**Sir Gawain and the Green Knight**

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About this Work

Written in Middle English of the late Fourteenth Century, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight survives in a single manuscript which also contains three religious poems including Pearl, written it seems by the same author, who is therefore referred to as The Pearl Poet.

The poem tells the story of an incident at the court of King Arthur, involving Sir Gawain’s acceptance of a challenge from the mysterious Green Knight, and leading to a test of his chivalry and courage. The poem is a lively, atmospheric, and cleverly-paced example of a quest tale, from which the hero emerges chastened and wiser, and contains an interesting mix of Celtic, French and English motifs. There are many and varied interpretations of the themes and symbols contained in the story, and echoes are found in many other folklore tales and legends.

The Pearl Poet appears to have been a Fourteenth Century contemporary of Chaucer, and the dialect in which the poem is written suggests an origin in the English West Midlands. The poem is written in an alliterative style, in variable length stanzas, their lines containing two pairs of stressed syllables, and each stanza ending in a rhyming quatrain. It is seen as an example of work produced during the Alliterative Revival of the period, but by combining alliteration and rhyme leads forward to the flexible rhymed and unrhymed verse of later times. Various attempts have been made to identify the Pearl Poet with a historical personage but no candidate has been generally accepted.

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| Passus I  SIÞEN þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at Troye,  Þe borȝ brittened and brent to brondeȝ and askez,  Þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wroȝt  Watz tried for his tricherie, þe trewest on erthe:  Hit watz Ennias þe athel, and his highe kynde,  Þat siþen depreced prouinces, and patrounes bicome  Welneȝe of al þe wele in þe west iles.  Fro riche Romulus to Rome ricchis hym swyþe,  With gret bobbaunce þat burȝe he biges vpon fyrst,  And neuenes hit his aune nome, as hit now hat;  Tirius to Tuskan and teldes bigynnes,  Langaberde in Lumbardie lyftes vp homes,  And fer ouer þe French flod Felix Brutus  On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez  wyth wynne,      Where werre and wrake and wonder      Bi syþez hatz wont þerinne,      And oft boþe blysse and blunder      Ful skete hatz skyfted synne.  2  Ande quen þis Bretayn watz bigged bi þis burn rych,  Bolde bredden þerinne, baret þat lofden,  In mony turned tyme tene þat wroȝten.  Mo ferlyes on þis folde han fallen here oft  Þen in any oþer þat I wot, syn þat ilk tyme.  Bot of alle þat here bult, of Bretaygne kynges,  Ay watz Arthur þe hendest, as I haf herde telle.  Forþi an aunter in erde I attle to schawe,  Þat a selly in siȝt summe men hit holden,  And an outtrage awenture of Arthurez wonderez.  If ȝe wyl lysten þis laye bot on littel quile,  I schal telle hit as-tit, as I in toun herde,          with tonge,      As hit is stad and stoken      In stori stif and stronge,      With lel letteres loken,      In londe so hatz ben longe.  3  Þis kyng lay at Camylot vpon Krystmasse  With mony luflych lorde, ledez of þe best,  Rekenly of þe Rounde Table alle þo rich breþer,  With rych reuel oryȝt and rechles merþes.  Þer tournayed tulkes by tymez ful mony,  Justed ful jolilé þise gentyle kniȝtes,  Syþen kayred to þe court caroles to make.  For þer þe fest watz ilyche ful fiften dayes,  With alle þe mete and þe mirþe þat men couþe avyse;  Such glaum ande gle glorious to here,  Dere dyn vpon day, daunsyng on nyȝtes,  Al watz hap vpon heȝe in hallez and chambrez  With lordez and ladies, as leuest him þoȝt.  With all þe wele of þe worlde þay woned þer samen,  Þe most kyd knyȝtez vnder Krystes seluen,  And þe louelokkest ladies þat euer lif haden,  And he þe comlokest kyng þat þe court haldes;  For al watz þis fayre folk in her first age,          on sille,      Þe hapnest vnder heuen,      Kyng hyȝest mon of wylle;      Hit were now gret nye to neuen      So hardy a here on hille.  4  Wyle Nw Ȝer watz so ȝep þat hit watz nwe cummen,  Þat day doubble on þe dece watz þe douth serued.  Fro þe kyng watz cummen with knyȝtes into þe halle,  Þe chauntré of þe chapel cheued to an ende,  Loude crye watz þer kest of clerkez and oþer,  Nowel nayted onewe, neuened ful ofte;  And syþen riche forth runnen to reche hondeselle,  Ȝeȝed ȝeres-ȝiftes on hiȝ, ȝelde hem bi hond,  Debated busyly aboute þo giftes;  Ladies laȝed ful loude, þoȝ þay lost haden,  And he þat wan watz not wrothe, þat may ȝe wel trawe.  Alle þis mirþe þay maden to þe mete tyme;  When þay had waschen worþyly þay wenten to sete,  Þe best burne ay abof, as hit best semed,  Whene Guenore, ful gay, grayþed in þe myddes,  Dressed on þe dere des, dubbed al aboute,  Smal sendal bisides, a selure hir ouer  Of tryed tolouse, and tars tapites innoghe,  Þat were enbrawded and beten wyth þe best gemmes  Þat myȝt be preued of prys wyth penyes to bye,          in daye.      Þe comlokest to discrye      Þer glent with yȝen gray,      A semloker þat euer he syȝe      Soth moȝt no mon say.  5  Bot Arthure wolde not ete til al were serued,  He watz so joly of his joyfnes, and sumquat childgered:  His lif liked hym lyȝt, he louied þe lasse  Auþer to longe lye or to longe sitte,  So bisied him his ȝonge blod and his brayn wylde.  And also an oþer maner meued him eke  Þat he þurȝ nobelay had nomen, he wolde neuer ete  Vpon such a dere day er hym deuised were  Of sum auenturus þyng an vncouþe tale,  Of sum mayn meruayle, þat he myȝt trawe,  Of alderes, of armes, of oþer auenturus,  Oþer sum segg hym bisoȝt of sum siker knyȝt  To joyne wyth hym in iustyng, in jopardé to lay,  Lede, lif for lyf, leue vchon oþer,  As fortune wolde fulsun hom, þe fayrer to haue.  Þis watz þe kynges countenaunce where he in court were,  At vch farand fest among his fre meny in halle.      Þerfore of face so fere      He stiȝtlez stif in stalle,      Ful ȝep in þat Nw Ȝere      Much mirthe he mas withalle.  6  Thus þer stondes in stale þe stif kyng hisseluen,  Talkkande bifore þe hyȝe table of trifles ful hende.  There gode Gawan watz grayþed Gwenore bisyde,  And Agrauayn *a la dure mayn* on þat oþer syde sittes,  Boþe þe kynges sistersunes and ful siker kniȝtes;  Bischop Bawdewyn abof biginez þe table,  And Ywan, Vryn son, ette with hymseluen.  Þise were diȝt on þe des and derworþly serued,  And siþen mony siker segge at þe sidbordez.  Þen þe first cors come with crakkyng of trumpes,  Wyth mony baner ful bryȝt þat þerbi henged;  Nwe nakryn noyse with þe noble pipes,  Wylde werbles and wyȝt wakned lote,  Þat mony hert ful hiȝe hef at her towches.  Dayntés dryuen þerwyth of ful dere metes,  Foysoun of þe fresche, and on so fele disches  Þat pine to fynde þe place þe peple biforne  For to sette þe sylueren þat sere sewes halden  on clothe.  Iche lede as he loued hymselue      Þer laght withouten loþe;      Ay two had disches twelue,      Good ber and bryȝt wyn boþe.  7  Now wyl I of hor seruise say yow no more,  For vch wyȝe may wel wit no wont þat þer were.  