged togeder:
 Such a sorwe at that syght thay sette on his hede
 As alle the clamberande clyffes hade clatered on hepes;
 Here he watz halawed, when hathelz hym metten,
 Loude he watz yayne with yarande speche;
 1725 Ther he watz threted and ofte thef called,
 And ay the titleres at his tayl, that tary he ne myght.
 Ofte he watz runnen at, when he out rayked,
 And ofte reled in agayn, so Reniarde³ watz wylé.
 And ye, he lad hem bi lagmon,⁴ the lorde and his meyny,
 1730 On this maner bi the mountes quyle myd-over-under,⁵
 Whyle the hende knyght at hom holsumly slepes
 Withinne the comly cortynes, on the colde morne.
 Bot the lady for luf let not to slepe,
 Ne the purpose to payre that pyght in hir hert,
 1735 Bot ros hir up radly, rayked hir theder,
 In a mery mantyle, mete to the erthe,
 That watz furred ful fyne with fellez wel pured;
 No hwez⁶ goud on hir hede bot the hagher stones
 Trased aboute hir tressour by twenty in clusteres;
 1740 Hir thryven face and hir throte throwen al naked,

¹ *Went haf wylt of the wode* Thought to have escaped out of the wood.

² *on-stray* In a different direction.

³ *Reniarde* 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.”

He scampers ahead of them, they soon found his trail,
 1705 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,
 1710 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.
 1715 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
 1720 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;
 1725 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 yes! strung out he led them, the lord and his followers,
 1730 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;
 1735 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;
 1740 Her lovely face and throat displayed uncovered,

⁵ *quyle myd-over-under* Various explained as mid-morning, midday, or afternoon. When the fox is killed it is *niegh nyght* (1922).

⁶ *hwez* So the manuscript; some critics prefer *hwef*. The sense of the passage is that the lady is not wearing the headdress of a married woman.

Hir brest bare bifore, and bihinde eke.
 Ho comez withinne the chambre dore, and closes hit hir after,
 Wayvez up a wyndow, and on the wyghe callez,
 And radly thus rehayed hym with hir riche wordes,
 1745 with chere:
 "A, mon, how may thou slepe,
 This morning is so clere?"
 He watz in drowping depe,
 Bot thenne he con hir here.

1750 In dreggh droupyng of dreme draveled that noble,¹
 As mon that watz in mornyng of mony thro thoghtes,
 How that destiné schulde that day dele hym his wyrde
 At the grene chapel, when he the gome metes,
 And bihovs his buffet abide withoute debate more;
 1755 Bot quen that comly com he kevered his wyttes,
 Swenges out of the swevenes, and swarez with hast.
 The lady luflych com laghande swete,
 Felle over his fayre face, and fetly hym kyssed;
 He welcumez hir worthily with a wale chere.
 1760 He sey hir so glorious and gayly atyred,
 So fautes of hir fetures and of so fyne hewes,
 Wight wallande joye warmed his hert.
 With smothe smylyng and smolt thay smeten into merthe,
 That al watz blis and bonchef that breke hem bitwene,
 1765 and wynne.
 Thay lanced wordes gode,
 Much wele then watz therinne;
 Gret perile bitwene hem stod,
 Nif Maré of hir knyght mynne.

1770 Fo that prynces of pris depreded hym so thikke,
 Nurned hym so neghe the thred, that nede hym bihoved
 Other lach ther hir luf other lodly refuse.
 He cared for his cortaysye, lest crathayn he were,
 And more for his meschef yif he schulde make synne,
 1775 And be traytor to that tolke that that telde aght.
 "God schylde," quoth the schalk, "that schal not befall!"
 With luf-laghyng a lyt he layd hym bysyde
 Alle the spechez of specialté that sprange of her mouthe.
 Quoth that burde to the burne, "Blame ye disserve
 1780 Yif ye luf not that lyf that ye lye nexte,

¹ In *dreggh droupyng of dreme draveled that noble* A literal translation —"In a heavy troubled sleep that nobleman muttered"—misses the grinding effect of the alliterated words.

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
 1745 in play:
 "Ah, sir, how can you sleep?
 The morning is so clear!"
 Deep in his drowsiness
 Her voice broke in his ear.

1750 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:
 1755 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;
 1760 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
 1765 and delight.
 Gracious words they spoke,
 And pleasure reached its height.
 Great peril threatened, should
 Mary not mind her knight.

1770 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,
 1775 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 deserve rebuke
 1780 If you feel no love for the person you are lying beside,

Bifore alle the wyghez in the worlde wounded in hert,
 Bot if ye haf a lemman, a lever, that yow lykez better,
 And folden fayth to that fre, festned so harde
 That yow lausen ne lyst—and that I leve nouthe;
 1785 And that ye telle me that now trwly I pray yow,
 For alle the lufez upon lyve layne not the sothe
 for gile.”

The knyght sayde, “Be sayn Jon,”
 And smethely con he smyle,
 1790 “In fayth I welde right non,
 Ne non wil welde the quile.”

“That is a worde,” quoth that wyght, “that worst is of alle,
 Bot I am swared for sothe, that sore me thinkkez.
 Kysse me now comly, and I schal cach hethen,
 1795 I may bot mourne upon molde, as may that much lovyes.”
 Sykande ho sweghe doun and semly hym kyssed,
 And sithen ho severes hym fro, and says as ho stondes,
 “Now, dere, at this departyng do me this ese,
 Gif me sumquat of thy gifte, thi glove if hit were,
 1800 That I may mynne on the, mon, my mourning to lassen.”
 “Now iwysse,” quoth that wyghe, “I wolde I hade here
 The levest thing for thy luf that I in londe welde,
 For ye haf deserved, for sothe, sellyly ofte
 More rewarde bi resoun then I reche myght;
 1805 Bot to dele yow for drurye that dawed bot neded,
 Hit is not your honour to haf at this tyme
 A glove for a garysoun of Gawaynez giftez;
 And I am here an erande in erdez uncouthen,
 And have no men wyth no males with menskful thingez;
 1810 That mislykez me, ladé, for luf at this tyme,
 Iche tolke mon do as he is tan, tas to non ille
 ne pine.”

“Nay, hende of hyghe honours,”
 Quoth that lufsum under lyne,
 1815 “Thagh I hade noght of yourez,
 Yet schulde ye have of myne.”

Ho raght hym a riche rynk of red golde werkez,
 With a starande ston stondande alofte
 That bere blusshande bemez as the bryght sunne—
 1820 Wyt ye wel, hit watz worth wele ful hoge.
 Bot the renk hit renayed, and redyly he sayde,
 “I wil no giftez, for God, my gay, at this tyme;
 I haf none yow to norne, ne noght wyl I take.”

More than anyone on earth wounded in her heart;
 Unless you have a mistress, someone you prefer,
 And have plighted troth with that lady, so strongly tied
 That you wish not to break it—which now I believe;
 1785 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,
 1790 “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,
 1795 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,
 1800 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.
 1805 But to give you as love-token something worth little
 Would do you 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;
 1810 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,
 1815 “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:
 1820 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 bysily, and he hir bode wernes,
 1825 And swere swyfte by his sothe that he hit sese nolde,
 And ho soré that he forsoke, and sayde thereafter,
 “If ye renay my rynk, to ryche for hit semez,
 Ye wolde not so hyghly halden be to me,
 I schal gif yow my girdel, that gaynes yow lasse.”
 1830 Ho lacht a lace lyghtly that leke umbe hir sydez,
 Knit upon hir kyrtel under the clere mantyle;
 Gered hit watz with grene sylke and with golde schaped,
 Noght bot arounde brayden,¹ beten with fyngrez;
 And that ho bede to the burne, and blythely bisoght,
 1835 Thagh hit unworthi were, that he hit take wolde.
 And he nay that he nolde neghe in no wyse
 Nauther golde ne garysoun, er God hym grace sende
 To acheve to the chaunce that he hade chosen there.
 “And therefore, I pray yow, displese yow noght,
 1840 And lettez be your bisnesse, for I baythe hit yow never
 to graunte.
 I am derely to yow biholde
 Bicause of your semblaunt,
 And ever in hot and colde
 1845 To be your trwe servaunt.”

“Now forsake ye this silke,” sayde the burde thenne,
 “For hit is symple in hitsel? and so wel hit semez.
 Lo, so hit is littel, and lasse hit is worthy;
 But who-so knew the costes that knit ar therinne,
 1850 He wolde hit prayse at more prys, paraventure.
 For quat gome so is gorde with this grene lace,
 While he hit hade hemely halched aboute,
 Ther is no hathel under heven tohewe hym that myght,
 For he myght not be slayn for slyght upon erthe.”
 1855 Then kest the knyght, and hit come to his hert
 Hit were a juel for the jopardé that hym jugged were:
 When he ached to the chapel his chek for to fech,
 Myght he haf slypped to be unslayn, the sleght were noble.
 Thenne he thulged with hir threpe and tholed hir to speke,
 1860 And ho bere on hym the belt and bede hit hym swythe—
 And he granted and hym gafe with a goud wylle—
 And bisoght hym, for hir sake, discever hit never,
 Bot to lelly layne fro hir lorde; the leude hym acordez
 That never wyghe schulde hit wyt, iwysse, bot thay twayne
 1865 for noghte.

¹ *Noght bot arounde brayden* No part of which was not embroidered at the edges.

She pressed him insistently, and he declines her request,
 1825 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.”
 1830 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
 1835 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,
 1840 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
 1845 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
 1850 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.”
 1855 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,
 1860 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
 1865 That no one should ever know of it, not for anything,
 but themselves.

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

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

1870 Thenne lachchez ho hir leve, and levez hym there,
 For more myrthe of that mon moght ho not gete,
 When ho watz gon, Sir Gawayn gerez hym sone,
 Rises and riches him in araye noble,
 Lays up the luf-lace the lady hym raghte,
 1875 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 lyf¹ and lern hym better
 How his sawle schulde be saved when he schuld seye hethen.
 1880 There he schrof hym schyrly and schewed his mysdedez,
 Of the more and the mynne, and merci besechez,
 And of absolucioun he on the segge calles;
 And he asoyled hym surely and sette hym so clene
 As domezday schulde haf ben dight on the morn.
 1885 And sythen he mace hym as mery among the fre ladyes,
 With comelych caroles and alle kynnes joye,
 As never he did bot that daye, to the derk nyght,
 with blys.
 Uche mon hade daynté thare
 1890 Of hym, and sayde, “Iwysse,
 Thus mery he watz never are,
 Syn he com hider, er this.”

1870 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,
 1875 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.
 1880 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.
 1885 And then Gawain makes merry with the noble ladies,
 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
 1890 From him, and said, “Sure,
 So merry since he came
 He never was before.”

Now hym lenge in that lee, ther luf hym bityde!
 Yet is the lorde on the launde ledande his gomnes.
 1895 He hatz forfaren this fox that he folwed longe;
 As he sprent over a spenne to spye the schrewe,
 Ther as he herd the howndes that hasted hym swythe,
 Renaud com richchande thurgh a roghe greve,
 And alle the rabel in a res ryght at his helez.
 1900 The wyghe watz war of the wylde, and warly abides,
 And braydez out the bryght bronde, and at the best castez.
 And he schunt for the scharp, and schulde haf
 arered;

Let him stay in that shelter, and love come his way!
 But still the lord is afield, enjoying his sport.
 1895 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.
 1900 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 bifore the hors fete thay fel on hym alle,
 1905 And worried me this wylly¹ wyth a wroth noyse.
 The lorde lyghtez bilyve, and lachez hym sone,
 Rased hym ful radly out of the rach mouthes,
 Haldez heghe over his hede, halowez faste,
 And ther bayen aboute hym mony brath houndez.
 1910 Huntens hyghed hem theder with hornes ful mony,
 Ay rechatande aryght til thay the renk seyen.
 Bi that watz comen his compeyny noble
 Alle that ever ber bugle blowed at ones,
 And alle thise other halowed that had no hornes;
 1915 Hit watz the myriest mute that ever men herde,
 The rich rurd that ther watz rased for Renaude saule
 with lote.
 Hor houndez thay ther rewarde,
 Her hedez thay fawne and frote,
 1920 And sythen thay tan Reynarde
 And tyrven of his cote.