An oþer noyse ful newe neȝed biliue,  Þat þe lude myȝt haf leue liflode to cach;  For vneþe watz þe noyce not a whyle sesed,  And þe fyrst cource in þe court kyndely serued,  Þer hales in at þe halle dor an aghlich mayster,  On þe most on þe molde on mesure hyghe;  Fro þe swyre to þe swange so sware and so þik,  And his lyndes and his lymes so longe and so grete,  Half etayn in erde I hope þat he were,  Bot mon most I algate mynn hym to bene,  And þat þe myriest in his muckel þat myȝt ride;  For of bak and of brest al were his bodi sturne,  Both his wombe and his wast were worthily smale,  And alle his fetures folȝande, in forme þat he hade,          ful clene;      For wonder of his hwe men hade,      Set in his semblaunt sene;      He ferde as freke were fade,      And oueral enker-grene.  8  Ande al grayþed in grene þis gome and his wedes:  A strayte cote ful streȝt, þat stek on his sides,  A meré mantile abof, mensked withinne  With pelure pured apert, þe pane ful clene  With blyþe blaunner ful bryȝt, and his hod boþe,  Þat watz laȝt fro his lokkez and layde on his schulderes;  Heme wel-haled hose of þat same,  Þat spenet on his sparlyr, and clene spures vnder  Of bryȝt golde, vpon silk bordes barred ful ryche,  And scholes vnder schankes þere þe schalk rides;  And alle his vesture uerayly watz clene verdure,  Boþe þe barres of his belt and oþer blyþe stones,  Þat were richely rayled in his aray clene  Aboutte hymself and his sadel, vpon silk werkez.  Þat were to tor for to telle of tryfles þe halue  Þat were enbrauded abof, wyth bryddes and flyȝes,  With gay gaudi of grene, þe golde ay inmyddes.  Þe pendauntes of his payttrure, þe proude cropure,  His molaynes, and alle þe metail anamayld was þenne,  Þe steropes þat he stod on stayned of þe same,  And his arsounz al after and his aþel skyrtes,  Þat euer glemered and glent al of grene stones;  Þe fole þat he ferkkes on fyn of þat ilke,          sertayn,      A grene hors gret and þikke,      A stede ful stif to strayne,      In brawden brydel quik—  To þe gome he watz ful gayn.  9  Wel gay watz þis gome gered in grene,  And þe here of his hed of his hors swete.  Fayre fannand fax vmbefoldes his schulderes;  A much berd as a busk ouer his brest henges,  Þat wyth his hiȝlich here þat of his hed reches  Watz euesed al vmbetorne abof his elbowes,  Þat half his armes þer-vnder were halched in þe wyse  Of a kyngez capados þat closes his swyre;  Þe mane of þat mayn hors much to hit lyke,  Wel cresped and cemmed, wyth knottes ful mony  Folden in wyth fildore aboute þe fayre grene,  Ay a herle of þe here, an oþer of golde;  Þe tayl and his toppyng twynnen of a sute,  And bounden boþe wyth a bande of a bryȝt grene,  Dubbed wyth ful dere stonez, as þe dok lasted,  Syþen þrawen wyth a þwong a þwarle knot alofte,  Þer mony bellez ful bryȝt of brende golde rungen.  Such a fole vpon folde, ne freke þat hym rydes,  Watz neuer sene in þat sale wyth syȝt er þat tyme,          with yȝe.      He loked as layt so lyȝt,      So sayd al þat hym syȝe;      Hit semed as no mon myȝt      Vnder his dynttez dryȝe.  10  Wheþer hade he no helme ne hawbergh nauþer,  Ne no pysan ne no plate þat pented to armes,  Ne no schafte ne no schelde to schwue ne to smyte,  Bot in his on honde he hade a holyn bobbe,  Þat is grattest in grene when greuez ar bare,  And an ax in his oþer, a hoge and vnmete,  A spetos sparþe to expoun in spelle, quoso myȝt.  Þe lenkþe of an elnȝerde þe large hede hade,  Þe grayn al of grene stele and of golde hewen,  Þe bit burnyst bryȝt, with a brod egge  As wel schapen to schere as scharp rasores,  Þe stele of a stif staf þe sturne hit bi grypte,  Þat watz wounden wyth yrn to þe wandez ende,  And al bigrauen with grene in gracios werkes;  A lace lapped aboute, þat louked at þe hede,  And so after þe halme halched ful ofte,  Wyth tryed tasselez þerto tacched innoghe  On botounz of þe bryȝt grene brayden ful ryche.  Þis haþel heldez hym in and þe halle entres,  Driuande to þe heȝe dece, dut he no woþe,  Haylsed he neuer one, bot heȝe he ouer loked.  Þe fyrst word þat he warp, 'Wher is', he sayd,  'Þe gouernour of þis gyng? Gladly I wolde  Se þat segg in syȝt, and with hymself speke          raysoun.'      To knyȝtez he kest his yȝe,      And reled hym vp and doun;      He stemmed, and con studie      Quo walt þer most renoun.  11  Ther watz lokyng on lenþe þe lude to beholde,  For vch mon had meruayle quat hit mene myȝt  Þat a haþel and a horse myȝt such a hwe lach,  As growe grene as þe gres and grener hit semed,  Þen grene aumayl on golde glowande bryȝter.  Al studied þat þer stod, and stalked hym nerre  Wyth al þe wonder of þe worlde what he worch schulde.  For fele sellyez had þay sen, bot such neuer are;  Forþi for fantoum and fayryȝe þe folk þere hit demed.  Þerfore to answare watz arȝe mony aþel freke,  And al stouned at his steuen and stonstil seten  In a swoghe sylence þurȝ þe sale riche;  As al were slypped vpon slepe so slaked hor lotez          in hyȝe—      I deme hit not al for doute,      Bot sum for cortaysye—      Bot let hym þat al schulde loute      Cast vnto þat wyȝe.  12  Þenn Arþour bifore þe hiȝ dece þat auenture byholdez,  And rekenly hym reuerenced, for rad was he neuer,  And sayde, 'Wyȝe, welcum iwys to þis place,  Þe hede of þis ostel Arthour I hat;  Liȝt luflych adoun and lenge, I þe praye,  And quat-so þy wylle is we schal wyt after.'  'Nay, as help me,' quoþ þe haþel, 'he þat on hyȝe syttes,  To wone any quyle in þis won, hit watz not myn ernde;  Bot for þe los of þe, lede, is lyft vp so hyȝe,  And þy burȝ and þy burnes best ar holden,  Stifest vnder stel-gere on stedes to ryde,  Þe wyȝtest and þe worþyest of þe worldes kynde,  Preue for to play wyth in oþer pure laykez,  And here is kydde cortaysye, as I haf herd carp,  And þat hatz wayned me hider, iwyis, at þis tyme.  Ȝe may be seker bi þis braunch þat I bere here  Þat I passe as in pes, and no plyȝt seche;  For had I founded in fere in feȝtyng wyse,  I haue a hauberghe at home and a helme boþe,  A schelde and a scharp spere, schinande bryȝt,  Ande oþer weppenes to welde, I wene wel, als;  Bot for I wolde no were, my wedez ar softer.  Bot if þou be so bold as alle burnez tellen,  Þou wyl grant me godly þe gomen þat I ask          bi ryȝt.'      Arthour con onsware,      And sayd, 'Sir cortays knyȝt,      If þou craue batayl bare,      Here faylez þou not to fyȝt.'  13  'Nay, frayst I no fyȝt, in fayth I þe telle,  Hit arn aboute on þis bench bot berdlez chylder.  If I were hasped in armes on a heȝe stede,  Here is no mon me to mach, for myȝtez so wayke.  Forþy I craue in þis court a Crystemas gomen,  For hit is Ȝol and Nwe Ȝer, and here ar ȝep mony:  If any so hardy in þis hous holdez hymseluen,  Be so bolde in his blod, brayn in hys hede,  Þat dar stifly strike a strok for an oþer,  I schal gif hym of my gyft þys giserne ryche,  Þis ax, þat is heué innogh, to hondele as hym lykes,  And I schal bide þe fyrst bur as bare as I sitte.  