And thenne thay helden to home, for hit watz niegh nyght,
 Strakande ful stoutly in hor store hornes.
 The lorde is lyght at last at hys lef home,
 1925 Fyndeze fire upon flet, the freke ther-byside,
 Sir Gawain the gode, that glad watz withalle,
 Among the ladies for luf he ladde much joye.
 He were a bleaunt of blwe that bradde to the erthe,
 His surkot semed hym wel that softe watz forred,
 1930 And his hode of that ilke hinged on his schulder,
 Blande al of blaunner were bothe al aboute.
 He metez me this godmon inmyddez the flore,
 And al with gomen he hym gret, and goudly he sayde,
 “I schal fylle upon fyrst oure forwardez nouthe,
 1935 That we spedly han spoken, ther spared watz no drynk.”
 Then acoles he the knyght and kysses hym thryes,
 As saverly and sadly as he hem sette couthe.
 “Bi Kryst,” quoth that other knyght, “ye cach much sele
 In chevisaunce of this chaffer, yif 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,
 1905 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.
 1910 Hunters 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.
 1915 It was the most glorious baying that man ever heard,
 The noble clamor set up there for Reynard's soul
 with din.
 Hunters reward their hounds,
 Heads they rub and pat;
 1920 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,
 1925 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,
 1930 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,
 1935 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 *woried me this wylly* Tore at the fox. The ethic dative *me* is colloquial. Other examples occur at 2014 and 2144.

² *yif ye hade goud chepez* If you struck a good bargain.

1940 “Ye, of the chepe no charg,” quoth chefly that other,
 “As is pertly payed the porchaz that I aghte.”
 “Mary,” quoth that other man, “myn is bihynde,
 For I haf hunted al this day, and noght haf I geten
 Bot this foule fox felle—the fende haf the godez!
 1945 And that is ful pore for to pay for suche prys thinges
 As ye haf thryght me here thro, suche thre cosses
 so gode.”
 “Inogh,” quoth Sir Gawayn,
 “I thank yow, bi the rode”;¹
 1950 And how the fox watz slayn
 He tolde hym as thay stode.

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

1955 Gawayn and the godemon so glad were thay bothe
 Bot if the douthe had doted, other dronken ben other.²
 Both the mon and the meyny maden mony japez
 Til the sesoun watz seghen that thay sever moste;
 Burnez to hor bedde behoved at the laste.
 1960 Thenne lowly his leve at the lorde fyrst
 Fochchez this fre mon, and fayre he hym thonkkez:
 “Of such a selly sojorne as I haf hade here,
 Your honour at this hyghe fest, the hyghe kyng yow yelde!
 I gef yow me for on of yourez, if yowreself lykez,
 1965 For I mot nedes, as ye wot, meve to-morne,
 And ye me take sum tolke to teche, as ye hyght,
 The gate to the grene chapel,³ as God wyl me suffer
 To dele on Nw Yerez day the dome of my wyrdes.”⁴
 “In god faythe,” quoth the godmon, “wyth a goud wylle
 1970 Al that ever I yow hyght halde schal I redé.”
 Ther asyngnes he a servaunt to sette hym in the waye,
 And coundue hym by the downez, that he no drechch had,
 For to ferk thurgh the fryth⁵ and fare at the gaynest
 bi greve.

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 deliriously happy if the whole company had gone crazy or got drunk.”

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!
 1945 And that is a meager return for such precious things
 As you have warmly pressed on me, three such kisses
 so good.”
 “Enough,” said Gawain,
 “I thank you, by the Rood”;
 1950 And how the fox was killed
 He heard as there they stood.

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,
 1965 For I am compelled, as you know, to leave tomorrow,
 If you will assign someone 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.”
 “In good faith,” said the lord, “very willingly,
 1970 Everything I ever promised you I shall readily give.”
 There he appoints a servant to put Gawain on the road
 And guide him over the fells, so that he would not be delayed,
 To ride through the woods and take the shortest path
 in the trees.

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 ferk thurgh the fryth* To ride through the wood, as Gawain does at 2084. *Bi greve* refers to it again.

1975 The lorde Gawayn con thonk,
Such worchip he wolde hym weve.
Then at tho ladyez wlonk
The knyght hatz tan his leve.

1980 With care and wyth kyssyng he carppez hem tille,
And fele thryvande thonkkez he thrat hom to have,
And thay yelden hym agayn yeply that ilk.
Thay bikende hym to Kryst with ful colde sykynggez.
Sythen fro the meyny he menskly departes;
Uche mon that he mette, he made hem a thonke

1985 For his servyse and his solace and his sere pyne,
That thay wyth busynes had ben aboute hym to serve;
And uche segge as soré to sever with hym there
As thay hade wonde worthyly with that wlonk ever.
Then with ledes and lyght he watz ladde to his chambre,
1990 And blythely broght to his bedde to be at his rest.
Yif he ne slepe soundly say ne dar I,
For he hade muche on the morn to mynne, yif he wolde,
in thoght.
Let hym lyghe there stille,
1995 He hatz nere that he soght;
And ye wyl a whyle be style¹
I schal telle yow how thay wrought.

FITT 4

2000 Now neghez the Nw Yere, and the nyght passez,
The day dryvez to the derk, as Dryghtyn biddez;
Bot wyldede wredere of the worlde wakned theroute,
Clowdes kesten kenly the colde to the erthe,
Wyth nyghe innoghe of the northe the naked to tene.
The snawe snitered ful snart, that snayped the wyldede;
The werbelande wynde wapped fro the hyghe,
2005 And drof uche dale ful of dryftes ful grete.
The leude lystened ful wel that ley in his bedde,
Thagh he lowkez his liddez, ful lyttel he slepes;
Bi uch kok that crue he knwe wel the steven.
Deliverly he dressed up, er the day sprenged,
2010 For there watz lyght of a laumpe that lemed in his chambre;
He called to his chamberlayn, that cofly hym swared,

¹ *stille... style* Literary convention of the time allowed homonyms to be used as rhyme-words different in sense; here "without moving," 1994, and "without noise," 1996.

1975 Gawain thanked the lord,
Paying him great respect;
Then from those noble ladies
Took leave, as was correct.

1980 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

1985 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,
1990 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,
1995 He is close to what he sought;
Be quiet a short while,
And I'll tell how things turned out.

PART 4

2000 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,
2005 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,
2010 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 bruny and his blonk sadel;
 That other ferkez hym up and fechez hym his wedez,
 And graythez me Sir Gawayn upon a grett wyse.
 2015 Fyrst he clad hym in his clothez the colde for to were,
 And sythen his other harnays, that holdely watz keped,
 Bothe his paunce and his platez, piked ful clene,
 The rynggez rokked of the roust of his riche bruny;
 And al watz fresch as upon fyrst, and he watz fayn thenne
 2020 to thonk.
 He hade upon uche pece,
 Wyped ful wel and wlonk;
 The gayest unto Grece
 The burne bede bryng his blonk.

2025 Whyle the wlonkest wedes he warp on hymselfen—
 His cote wyth the consaunce of the clere werkez
 Ennurned upon velvet, vertuus stoncz
 Aboute beten and bounden, enbrauded semcz,
 And fayre furred withinne wyth fayre pelures—
 2030 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 balghe haunchez,
 Thenn dressed he his drurye double hym aboute,
 Swythe swethled umbe his swange swetely that knyght
 2035 The gordel of the grene silk, that gay wel bisemed,
 Upon that ryol red clothe that ryche watz to schewe.
 Bot wered not this ilk wyghe for wele this gordel,
 For pryde of the pendauntez, thagh polyst thay were,
 And thagh the glyterande golde glent upon endez,
 2040 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,
 2045 Alle the meyny of renoun
 He thonkkez ofte ful ryve.

Thenne watz Gryngolet graythe, that gret watz and huge,
 And hade ben sojourned saverly and in a siker wyse,
 Hym lyst prik for poynt, that proude hors thenne.
 2050 The wyghe wynnez hym to and wytez on his lyre,
 And sayde soberly hymself and by his soth swerez:
 “Here is a meyny in this mote that on menske thenkkez,
 The mon hem maynteines, joy mot thay have;
 The leve lady on lyve luf hir bityde;

Bade him 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.
 2015 First he puts clothing on him to keep out the cold,
 And then the rest of his gear, that had been well looked after,
 His body-armor and his plate, all polished clean,
 The rings of his fine mail-shirt rocked free of rust;
 Everything unstained as at first, for which he gladly
 2020 gave thanks.
 Wearing each metal piece
 Rubbed clean of stain and spot,
 The best-dressed man on earth
 Ordered his horse be brought.

2025 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—
 2030 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;
 2035 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,
 2040 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,
 2045 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.
 2050 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!

2055 Yif thay for charyté cherysen a gest,
 And halden honour in her honde, the hathel hem yelde
 That haldez the heven upon hyghe, and also yow alle!
 And yif I myght lyf upon londe lede any quyle,
 I schuld rech yow sum rewarde redyly, if I myght.”
 2060 Thenn steppez he into stirop and strydez alofte;
 His schalk schewed hym his schelde, on schulder he hit laght,
 Gordez to Gryngolet with his gilt helez,
 And he startez on the ston, stod he no lenger
 to prounce.
 2065 His hathel on hors watz thenne,
 That bere his spere and launce.
 “This kastel to Kryst I kenne”:
 He gef hit ay god chaunce.¹

The brygge watz brayed down, and the brode gateg
 2070 Unbarred and born open upon bothe halve.
 The burne blessed hym bilyve, and the brede passed—
 Prayses the porter bifore the prynce kneled,
 Gef hym God and goud day, that Gawain he save—
 And went on his way with his wyghe one,
 2075 That schulde teche hym to tourne to that tene place
 Ther the ruful race he schulde resayve.
 Thay bowen bi bonkkez ther boghez ar bare,
 Thay clomben bi clyffez ther clengez the colde.
 The heven watz uphalt, bot ugly ther-under;
 2080 Mist mugged on the mor, malt on the mountez,
 Uche hille hade a hatte, a myst-hakel huge.
 Brokez byled and breke bi bonkkez about,
 Schyre schaterande on schorez ther thay doun showed.
 Wela wyll watz the way ther thay bi wod schulden,
 2085 Til hit watz sone sesoun that the sunne ryses
 that tyde.
 Thay were on a hille ful hyghe,
 The quyte snaw lay bisyde;
 The burne that rod hym by
 2090 Bede his mayster abide.

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

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.”

2055 If out of kindness they cherish a guest
 And dispense hospitality, may the noble lord
 Who holds up heaven repay them, and reward you all!
 And were I to live any long time on earth
 I would gladly recompense you, if I could.”
 2060 Then he sets foot in stirrup and vaults on to his horse;
 His servant gave him his shield, he slung it on his shoulder,
 Strikes spurs into Gringolet with his gilt heels,
 And he leaps forward on the paving, he waited no longer
 to prance.
 2065 His man was mounted then,
 Carrying his spear and lance.
 “I commend this house to God,
 May it never meet mischance.”
 The drawbridge was lowered, and the broad gates
 2070 Unbarred and pushed open upon both sides.
 The knight blessed himself quickly and rode over the planks,
 Praises the porter who knelt before him
 Commending Gawain to God, that he should the knight save,
 And went on his way with his single guide,
 2075 Who would show him the way to that perilous place
 Where he must submit to a fearful stroke.
 They struggled up hillsides where branches are bare,
 They climbed up past rock-faces gripped by the cold.
 The clouds were high up, but murky beneath them,
 2080 Mist shrouded the moors, melted on the hills.
 Each summit wore a hat, a huge cloak of mist.
 Streams foamed and splashed down the slopes around them,
 Breaking white against the banks as they rushed downhill.
 Very wandering was the way they must take to the wood,
 2085 Until soon it was time for sunrise at that point
 of the year.
 They were high up in the hills,
 By snow surrounded then;
 The servant at his side
 2090 Bade Gawain draw rein.

“For I have guided you here, sir, on this day,
 And now you are not far from that notorious place
 That you have searched and enquired for so specially.
 But I shall tell you truly—since I know who you are,

2095 And ye are a lede upon lyve that I wel lovy,
 Wolde ye worch bi my wytte, ye worthed the better.
 The place that ye prece to ful perelous is halden;
 Ther wonez a wyghe in that waste, the worst upon erthe,
 For he is stiffe and sturne, and to strike lovies,
 2100 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 chevez that chaunce at the chapel grene,
 Ther passes non bi that place so proude in his armes
 2105 That he ne dynggez hym to dethe with dynt of his honde;
 For he is a mon methles, and mercy non uses,
 For be hit chorle other chaplayn that bi the chapel rydes,
 Monk other masseprest, other any mon elles,
 Hym thynk as queme hym to quelle as quyk go hymselfen.
 2110 Forthy I say the, as sothe as ye in sadel sitte,
 Com ye there, ye be kyllid, I may the knyght rede;¹
 Trawe ye me that trwely, thagh ye had twenty lyses
 to spende.
 He hatz wonyd here ful yore,
 2115 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!
 2120 Cayrez bi sum other kyth, ther Kryst mot yow spede,
 And I schal hygh me hom agayn, and hete yow fyrre
 That I schal swere bi God and alle his gode halwez,
 As help me God and the halydam, and othez innoghe,
 That I schal lelly yow layne,² and lance never tale
 2125 That ever ye fondet to fle for freke that I wyst.”
 “Grant merci,” quoth Gawayn, and gruchyng he sayde,
 “Wel worth the, wyghe, that woldez my gode,
 And that lelly me layne I leve wel thou woldez.
 Bot helde thou hit never so holde, and I here passed,
 2130 Founded for ferde for to fle, in fourme that thou tellez,
 I were a knyght kowarde, I myght not be excused.
 Bot I wyl to the chapel, for chaunce that may falle,
 And talk wyth that ilk tulk the tale that me lyste,

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

² *I schal lelly yow layne* The guide repeats Gawain’s promise to the lady at 1863.