If any freke be so felle to fonde þat I telle,  Lepe lyȝtly me to, and lach þis weppen,  I quit-clayme hit for euer, kepe hit as his auen,  And I schal stonde hym a strok, stif on þis flet,  Ellez þou wyl diȝt me þe dom to dele hym an oþer          barlay,      And ȝet gif hym respite,      A twelmonyth and a day;      Now hyȝe, and let se tite      Dar any herinne oȝt say.'  14  If he hem stowned vpon fyrst, stiller were þanne  Alle þe heredmen in halle, þe hyȝ and þe loȝe.  Þe renk on his rouncé hym ruched in his sadel,  And runischly his rede yȝen he reled aboute,  Bende his bresed broȝez, blycande grene,  Wayued his berde for to wayte quo-so wolde ryse.  When non wolde kepe hym with carp he coȝed ful hyȝe,  Ande rimed hym ful richly, and ryȝt hym to speke:  'What, is þis Arthures hous,' quoþ þe haþel þenne,  'Þat al þe rous rennes of þurȝ ryalmes so mony?  Where is now your sourquydrye and your conquestes,  Your gryndellayk and your greme, and your grete wordes?  Now is þe reuel and þe renoun of þe Rounde Table  Ouerwalt wyth a worde of on wyȝes speche,  For al dares for drede withoute dynt schewed!'  Wyth þis he laȝes so loude þat þe lorde greued;  Þe blod schot for scham into his schyre face          and lere;  He wex as wroth as wynde,      So did alle þat þer were.      Þe kyng as kene bi kynde      Þen stod þat stif mon nere,  15  Ande sayde, 'Haþel, by heuen, þyn askyng is nys,  And as þou foly hatz frayst, fynde þe behoues.  I know no gome þat is gast of þy grete wordes;  Gif me now þy geserne, vpon Godez halue,  And I schal bayþen þy bone þat þou boden habbes.'  Lyȝtly lepez he hym to, and laȝt at his honde.  Þen feersly þat oþer freke vpon fote lyȝtis.  Now hatz Arthure his axe, and þe halme grypez,  And sturnely sturez hit aboute, þat stryke wyth hit þoȝt.  Þe stif mon hym bifore stod vpon hyȝt,  Herre þen ani in þe hous by þe hede and more.  Wyth sturne schere þer he stod he stroked his berde,  And wyth a countenaunce dryȝe he droȝ doun his cote,  No more mate ne dismayd for hys mayn dintez  Þen any burne vpon bench hade broȝt hym to drynk          of wyne.      Gawan, þat sate bi þe quene,      To þe kyng he can enclyne:      'I beseche now with saȝez sene      Þis melly mot be myne.  16  'Wolde ȝe, worþilych lorde,' quoþ Wawan to þe kyng,  'Bid me boȝe fro þis benche, and stonde by yow þere,  Þat I wythoute vylanye myȝt voyde þis table,  And þat my legge lady lyked not ille,  I wolde com to your counseyl bifore your cort ryche.  For me þink hit not semly, as hit is soþ knawen,  Þer such an askyng is heuened so hyȝe in your sale,  Þaȝ ȝe ȝourself be talenttyf, to take hit to yourseluen,  Whil mony so bolde yow aboute vpon bench sytten,  Þat vnder heuen I hope non haȝerer of wylle,  Ne better bodyes on bent þer baret is rered.  I am þe wakkest, I wot, and of wyt feblest,  And lest lur of my lyf, quo laytes þe soþe—  Bot for as much as ȝe ar myn em I am only to prayse,  No bounté bot your blod I in my bodé knowe;  And syþen þis note is so nys þat noȝt hit yow falles,  And I haue frayned hit at yow fyrst, foldez hit to me;  And if I carp not comlyly, let alle þis cort rych          bout blame.'      Ryche togeder con roun,      And syþen þay redden alle same      To ryd þe kyng wyth croun,      And gif Gawan þe game.  17  Þen comaunded þe kyng þe knyȝt for to ryse;  And he ful radly vpros, and ruchched hym fayre,  Kneled doun bifore þe kyng, and cachez þat weppen;  And he luflyly hit hym laft, and lyfte vp his honde,  And gef hym Goddez blessyng, and gladly hym biddes  Þat his hert and his honde schulde hardi be boþe.  'Kepe þe, cosyn,' quoþ þe kyng, 'þat þou on kyrf sette,  And if þou redez hym ryȝt, redly I trowe  Þat þou schal byden þe bur þat he schal bede after.'  Gawan gotz to þe gome with giserne in honde,  And he baldly hym bydez, he bayst neuer þe helder.  Þen carppez to Sir Gawan þe knyȝt in þe grene,  'Refourme we oure forwardes, er we fyrre passe.  Fyrst I eþe þe, haþel, how þat þou hattes  Þat þou me telle truly, as I tryst may.'  'In god fayth,' quoþ þe goode knyȝt, 'Gawan I hatte,  Þat bede þe þis buffet, quat-so bifallez after,  And at þis tyme twelmonyth take at þe an oþer  Wyth what weppen so þou wylt, and wyth no wyȝ ellez          on lyue.'      Þat oþer onswarez agayn,      'Sir Gawan, so mot I þryue      As I am ferly fayn      Þis dint þat þou schal dryue.  18  'Bigog,' quoþ þe grene knyȝt, 'Sir Gawan, me lykes  Þat I schal fange at þy fust þat I haf frayst here.  And þou hatz redily rehersed, bi resoun ful trwe,  Clanly al þe couenaunt þat I þe kynge asked,  Saf þat þou schal siker me, segge, bi þi trawþe,  Þat þou schal seche me þiself, where-so þou hopes  I may be funde vpon folde, and foch þe such wages  As þou deles me to-day bifore þis douþe ryche.'  'Where schulde I wale þe,' quoþ Gauan, 'where is þy place?  I wot neuer where þou wonyes, bi hym þat me wroȝt,  Ne I know not þe, knyȝt, by cort ne þi name.  Bot teche me truly þerto, and telle me how þou hattes,  And I schal ware alle my wyt to wynne me þeder,  And þat I swere þe for soþe, and by my seker traweþ.'  'Þat is innogh in Nwe Ȝer, hit nedes no more',  Quoþ þe gome in þe grene to Gawan þe hende;  'Ȝif I þe telle trwly, quen I þe tape haue  And þou me smoþely hatz smyten, smartly I þe teche  Of my hous and my home and myn owen nome,  Þen may þou frayst my fare and forwardez holde;  And if I spende no speche, þenne spedez þou þe better,  For þou may leng in þy londe and layt no fyrre—          bot slokes!      Ta now þy grymme tole to þe,      And let se how þou cnokez.'      'Gladly, sir, for soþe',      Quoþ Gawan; his ax he strokes.  19  Þe grene knyȝt vpon grounde grayþely hym dresses,  A littel lut with þe hede, þe lere he discouerez,  His longe louelych lokkez he layd ouer his croun,  Let þe naked nec to þe note schewe.  Gauan gripped to his ax, and gederes hit on hyȝt,  Þe kay fot on þe folde he before sette,  Let him doun lyȝtly lyȝt on þe naked,  Þat þe scharp of þe schalk schyndered þe bones,  And schrank þurȝ þe schyire grece, and schade hit in twynne,  Þat þe bit of þe broun stel bot on þe grounde.  Þe fayre hede fro þe halce hit to þe erþe,  Þat fele hit foyned wyth her fete, þere hit forth roled;  Þe blod brayd fro þe body, þat blykked on þe grene;  And nawþer faltered ne fel þe freke neuer þe helder,  Bot styþly he start forth vpon styf schonkes,  And runyschly he raȝt out, þere as renkkez stoden,  Laȝt to his lufly hed, and lyft hit vp sone;  And syþen boȝez to his blonk, þe brydel he cachchez,  Steppez into stelbawe and strydez alofte,  And his hede by þe here in his honde haldez;  And as sadly þe segge hym in his sadel sette  As non vnhap had hym ayled, þaȝ hedlez he were          in stedde.      He brayde his bulk aboute,  Þat vgly bodi þat bledde;      Moni on of hym had doute,      Bi þat his resounz were redde.  20  For þe hede in his honde he haldez vp euen,  Toward þe derrest on þe dece he dressez þe face,  And hit lyfte vp þe yȝe-lyddez and loked ful brode,  And meled þus much with his muthe, as ȝe may now here:  'Loke, Gawan, þou be grayþe to go as þou hettez,  And layte as lelly til þou me, lude, fynde,  As þou hatz hette in þis halle, herande þise knyȝtes;  To þe grene chapel þou chose, I charge þe, to fotte  Such a dunt as þou hatz dalt—disserued þou habbez  To be ȝederly ȝolden on Nw Ȝeres morn.  Þe knyȝt of þe grene chapel men knowen me mony;  Forþi me for to fynde if þou fraystez, faylez þou neuer.  Þerfore com, oþer recreaunt be calde þe behoues.'  With a runisch rout þe raynez he tornez,  Halled out at þe hal dor, his hed in his hande,  Þat þe fyr of þe flynt flaȝe fro fole houes.  To quat kyth he becom knwe non þere,  Neuer more þen þay wyste from queþen he watz wonnen.          What þenne?      Þe kyng and Gawen þare      At þat grene þay laȝe and grenne,      Ȝet breued watz hit ful bare      A meruayl among þo menne.  21  Þaȝ Arþer þe hende kyng at hert hade wonder,  He let no semblaunt be sene, bot sayde ful hyȝe  To þe comlych quene wyth cortays speche,  'Dere dame, to-day demay yow neuer;  Wel bycommes such craft vpon Cristmasse,  Laykyng of enterludez, to laȝe and to syng,  Among þise kynde caroles of knyȝtez and ladyez.  Neuer þe lece to my mete I may me wel dres,  For I haf sen a selly, I may not forsake.'  He glent vpon Sir Gawen, and gaynly he sayde,  'Now, sir, heng vp þyn ax, þat hatz innogh hewen';  And hit watz don abof þe dece on doser to henge,  Þer alle men for meruayl myȝt on hit loke,  And bi trwe tytel þerof to telle þe wonder.  Þenne þay boȝed to a borde þise burnes togeder,  Þe kyng and þe gode knyȝt, and kene men hem serued  Of alle dayntyez double, as derrest myȝt falle;  Wyth alle maner of mete and mynstralcie boþe,  Wyth wele walt þay þat day, til worþed an ende          in londe.      Now þenk wel, Sir Gawan,      For woþe þat þou ne wonde      Þis auenture for to frayn      Þat þou hatz tan on honde. | The Book of Romance  Part I  1  Soon as the siege and assault had ceased at Troy,  the burg broken and burnt to brands and ashes,  the traitor who trammels of treason there wrought  was tried for his treachery, the foulest on earth.  It was Aeneas the noble and his high kin  who then subdued provinces, lords they became,  well-nigh of all the wealth in the Western Isles:  forth rich Romulus to Rome rapidly came,  with great business that burg he builds up first,  and names it with his name, as now it has;  Ticius to Tuscany, and townships begins;  Langobard in Lombardy lifts up homes;  and fared over the French flood Felix Brutus  on many banks all broad Britain he settles  then,  where war and wreck and wonder  betimes have worked within,  and oft both bliss and blunder  have held sway swiftly since.  2  And when this Britain was built by this baron rich,  bold men were bred therein, of battle beloved,  in many a troubled time turmoil that wrought.  More flames on this fold have fallen here oft  than any other I know of, since that same time.  But of all that here built, of Britain the kings,  ever was Arthur highest, as I have heard tell.  And so of earnest adventure I aim to show,  that astonishes sight as some men do hold it,  an outstanding action of Arthur’s wonders.  If you will list to this lay but a little while,  I’ll tell it straight, as I in town heard it,  with tongue;  as it was said and spoken  in story staunch and strong,  with linked letters loaded,  as in this land so long.  3  This king lay at Camelot nigh on Christmas  with many lovely lords, of leaders the best,  reckoning of the Round Table all the rich brethren,  with right ripe revel and reckless mirth.  There tourneyed tykes by times full many,  jousted full jollily these gentle knights,  then carried to court, their carols to make.  For there the feast was alike full fifteen days,  with all the meat and mirth men could devise:  such clamour and glee glorious to hear,  dear din in the daylight, dancing of nights;  all was happiness high in halls and chambers  with lords and ladies, as liked them all best.  With all that’s well in the world were they together,  the knights best known under the Christ Himself,  and the loveliest ladies that ever life honoured,  and he the comeliest king that the court rules.  For all were fair folk and in their first age  still,  the happiest under heaven,  king noblest in his will;  that it were hard to reckon  so hardy a host on hill.  4  While New Year was so young it was new come in,  that day double on the dais was the dole served,  for the king was come with knights into the hall,  and chanting in the chapel had chimed to an end.  Loud cry was there cast of clerics and others,  Noel nurtured anew, and named full oft;  and see the rich run forth to render presents,  yelled their gifts on high, yield them to hand,  argued busily about those same gifts.  Ladies laughed out loud, though they had lost,  while he that won was not wrath, that you’ll know.  All this mirth they made at the meal time.  When they had washed well they went to be seated,  the best of the barons above, as it seemed best;  with Guinevere, full gaily, gracing their midst,  dressed on the dais there, adorned all about –  splendid silk by her sides, and sheer above  of true Toulouse, of Tartar tapestries plenty,  that were embroidered, bright with the best gems  that might be price-proved with pennies  any a day.  the comeliest to descry  glanced there with eyen grey;  a seemlier ever to the sight,  sooth might no man say.  5  But Arthur would not eat till all were served,  he was so joyous a youth, and somewhat boyish:  he liked his life lively, he loved the less  either to long lie idle or to long sit,  so busied him his young blood and his brain wild.  And also another matter moved him so,  that he had nobly named he would never eat  on such dear days, before he had been advised,  of some adventurous thing, an unknown tale,  of some mighty marvel, that he might believe,  of ancestors, arms, or other adventures;  or else till someone beseeched for some sure knight  to join with him in jousting, in jeopardy to lay,  lay down life for life, allow each to the other,  as fortune might favour them, a fair advantage.  This was the king’s custom when he in court was,  at each fine feast among his many friends in hall.  Therefore with fearless face  he stands straight and tall;  full lively at that New Year  much mirth he makes with all.  6  Thus there stands straight and tall the king himself,  talking at the high table of trifles full courtly.  There good Gawain was graced by Guinevere beside,  and Agravain a la dure main on the other side sits,  both the king’s sister-sons and full sure knights;  Bishop Baldwin above, he begins the table,  and Ywain, Urien’s son, ate alongside him.  These sat high on the dais and deftly served,  and many another sat sure at the side-tables.  Then the first course came with crack of trumpets,  with many a banner full bright that thereby hung;  new noise of kettledrums and noble pipes,  wild warbles and wide wakened echoes,  that many a heart full high heaved at their notes.  Dainties drawn in therewith of full dear meats,  foods of the freshest, and in such files of dishes  they find no room to place them people before  and to set the silver that holds such servings  on cloth.  