2095 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,
 2100 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,
 2105 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.
 2110 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,
 2115 And brought about much strife;
 Against his brutal blows
 Nothing can save your life.

“Therefore, good Sir Gawain, let the man be,
 And for God’s sake get away from here by some other road!
 2120 Ride through some other country, where Christ be your help,
 And I will make my way home again, and further I wov
 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
 2125 That ever you took flight from a man that I knew.”
 “Many thanks,” replied Gawain, 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,
 2130 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,

2135 Worthe 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.”

2140 “Mary!” quoth that other man, “now thou so much spellz
 That thou wylt thyn awen nye nyme to thyselfen,
 And the lyste lese thy lyf, the lette I ne kepe.
 Haf here thi helme on thy hede, thi spere in thi honde,
 And ryde me doun this ilke rake bi yon rokke syde,
 2145 Til thou be broght to the bothem of the brem valay;
 Thenne loke a littel on the launde, on thy lyfte honde,
 And thou schal se in that slade the self chapel,
 And the borelych burne on bent that hit kepez.
 Now farez wel, on Godez half, Gawain the noble!
 2150 For alle the golde upon grounde I nolde go wyth the,
 Ne bere the felaghschip thurgh this fryth on fote fyrr.”
 Bi that the wyghe in the wod wendez his brydel,
 Hit the hors with the helez as harde as he myght,
 Lepez hym over the launde, and levez the knyght there
 2155 al one.
 “Bi Goddez self,” quoth Gawain,
 “I wyl nauther grete ne grone;
 To Goddez wylle I am ful bayn,
 And to hym I haf me tone.”

2160 Thenne gyrdez he to Gryngolet, and gederez the rake,
 Schowvez in bi a schore at a schawe syde,
 Ridez thurgh the roghe bonk ryght to the dale;
 And thenne he wayted hym aboute, and wyld hit hym thocht,
 And seye no syngne of resette bisydez nowhere,
 2165 Bot hyghe bonkkez and brent upon bothe halve,
 And rughe knokled knarrez with knorned stonez;
 The skwez of the scowtes skayned hym thocht.
 Thenne he hoved, and wythhylde his hors at that tyde,
 And ofte chaunged his cher the chapel to seche:
 2170 He seye non suche in no syde, and selly hym
 thocht,
 Save, a lyttle on a launde, a lawe as hit were;
 A balgh berw bi a bonke the brymme bysyde,
 Bi a forgh of a flode that ferked thare;
 The borne blubred therinne as hit boyled hade.
 2175 The knyght kachez his caple and com to the lawe,

Whether good or ill come of it, as destiny
 2135 decides.
 Though an opponnet grim
 To deal with, club in hand,
 His faithful servants God
 Knows well how to defend.”

2140 “Marry!” 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
 2145 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!
 2150 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
 2155 alone.
 Said Gawain, “By God himself,
 I shall not moan or cry;
 My life is in his hands,
 His will I shall obey.”

2160 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,
 2165 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.
 2170 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.
 2175 The knight urges his horse and comes to the mound,

Lightez doun luffly, and at a lynde tachez
 The rayne and his riche with a roghe braunche.
 Thenne he bowez to the berwe, aboute hit he walkez,
 Debatande with hymself quat hit be myght.
 2180 Hit hade a hole on the ende and on ayther syde,
 And overgrown with gresse in glodes aywhere,
 And al watz holw inwith, nobot an olde cave,¹
 Or a crevisse of an olde cragge, he couthe hit noght deme
 with spelle.
 2185 “We, lorde!” quoth the gentyle knyght,
 “Whether this be the grene chapelle?
 Here myght aboute mydnyght
 The dele his matynnes telle!

“Now iwysse,” quoth Wowayn, “wysty is here;
 2190 This oritore is ugly, with erbez overgrown;
 Wel bisemez the wyghe wruxled in grene
 Dele here his devocioun on the develez wyse.
 Now I fele hit is the fende, in my fyve wyttez,
 That hatz stoken me this steven to strye me here.
 2195 This is a chapel of meschaunce, that chekke hit bytyde!
 Hit is the corededest kyrk that ever I com inne!”
 With hegh helme on his hede, his launce in his honde,
 He romez up to the roffe of the rogh wonez.
 Thene herde he of that hyghe hil, in a harde roche
 2200 Biyonde the broke, in a bonk, a wonder breme noyse:
 Quat! hit clatered in the clyff, as hit cleve schulde,
 As one upon a gryndelston hade grounden a sythe.
 What! hit wharred and whette, as water at a mulne;
 What! hit rusched and ronge, rawthe to here.
 2205 Thenne “Bi Godde,” quoth Gawayn, “that gere, as I trowe,
 Is ryched at the reverence me, renk, to mete
 bi rote.²
 Let God worche! ‘We loo’
 Hit helppez me not a mote.
 2210 My lif thagh I forgoo,
 Drede dotz me no lote.”

Thenne the knyght con calle ful hyghe,
 “Who stightlez in this sted me steven to holde?”

¹ *nobot an olde cave* An unlikely guess. The hollow mound half-covered with grass, with a hole on the ende and on ayther syde, has the characteristic form of a prehistoric burial chamber.

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.
 2180 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.
 2185 “Good lord!” said the noble knight,
 “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;
 2190 This chapel looks evil, with grass overgrown;
 Here fittingly 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!
 2195 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,
 2200 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.
 2205 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.
 2210 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?”

² *Is ryched ... bi rote* Is intended in honor of me, in order to meet a knight with due ceremony; or, if *renk* means a field of combat or a dueling-place, the noise is intended to mark (*mete*) it out ceremoniously.