Each his load as he liked himself,  there ladled and nothing loath;  Every two had dishes twelve,  good beer and bright wine both.  7  Now will I of their service say you no more,  for each man may well know no want was there  another noise full new neared with speed,  that would give the lord leave to take meat.  For scarce was the noise not a while ceased,  and the first course in the court duly served,  there hales in at the hall door a dreadful man,  the most in the world’s mould of measure high,  from the nape to the waist so swart and so thick,  and his loins and his limbs so long and so great  half giant on earth I think now that he was;  but the most of man anyway I mean him to be,  and that the finest in his greatness that might ride,  for of back and breast though his body was strong,  both his belly and waist were worthily small,  and his features all followed his form made  and clean.  Wonder at his hue men displayed,  set in his semblance seen;  he fared as a giant were made,  and over all deepest green.  8  And all garbed in green this giant and his gear:  a straight coat full tight that stuck to his sides,  a magnificent mantle above, masked within  with pelts pared pertly, the garment agleam  with blithe ermine full bright, and his hood both,  that was left from his locks and laid on his shoulders;  neat, well-hauled hose of that same green  that clung to his calves and sharp spurs under  of bright gold, on silk stockings rich-barred,  and no shoes under sole where the same rides.  And all his vesture verily was bright verdure,  both the bars of his belt and other bright stones,  that were richly rayed in his bright array  about himself and his saddle, on silk work,  it were tortuous to tell of these trifles the half,  embroidered above with birds and butterflies,  with gay gaudy of green, the gold ever inmost.  The pendants of his harness, the proud crupper,  his bridle and all the metal enamelled was then;  the stirrups he stood on stained with the same,  and his saddle bows after, and saddle skirts,  ever glimmered and glinted all with green stones.  The horse he rode on was also of that hue,  certain:  A green horse great and thick,  a steed full strong to restrain,  in broidered bridle quick –  to the giant he brought gain.  9  Well garbed was this giant geared in green,  and the hair of his head like his horse’s mane.  Fair fanned-out flax enfolds his shoulders;  A beard big as a bush over his breast hangs,  that with the haul of hair that from his head reaches  was clipped all round about above his elbows,  that half his hands thereunder were hid in the wise  of a king’s broad cape that’s clasped at his neck.  The mane of that mighty horse was much alike,  well crisped and combed, with knots full many  plaited in thread of gold about the fair green,  here a thread of the hair, and there of gold.  The tail and his forelock twinned, of a suit,  and bound both with a band of a bright green,  dressed with precious stones, as its length lasted;  then twined with a thong, a tight knot aloft,  where many bells bright of burnished gold ring.  Such a man on a mount, such a giant that rides,  was never before that time in hall in sight of human  eye.  He looked as lightning bright,  said all that him descried;  it seemed that no man might  his mighty blows survive.  10  And yet he had no helm nor hauberk, neither,  nor protection, nor no plate pertinent to arms,  nor no shaft, nor no shield, to strike and smite,  but in his one hand he held a holly branch,  that is greatest in green when groves are bare,  and an axe in his other, one huge, monstrous,  a perilous spar to expound in speech, who might.  The head of an ell-rod its large length had,  the spike all of green steel and of gold hewn,  the blade bright burnished with a broad edge  as well shaped to sheer as are sharp razors.  The shaft of a strong staff the stern man gripped,  that was wound with iron to the wand’s end,  and all engraved with green in gracious workings;  a cord lapped it about, that linked at the head,  and so around the handle looped full oft,  with tried tassels thereto attached enough  on buttons of the bright green broidered full rich.  This stranger rides in and the hall enters,  driving to the high dais, danger un-fearing.  Hailed he never a one, but high he overlooked.  The first word that he spoke: ‘Where is,’ he said,  ‘the governor of this throng? Gladly I would  see that soul in sight and with himself speak  reason.’  On knights he cast his eyes,  And rolled them up and down.  He stopped and studied ay  who was of most renown.  11  There was a looking at length the man to behold,  for each man marvelled what it might mean  for a rider and his horse to own such a hue  as grew green as the grass and greener it seemed,  than green enamel on gold glowing the brighter.  All studied that steed, and stalked him near,  with all the wonder of the world at what he might do.  for marvels had they seen but such never before;  and so of phantom and fairie the folk there it deemed.  Therefore to answer was many a knight afraid,  and all stunned at his shout and sat stock-still  in a sudden silence through the rich hall;  as all had slipped into sleep so ceased their noise  and cry.  I think it not all in fear,  but some from courtesy;  to let him all should revere  speak to him firstly.  12  Then Arthur before the high dais that adventure beholds,  and, gracious, him reverenced, a-feared was he never,  and said: ‘Sir, welcome indeed to this place,  the head of this house, I, Arthur am named.  Alight swiftly adown and rest, I thee pray,  and what thy will is we shall wait after.’  ‘Nay, so help me,’ quoth the man, ‘He that on high sits:  to wait any while in this way, it was not my errand.  But as the light of thee, lord, is lifted so high,  and thy burg and thy barons the best, men hold,  strongest under steel gear on steeds to ride,  the wisest and worthiest of the world’s kind,  proof to play against in other pure sports,  and here is shown courtesy, as I have heard said,  so then I wandered hither, indeed, at this time.  You may be sure by this branch that I bear here  that I pass by in peace and no plight seek.  For were I found here, fierce, and in fighting wise,  I had a hauberk at home and a helm both,  a shield and a sharp spear, shining bright,  and other weapons to wield, I well will, too;  but as I wish no war, I wear the softer.  But if you be as bold as all bairns tell,  you will grant me goodly the gift that I ask  by right.’  Arthur answered there,  and said: ‘Sir courteous knight,  if you crave battle bare,  here fails you not the fight.’  13  ‘Nay, follow I no fight, in faith I thee tell.  About on these benches are but beardless children;  if I were clasped in armour on a high steed,  here is no man to match me, his might so weak.  From thee I crave in this court a Christmas gift,  for it is Yule and New Year, and here many young men.  If any so hardy in this house holds himself,  is so bold of blood, hot-brained in his head,  that dare staunchly strike a stroke for another,  I shall give him as gift this weapon so rich,  this blade, that is heavy enough to handle as he likes,  and I will bear the first blow, as bare as I sit.  If any friend be so fell as to fare as I say,  Leap lightly to me; latch on to this weapon –  I quit claim for ever, he keeps it, his own.  And I will stand his stroke straight, on this floor,  if you will grant me the gift to give him another,  again;  and yet give him respite  a twelvemonth and a day.  Now hurry, let’s see aright  dare any herein aught say.’  14  If he had stunned them at first, stiller were then  all the host in the hall, the high and the low.  The man on his mount he turned in his saddle,  and roundly his red eyes he rolled about,  bent his bristling brows, burning green,  waving his beard about waiting who would rise.  When none would come to his call he coughed full high,  and cleared his throat full richly, ready to speak:  ‘What, is this Arthur’s house,’ quoth the horseman then,  ‘that all the rumour runs of, through realms so many?  Where now your superiority and your conquests,  your grinding down and your anger, your great words?  Now is the revel and the renown of the Round Table  overthrown with the word of a wanderer’s speech,  for all duck down in dread without dint of a blow!’  With this he laughed so loud that the lord grieved;  the blood shot for shame into his fair face  and there,  he waxed as wrath as wind;  so did all that there were.  The king, so keen by kind,  then stood that strong man near.  15  And said: ‘Horseman, by heaven you ask as a fool,  and as a folly you fain, to find it me behoves.  I know no guest that’s aghast at your great words.  Give me now your weapon, upon God’s name,  and I shall bear you the boon you’d be having.’  lightly he leaped to him and caught at his hand;  then fiercely the other fellow on foot alighted.  Now has Arthur his axe, and the helm grips,  and strongly stirs it about, to strike with a thought.  The man before him drew himself to full height,  higher than any in the house by a head and more.  With stern face where he stood he stroked his beard,  and with fixed countenance tugged at his coat,  no more moved or dismayed by mighty blows  than if any man to the bench had brought him a drink  of wine.  Gawain, that sat by the queen,  to the king he did incline:  ‘I beseech in plain speech  that this mêlée be mine’  16  ‘Would you, worthiest lord,’ quoth Gawain to the king,  ‘bid me bow from this bench and stand by you there,  that I without villainy might void this table,  and if my liege lady liked it not ill,  I would come counsel you before your court rich.  For I think it not seemly, as it is true known,  that such an asking is heaved so high in your hall,  that you yourself are tempted, to take it to yourself,  while so many bold men about you on benches sit,  that under heaven, I hope, are none higher of will,  nor better of body on fields where battle is raised.  I am the weakest, I know, and of wit feeblest.  least worth the loss of my life, who’d learn the truth.  Only inasmuch as you are my uncle, am I praised:  No bounty but your blood in my body I know.  And since this thing is folly and naught to you falls,  and I have asked it of you first, grant it to me;  and if my cry be not comely, let this court be free  of blame.’  Nobles whispered around,  and after counselled the same,  to free the king and crown,  and give Gawain the game.  17  Then commanded the king the knight for to rise,  and he readily up-rose and prepared him fair,  knelt down before the king, and caught the weapon;  and he lightly left it him, and lifted up his hand  and gave him God’s blessing, and gladly him bade  that his heart and his hand should hardy be, both.  ‘Take care, cousin,’ quoth the king, ‘how you set on,  and if you read him aright, readily I trow,  that you shall abide the blow he shall bring after.’  Gawain goes to the giant, with weapon in hand,  and boldly abides him, never bothered the less.  Then to Sir Gawain says the knight in the green:  ‘Re-affirm we our oaths before we go further.  First I entreat you, man, how are you named,  that tell me truly, then, so trust it I may.’  ‘In God’s faith,’ quoth the good knight, ‘Gawain am I,  that bear you this buffet, whatever befalls after,  and at this time twelvemonth take from thee another  with what weapon you wilt, and no help from any  alive.’  The other replies again:  ‘Sir Gawain, may I so thrive,  if I am not wondrous fain  for you this blow to drive.’  18  ‘By God,’ quoth the green knight, ‘Sir Gawain, I like  That I’ll face first from your fist what I found here.  And you have readily rehearsed, with reason full true,  clearly all the covenant that I the king asked,  save that you shall secure me, say, by your troth,  that you shall seek me yourself, where so you think  I may be found upon field, and fetch you such wages  as you deal me today before this dear company.’  ‘Where should I seek,’ quoth Gawain, ‘where is your place?  I know nothing of where you walk, by Him that wrought me,  nor do I know you, knight, your court or your name.  But teach me truly the track, tell me how you are named,  and I shall wind all my wit to win me thither;  and that I swear you in truth, and by my sure honour.’  ‘That is enough this New Year, it needs no more,’  quoth the giant in the green to courteous Gawain:  ‘if I shall tell you truly, when you have tapped me  and you me smoothly have smitten, I swiftly you teach,  of my house and my home and my own name.  Then may you find how I fare, and hold to your word;  and if I spend no speech, then it speeds you the better,  for you may linger in your land and seek no further –  but oh!  Take now your grim steel to thee,  and see how you fell oaks.’  ‘Gladly, sir, indeed,’  quoth Gawain; his axe he strokes.  19  The green knight on his ground graciously stands:  with a little lean of the head, flesh he uncovers;  his long lovely locks he laid over his crown,  and let the naked neck to the stroke show.  Gawain gripped his axe and glanced it on high,  his left foot on the field before him he set,  letting it down lightly light on the naked,  that the sharp of the steel sundered the bones,  and sank through the soft flesh, sliced it in two,  that the blade of the bright steel bit in the ground.  The fair head from the frame fell to the earth,  that folk flailed it with their feet, where it forth rolled;  the blood burst from the body, the bright on the green.  Yet nevertheless neither falters nor falls the fellow,  but stoutly he started forth on strong shanks,  and roughly he reached out, where the ranks stood,  latched onto his lovely head, and lifted it so;  and then strode to his steed, the bridle he catches,  steps into stirrup and strides him aloft,  and his head by the hair in his hand holds.  and as steady and staunch him in his saddle sat  as if no mishap had him ailed, though headless now  instead.  He twined his trunk about,  that ugly body that bled;  many of him had doubt,  ere ever his speech was said.  20  For the head in his hand he holds up even,  towards the dearest on dais addresses the face;  and it lifted its eyelids, and looked full wide,  and made this much with its mouth, as you may now hear;  ‘Look, Gawain, be you geared to go as you promised,  and look out loyally till you me, lord, find,  as you swore oath in this hall, these knights hearing.  