For now is gode Gawayn goande ryght here.¹
 2215 If any wyghe oght wyl, wynne hider fast,
 Other now other never, his nedez to spede.”
 “Abyde,” quoth on on the bonke aboven his hede,
 “And thou schal haf al in hast that I the hyght ones.”
 Yet he rusched on that rurde rapely a throwe,
 2220 And wyth quettyng awharf, er he wolde lyght;
 And sythen he keverez bi a cragge, and comez of a hole,
 Whyrlande out of a wro wyth a felle weppen,
 A denez ax nwe dyght, the dynt with to yelde,
 With a borelych bytte bende bi the halme,
 2225 Fyled in a fylor, fowre foot large—
 Hit watz no lasse bi the lace that lemed ful bryght—²
 And the gome in the grene gered as fyrst,
 Bothe the lyre and the leggez, lokkez and berde,
 Save that fayre on his fote he foundez on erthe,
 2230 Sette the stele to the stone, and stalked bysyde.
 When he wan to the watter, ther he wade nolde,
 He hypped over on hys ax, and orpedly strydez,
 Bremly brothe on a bent that brode watz aboute,
 on snawe.
 2235 Sir Gawayn the knyght con mete,
 He ne lutte hym nothyng lowe;
 That other sayde, “Now, sir swete,
 Of steven mon may the trowe.

“Gawayn,” quoth that grene gome, “God the mot loked!
 2240 Iwysse thou art welcom, wyghe, to my place,
 And thou hatz tymed thi travayl as truee mon schulde,
 And thou knowez the covauntez kest uus bytwene:
 At this tyme twelmonyth thou toke that the falled,
 And I schulde at this Nwe Yere yeply the quyte.
 2245 And we ar in this valay verayly oure one;
 Here are no renkes us to rydde, rele as uus lykez.
 Haf thy helme of thy hede, and haf here thy pay.
 Busk no more debate then I the bede thenne
 When thou wypped of my hede at a wap one.”
 2250 “Nay, bi God,” quoth Gawayn, “that me gost lante,

¹ *goande ryght 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 loked 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 *luf-lace*;

For now is good Gawain waiting right here.
 2215 If anyone wants something, let him hurry here fast,
 Either now or never, to settle his affairs.”
 “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,
 2220 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,
 2225 Honed with a whetstone, 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,
 2230 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.
 2235 Sir Gawain met the knight,
 Made him a frosty bow;
 The other said, “Good sir,
 A man may trust your vow.

“Gawain,” said that green man, “may God protect you!
 2240 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.
 2245 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.”
 2250 “No, by God,” said Gawain, “who gave me a soul,

see 1830, *a lace ... that leke umbe hir sydez*, and 2030, *the lace, the ladiez gifte*. 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 gruch the no grwe for grem that fallez.
 Bot styghtel the upon on strok, and I schal stonde style
 And warp the no wernyng to worch as the lykez,
 nowhare.”¹

2255 He lened with the nek, and lutte,
 And schewed that schyre al bare,
 And lette as he noght dutte;
 For drede he wolde not dare.

2260 Then the gome in the grene graythed hym swythe,
 Gederez up hys grymme tole Gawayn to smyte;
 With alle the bur in his body he ber hit on lofte,
 Munt as maghtyly as marre hym he wolde;
 Hade hym dryven adoun as dregh as he atled,
 Ther hade ben ded of his dynt that doghty watz ever.²
 2265 Bot Gawayn on that giserne glyfte hym bysyde,
 As hit com glydande adoun on glode hym to schende,
 And schranke a lytel with the schulderes for the scharp yrne.
 That other schalk wyth a schunt the schene wythhaldez,
 And thenne repreved he the prynce with mony prowde wordes:
 2270 “Thou art not Gawayn,” quoth the gome, “that is so goud
 halden,
 That never arghed for no here by hylle ne be vale,
 And now thou fles for ferde er thou fele harmez!
 Such cowardise of that knyght cowthe I never here.
 Nawther fyked I ne flaghe, freke, quen thou myntest,
 2275 Ne kest no cavelacioun in kyngez hous Arthor.
 My hede flagh to my fore, and yet flagh I never;
 And thou, er any harme hent, arghez in hert.
 Wherefore the better burne me burde be called
 therfore.”
 2280 Quoth Gawayn, “I schunt onez,
 And so wyl I no more;
 Bot thagh my hede falle on the stonz,
 I con not hit restore.

2285 “But busk, burne, bi thi fayth, and bryng me to the poynt.
 Dele to me my destiné, 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 thenne!” quoth that other, and hevez hit alofte,
 And waytez as wrothely as he wode were.

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

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

I shall bear 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.”

2255 He bent his neck and bowed,
 Showing the flesh all bare,
 And seeming unafraid;
 He would not shrink in fear.

2260 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 heaved 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;
 2265 But Gawain glanced sideways at that battle-axe
 As it came sweeping down to destroy him there,
 And hunched 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:
 2270 “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, sir, when you aimed one at me,
 2275 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.”
 2280 Gawain said, “I flinched once,
 But won’t twice hunch my neck,
 Though if my head should fall
 I cannot put it back.

2285 “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.

³ *out of honde* I.e., out of hand: at once. The first recorded use of the phrase.

2290 He myntez at hym maghtly, bot not the mon rynez,
 Withhelde heterly his honde er hit hurt myght.
 Gawayn graythely hit bydez, and glent with no membre,
 Bot stode styлле as the ston, other a stubbe auther
 That ratheled is in roché grounde with rotez a hundreth.
 2295 Then muryly efte con he mele, the mon in the grene,
 “So, now thou hatz thi hert holle, hitte me bihovs.
 Halde the now the hyghe hode that Arthur the raght,
 And kepe thy kanel at this kest, yif hit kever may.”
 Gawayn ful gryndelly with greme thenne sayde:
 2300 “Wy! thresch on, thou thro mon, thou thretez to longe;
 I hope that thi hert arghe wyth thyn awen selven.”
 “For sothe,” quoth that other freke, “so felly thou spekez,
 I wyl no lenger on lyte lette thin ernde¹
 right nowe.”
 2305 Thenne tas he hym strythe to stryke,
 And frounsez bothe lyppe and browe,
 No mervayle thagh hym myslyke
 That hoped of no rescowe.