To the green chapel you go, I charge you, to find  such a dint as you dealt – deserved you have –  to be readily yielded on New Year’s morn.  The knight of the green chapel, men know me as, many;  therefore to find me, if you fain it, you’ll fail never.  Come then, or be called recreant it behoves you.’  With a rough rasping the reins he twists,  hurled out the hall door, his head in his hand,  that the fire of the flint flew from fleet hooves.  to what land he came no man there knew,  no more than they knew where he had come from  what then?  The king and Gawain there  at that green man laugh and grin;  yet broadcast it was abroad  as a marvel among those men.  21  Though Arthur the high king at heart had wonder,  he let no semblance be seen, but said aloud  to the comely queen, with courteous speech:  ‘Dear dame, today dismay you never;  well become us these crafts at Christmas,  larking at interludes, to laugh and to sing  among the courtly carols of lords and ladies.  Nevertheless my meat I may now me address,  for I have seen my marvel, I may not deny.’  He glanced at Sir Gawain and graciously said:  ‘Now sir, hang up your axe that has hewn enough.’  And it adorned the dais, hung on display,  where all men might marvel and on it look,  and by true title thereof to tell the wonder.  Then they went to the board these two together,  the king and the godly knight, and keen men them served  of all dainties double, as dearest might fall,  with all manner of meat and minstrelsy both.  Full well they whiled that day till it worked its end  on land  Now think well, Sir Gawain,  lest by peril unmanned,  this adventure to sustain,  you have taken in hand. **Part II** 22  This gift of adventure has Arthur thus on the first  of the young year, for he yearned exploits to hear.  Though words were wanting when they went to sit,  now are they stoked with stern work, fullness to hand.  Gawain was glad to begin those games in hall,  yet if the end be heavy, have you no wonder;  though men be merry in mind when they have strong ale,  a year turns full turn, and yields never a like;  the form of its finish foretold full seldom.  For this Yuletide passed by, and the year after,  and each season slips by pursuing another:  after Christmas comes crabbed Lenten time,  that forces on flesh fish and food more simple.  But then the weather of the world with winter it fights,  cold shrinks down, clouds are uplifted,  shining sheds the rain in showers full warm,  falls upon fair flats, flowers there showing.  Both ground and groves green is their dress,  birds begin to build and brightly sing they  the solace of the soft summer ensuing after  on bank;  and blossoms bloom to blow  by hedges rich and rank,  while noble notes do flow  in woodland free and frank.  23  After, in season of summer with the soft winds,  when Zephyrus sighs himself on seeds and herbs;  well-away is the wort that waxes out there,  when the dunking dew drops from the leaves,  biding a blissful blush of the bright sun.  But then hies Harvest and hardens it soon,  warns it before the winter to wax full ripe;  then drives with drought the dust for to rise,  from the face of the field to fly full high;  wild wind from the welkin wrestles the sun,  the leaves lance then from linden, light on the ground,  and all grey is the grass, that green was ere;  then all ripens and rots, that rose up at first.  And thus wears the year into yesterdays many,  and winter walks again, as the world’s way is,  I gauge,  till Michaelmas moon  threatens a wintry age.  Then thinks Gawain full soon,  of his wearisome voyage.  24  Yet till All-Hallows with Arthur he lingers,  and he made a feast on that day for the knight’s sake,  with much revel and rich of the Round Table.  Knights full courteous and comely ladies,  all for love of that lad in longing they were;  but nevertheless they named nothing but mirth,  many joyless for that gentle soul jokes made there.  For, after meat, with mourning he makes to his uncle,  and speaks his departure, and openly says:  ‘Now, liege lord of my life, I ask you leave.  You know the cost in this case, care I no more  to tell you the trial thereof, naught but a trifle;  but I am bound to bear it, be gone, and tomorrow,  to seek the giant in the green, as God will me guide.’  Then the best of the burg were brought together,  Ywain and Eric and others full many,  Sir Dodinal le Sauvage, the Duke of Clarence,  Lancelot and Lionel and Lucan the Good,  Sir Bors and Sir Bedivere, big men both,  and many other men, with Mador de la Porte.  All this courtly company came the king near,  for to counsel the knight, with care in their hearts.  There was much dark dolefulness deep in the hall,  that so worthy as Gawain should wend on that errand,  to endure a dreadful dint, and no more with sword  wander.  The knight made yet good cheer,  and said: ‘Why should I falter?  Such destinies foul or fair  what can men do but suffer?’  25  He dwelt there all that day, and dressed on the morn,  asks early for his arms, and all were they brought.  First a crimson carpet, cast over the floor,  and much was the gilded gear that gleamed thereon.  The strong man steps there, and handles the steel,  dressed in a doublet of silk of Turkestan,  and then a well-crafted cape, clasped at the top,  that with a white ermine was trimmed within.  Then set they the plate shoes on his strong feet,  his legs lapped in steel with lovely greaves,  with knee-pieces pinned thereto, polished full clean,  about his knees fastened with knots of gold;  then the cuisses, that cunningly enclosed  his thick-thewed thighs, attached with thongs;  and then the hauberk linked with bright steel rings  over rich wear, wrapped round the warrior;  and well-burnished bracelets over both arms,  elbow-pieces good and gay, and gloves of plate,  and all the goodly gear that should bring him gain  that tide;  with rich coat armour,  his gold spurs set with pride,  girt with a blade full sure  with silk sword-belt at his side.  26  When he was hasped in armour, his harness was rich;  the least laces or loops gleamed with gold.  So harnessed as he was he hears the Mass,  offered and honoured at the high altar,  then he comes to the king and his companions,  takes his courteous leave of lords and ladies;  and they him kiss and convey, commend him to Christ.  By then Gringolet was game, girt with a saddle  that gleamed full gaily with many gold fringes,  everywhere nailed full new, for that noted day;  the bridle barred about, with bright gold bound;  the apparel of the breast-guard and proud skirts,  crupper, caparison, in accord with the saddle-bows;  and all was arrayed with rich red gold nails,  that all glittered and glinted as gleam of the sun.  Then hefts he the helm, and hastily it kisses,  that was strongly stapled and stuffed within.  It was high on his head, clasped behind,  with a light covering over the face-guard,  embroidered and bound with the best gems  on broad silken border, and birds on the seams,  such as parrots painted preening between,  turtle-doves, true-love knots, so thick entailed  as many burdened with it had been seven winters  in town.  The circlet of greater price  that embellished his crown,  of diamonds all devised  that were both bright and brown.  27  Then they showed him the shield that was of shining gules,  with the pentangle painted there in pure gold hues.  He brandishes it by the baldric, casts it about his neck,  that suited the wearer seemly and fair.  And why the pentangle applies to that prince noble,  I intend to tell, though I tarry more than I should.  It is a sign Solomon settled on some while back,  in token of truth, by the title that it has,  for it is a figure that has five points,  and each line overlaps and locks with another,  and everywhere it is endless, and English call it  over all the land, as I here, the Endless Knot.  For so it accords with this knight and his bright arms,  forever faithful in five ways, and five times so,  Gawain was for good known, and, as purified gold,  void of every villainy, with virtues adorned  all, so.  And thus the pentangle new  he bore on shield and coat,  as title of trust most true  and gentlest knight of note.  28  First he was found faultless in his five senses,  and then failed never the knight in his five fingers,  and all his trust in the field was in the five wounds  that Christ caught on the cross, as the creed tells.  And wheresoever this man in mêlée was stood,  his first thought was that, over all other things,  all his force in fight he found in the five joys  that holy Heaven’s Queen had of her child;  for this cause the knight fittingly had  on the inner half of his shield her image painted,  that when he beheld her his boldness never failed.  The fifth five that I find the knight used  was Free-handedness and Friendship above all things;  his Continence and Courtesy corrupted were never,  and Piety, that surpasses all points – these pure five  were firmer founded in his form than another.  Now all these five-folds, forsooth, were fused in this knight,  and each one joined to another that none end had,  and fixed upon five points that failed never,  never confused on one side, nor sundered neither,  without end at any angle anywhere, I find,  wherever its guise begins or glides to an end.  Therefore on his shining shield shaped was the knot  royally with red gold upon red gules,  thus is the pure pentangle called by the people  of lore.  Now geared was Gawain gay,  lifted his lance right there,  and gave them all good day –  as he thought, for evermore.  29  He struck the steed with the spurs, and sprang on his way  so strongly the stone-fire sparked out thereafter.  All that saw the seemly sight sighed in their hearts,  and said softly the same thing all to each other,  in care of that comely knight: ‘By Christ, ‘tis pity,  that you, lord, shall be lost, who art of life noble!  To find his fellow in field, in faith, is not easy.  Warily to have wrought would wiser have been,  to have dealt yon dear man a dukedom of worth.  A loyal leader of this land’s lances in him well seems,  and so had better have been than brought to naught,  beheaded by an elvish man, out of arrogant pride.  Who knew any king ever such counsel to take  as knights in altercations in Christmas games?’  Well was the water warm much wept from eyen,  when that seemly sire spurred from the court  that day.  He made no delay,  but swiftly went his way;  Many a wild path he strayed,  so the books do say.  30  Now rides this knight through the realm of Logres,  Sir Gawain, in God’s name, yet no game it thought.  Oft friendless alone he lay long a-nights,  where he found no fare that he liked before him.  He had no friend but his steed by furze and down,  and no one but God to speak with on the way,  till that he neared full nigh to northern Wales.  All the Isle of Anglesey on the left hand he held,  and fared over the fords by the forelands,  over at Holyhead, till he reached the bank  in the wilderness of Wirral – few thereabouts  that either God or other with good heart loved.  And ever he asked as he fared, of fellows he met,  if they had heard any word of a knight in green,  on any ground thereabout, of the green chapel;  and all met him with nay, that never in their lives  saw they ever a sign of such a one, hued  in green.  The knight took pathways strange  by many a bank un-green;  his cheerfulness would change,  ere might that chapel be seen.  31  Many cliffs he over-clambered in countries strange,  far flying from his friends forsaken he rides.  at every twist of the water where the way passed  he found a foe before him, or freakish it were,  and so foul and fell he was beholden to fight.  So many marvels by mountain there the man finds,  it would be tortuous to tell a tenth of the tale.  Sometimes with dragons he wars, and wolves also,  sometimes with wild woodsmen haunting the crags,  with bulls and bears both, and boar other times,  and giants that chased after him on the high fells.  had he not been doughty, enduring, and Duty served,  doubtless he had been dropped and left for dead,  for war worried him not so much but winter was worse,  when the cold clear water from the clouds shed,  and froze ere it fall might to the fallow earth.  Near slain by the sleet he slept in his steel  more nights than enough in the naked rocks,  where clattering from the crest the cold burn runs,  and hung high over his head in hard icicles.  Thus in peril and pain, and plights full hard  covers the country this knight till Christmas Eve  alone.  The knight that eventide  to Mary made his moan,  to show him where to ride,  and guide him to some home.  32  By a mount in the morn merrily he rides  into a forest full deep, wonderfully wide,  high hills on either hand, and woodlands under  of hoar oaks full huge a hundred together.  The hazel and the hawthorn were tangled and twined,  with rough ragged moss ravelled everywhere,  with many birds un-blithe upon bare twigs,  that piteously they piped for pinch of the cold.  The gallant on Gringolet glides them under  through many a marsh and mire, a man alone,  full of care lest to his cost he never should  see the service of that Sire, that on that self night,  of a bright maid was born, our burden to quell.  And therefore sighing he said; ‘I beseech thee, Lord,  and Mary, that is mildest mother so dear,  of some harbour where highly I might hear Mass,  and thy Matins tomorrow, meekly I ask,  and thereto promptly I pray my Pater and Ave  and Creed.’  He rode as he prayed,  And cried for his misdeeds;  He crossed himself always,  And said: ‘Christ’s Cross me speed!’  33  Now he had signed himself times but three,  when he was aware in the wood of a wall in a moat,  above a level, on high land locked under boughs  of many broad set boles about by the ditches:  a castle the comeliest that ever knight owned,  perched on a plain, a park all about,  with a pointed palisade, planted full thick,  encircling many trees in more than two miles.  The hold on the one side the knight assessed,  as it shimmered and shone through the shining oaks.  Then humbly has off with his helm, highly he thanks  Jesus and Saint Julian, that gentle are both,  