He lyftes lyghtly his lome, and let hit doun fayre
 2310 With the barbe of the bitte bi the bare nek;
 Thagh he homered heterly, hurt hym no more
 Bot snyrt hym on that on syde, that severed the hyde.
 The scharp schrank to the flesche thurgh the schyre grece,
 That the schene blod over his schulderes schot to the erthe;
 2315 And quen the burne sey the blode blenk on the snawe,
 He sprit forth a spenne-fote² more then a spere lenthe,
 Hent heterly his helme, and his hed cast,
 Schot with his schulderes his fayre schelde under,
 Braydez out a bryght sworde, and bremly he spekez—
 2320 Never syn that he watz burne borne of his moder
 Watz he never in this worlde wyghe half so blythe—
 “Blynne, burne, of thy bur, bede me no mo!
 I haf a stroke in this sted withoute stryf hent,
 And if thow rechez me any mo, I redyly schal quyte,
 2325 And yelde yederly agayn—and therto ye tryst—
 and foo.
 Bot on stroke here me fallez—
 The covaunant ryght schop so,
 Fermed in Arthurez hallez—
 2330 And therefore, hende, now hool!”

¹ *I wyl no lenger on lyte lette thin ernde* Literally: I will no longer in delay hinder your mission.

2290 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.
 2295 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,
 2300 “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.”
 2305 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
 2310 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.
 2315 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—
 2320 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
 2325 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;
 2330 And therefore, sir, enough!”

² *spenne-fote* With feet together.

The hathel heldet hym fro, and on his ax rested,
 Sette the schaft upon schore, and to the scharp lened,
 And loked to the leude that on the launde yede,
 How that doghty, dredles, dervely ther stondez
 2335 Armed, ful aghles: in hert hit hym lykez.
 Thenn he melez muryly wyth a much steven,
 And with a rynkande rurde he to the renk sayde:
 “Bolde burne, on this bent be not so gryndel.
 No mon here unmanerly the mysboden habbez,
 2340 Ne kyd bot as covenaunde at kynges kort schaped.
 I hyght the a strok and thou hit hatz, halde the wel payed;
 I relece the of the remnaunt of ryghtes alle other.
 lif I deliver had bene, a boffet paraunter
 I couthe wrotheloker haf waret, to the haf wroght anger.
 2345 Fyrst I mansed the muryly with a mynt one,
 And rove the wyth no rofe-sore, with ryght I the profered
 For the forwarde that we fest in the fyrst nyght,¹
 And thou trystyly the trawthe and trwly me haldez,
 Al the gayne thow me gef, as god mon schulde.
 2350 That other munt for the morne, mon, I the profered,
 Thou kyssedes my clere wyf—the cosses me raghtez.
 For bothe two here I the bede bot two bare myntes
 boute scathe.²
 Trwe mon trwe restore,
 2355 Thenne thar mon drede no wathe.
 At the thrid thou fayled thore,
 And therfore that tappe ta the.

“For hit is my wede that thou werez, that ilke woven girdel,
 Myn owen wyf hit the weved, I wot wel for sothe.
 2360 Now know I wel thy cosses, and thy costes als,
 And the wowyng of my wyf: I wroght it myselven.
 I sende hir to asay the, and sothly me thynkkez
 On the fautlest freke that ever on fote yede;
 As perle bi the quite pese is of prys more,
 2365 So is Gawain, in god fayth, bi other gay knyghtez.
 Bot here yow lakked a lyttel, sir, and lewté yow wanted;
 Bot that watz for no wylyde werke,³ ne wowyng nauther,
 Bot for ye lufed your lyf; the lasse I yow blame.”
 That other stif mon in study⁴ stod a gret whyle,
 2370 So agreved for greme he gryed withinne;
 Alle the blod of his brest blende in his face,

¹ *fyrst nyght* The night before the first hunt.

² *boute scathe* Without injury, unscathed.

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
 2335 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 wrathfully in this place.
 No one has discourteously mistreated you here,
 2340 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.
 2345 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.
 2350 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,
 2355 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.
 2360 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,
 2365 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,
 2370 So mortified and crushed that he inwardly squirmed;
 All the blood in his body burned in his face,

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:
 "Corsed worth cowarddyse and covetyse bothe!
 2375 In yow is vylany and vyse that vertue disstryez."
 Thenne he kaght to the knot, and the kest lawsez,
 Brayde brothely the belt to the burne selven:
 "Lo, ther the falssyng, foule mot hit falle!
 For care of thy knokke cowardyse me taght
 2380 To acorde me with covetyse, my kynde to forsake,
 That is larges and lewté that longez to knyghtez.
 Now am I fawty and falce, and ferde haf ben ever
 Of trecherye and untrawthe: bothe bityde sorwe
 and care!
 2385 I biknowe yow, knyght, here stylle,
 Al fawty is my fare;
 Letez me overtake your wylle
 And efte I schal be ware."

The loghe that other leude and luflyly sayde,
 2390 "I halde hit hardily hole, the harme that I hade.¹
 Thou art confessed so clene, beknownen of thy mysses,
 And hatz the penaunce apert of the poynt of myn egge,
 I halde the polysed of that plyght, and pured as clene
 As thou hadez never forfeted sythen thou watz fyrst borne;
 2395 And I gif the, sir, the gurdel that is golde-hemmed;
 For hit is grene as my gounne, Sir Gawain, ye maye
 Think upon this ilke threpe, ther thou forth thryngez
 Among prynces of prys, and this a pure token
 Of the chaunce of the grene chapel at chevalrous
 knyghtez.
 2400 And ye schal in this Nwe Yer agayn to my wonez,
 And we schyn revel the remnaunt of this ryche fest
 ful bene."
 Ther lathed hym fast the lorde
 And sayde, "Wyth my wyf, I wene,
 2405 We schal yow wel acorde,
 That watz your enemy kene."

"Nay, for sothe," quoth the segge, and sesed hys helme,
 And hatz hit of hendely, and the hathel thonkkez,
 "I haf sojomed sadly; sele yow bytyde
 2410 And he yelde hit yow yare that yarkkez al menskes!
 And comaunde me to that cortays, your comlych fere,
 Bothe that on and that other, myn honoured ladyez,

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 coveteousness!
 2375 You breed boorishness and vice that ruin virtue."
 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,
 2380 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!
 2385 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,
 2390 "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.
 2395 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
 knights.
 2400 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,
 2405 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,
 2410 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

¹ *the harme that I hade* I.e., being cheated of his winnings.

That thus hor knyght wyth hor kest han koyntly bigyled.
 Bot hit is no ferly thagh a fole madde,
 2415 And thurgh wyles of wymmen be wonen to sorwe,
 For so watz Adam in erde with one bygyled,
 And Salamon with fele sere, and Samson eftsonnez—
 Dalyda dalt hym hys wyrde—and Davyth thereafter
 Watz blended with Barsabe, that much bale tholed.¹
 2420 Now these were wrathed wyth her wyles, hit were a wyne huge
 To luf hom wel and leve hem not, a leude that couthe.
 For thes wer forne the freest, that folwed alle the sele
 Excellently of alle thyse other, under hevenryche
 that mused;
 2425 And alle thay were biwyled
 With wymmen that thay used.
 Thagh I be now bigyled
 Me think me burde be excused.

“Bot your gordel,” quoth Gawain, “God yow foryelde!
 2430 That wyl I welde wyth goud wylle, not for the wyne golde,
 Ne the saynt, ne the sylk, ne for syde pendaundes,
 For wele ne for worchyp, ne for the wlonk werkkez,
 Bot in syngne of my surfet I schal se hit ofte,
 When I ride in renoun, remorde to myselfen
 2435 The faut and the fayntyse of the flesche crabbed,
 How tender hit is to entyse teches of fylthe;
 And thus, quen pryde schal me pryk for prowes of armes,
 The loke to this luf-lace schal lethe my hert.
 Bot on I wolde yow pray, displeses yow never:
 2440 Syn ye be lorde of the yonder londe her I haf lent inne
 Wyth yow wyth worschyp—the wyghe hit yow yelde
 That uphaldez the heven and on hygh sittez—
 How norne ye yowre ryght nome, and thenne no more?”
 “That schal I telle the trwly,” quoth that other thenne,
 2445 “Bertilak de Hautdesert I hat in this londe.
 Thurgh myght of Morgne la Faye, that in my hous lenges,
 And koyntyse of cleryge, bi craftes wel lerned,
 The maystrés of Merlyn mony hatz taken—
 For ho hatz dalt drwry ful dere sumtyme
 2450 With that conable klerk, that knowes alle your knyghtez
 at hame.
 Morgne the goddes
 Therefore hit is hir name:
 Weldez non so hyghe hawtesse
 2455 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
 2415 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—
 Delilah was cause of his fate—and afterwards David
 Was deluded by Bathsheba, and suffered much grief.
 2420 Since these were ruined by their wives, 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.
 2425 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!
 2430 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
 2435 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,
 2440 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,
 2445 “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
 2450 With that accomplished scholar, as all your knights know
 at home.
 Morgan the goddess
 Therefore is her name;
 No one, however haughty
 2455 Or proud she cannot tame.

¹ For so watz Adam ... tholed Famous stories of female betrayal from the Old Testament.

“Ho wayned me upon this wyse to your wynne halle
 For to assay the surquidré, yif hit soth were
 That rennes of the grete renoun of the Rounde Table.
 Ho wayned me this wonder your wyttez to reve,
 2460 For to have greved Gaynour and gart hir to dyghe
 With glopnyng of that ilke gome that gostlych speked
 With his hede in his honde bfore the hyghe table.
 That is ho that is at home, the auncian lady;
 Ho is even thyn aunt, Arthurez half-suster,
 2465 The duches doghter of Tyntagelle, that dere Uter after
 Hade Arthur upon, that athel is nowthe.
 Therefore I ethe the, hathel, to com to thyn aunt,
 Make myry in my hous; my meny the lovies,
 And I wol the as wel, wyghe, bi my faythe,
 2470 As any gome under God for thy grete trauchte.”
 And he nikked hym naye, he nolde bi no wayes.
 Thay acolen and kyssen and kennen ayther other
 To the prynce of paradise, and parten ryght there
 on coolde;
 2475 Gawayn on blonk ful bene
 To the kynges burgh buskez bolde,
 And the knyght in the enker-grene
 Whiderwarde-so-ever he wolde.

 Wylde wayez in the worlde Wowen now rydez
 2480 On Gryngolet, that the grace hade geten of his lyve;
 Ofte he herbered in house and ofte al theroute,
 And mony aventure in vale, and venquyst ofte,
 That I ne tyght at this tyme in tale to remene.
 The hurt watz hole that he hade hent in his nek,
 2485 And the blykkande belt he bere therabout
 Abelef as a bauderyk bounden by his syde,
 Loken under his lyfte arme, the lace, with a knot,
 In tokenyng he watz tane in tech of a faute.
 And thus he commes to the court, knyght al in sounde.
 2490 Ther wakned wele in that wone when wyst the grete
 That gode Gawayn watz comen; gayn hit hym thought.
 The kyng kysses the knyght, and the whene alce,
 And sythen mony syker knyght that soght hym to haylce,
 Of his fare that hym frayned; and ferlyly he telles,
 2495 Biknowez alle the costes of care that he hade,
 The chaunce of the chapel, the chere of the knyght,
 The luf of the ladi, the lace at the last.
 The nirt in the neck he naked hem schewed

“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,
 2460 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,
 2465 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,
 2470 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;
 2475 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
 2480 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,
 2485 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.
 2490 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,
 2495 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

2500 That he laght for his unleuté at the leudes hondes
 for blame.
 He tened quen he schulde telle,
 He groned for gref and grame;
 The blod in his face con melle,
 When he hit schulde schewe, for schame.

 2505 “Lo, lorde,” quoth the leude, and the lace hondeled,
 “This is the bende of this blame I bere in my nek,
 This is the lathe and the losse that I laght have
 Of cowardise and covetyse that I haf caght thare,
 This is the token of untrawthe that I am tane inne,
 2510 And I mot nedez hit were wyle I may last;
 For mon may hyden his harme, bot unhap ne may hit,
 For ther hit onez is tachched twynne wil hit never.”
 The kyng confortez the knyght, and alle the court als
 Laghen loude therat, and lufflyly acorden
 2515 That lordes and ladis that longed to the Table,
 Uche burne of the brotherhede, a bauderyk schulde have,
 A bende abelef hym aboute of a bryght grene,
 And that, for sake of that segge, in swete to were.
 For that watz acorded the renoun of the Rounde Table,
 2520 And he honoured that hit hade evermore after,
 As hit is breved in the best boke of romaunce.
 Thus in Arthurus day this aunter bitidde,
 The Brutus bokez therof beres wyttensse;
 Sythen Brutus, the bolde burne, bowed hider fyrst,
 2525 After the segge and the asaute watz sesed at Troye,¹
 iwysse,
 Mony aunterez here-biforne
 Haf fallen suche er this.
 Now that bere the croun of thorne
 2530 He bryng uus to his blysse! AMEN.

*HONY SOYT QUI MAL PENCE.*²

¹ *After the segge and the asaute watz sesed 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.

2500 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.

 2505 “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,
 2510 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
 2515 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,
 2520 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,
 2525 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
 2530 Bring us to his bliss! AMEN.

HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE.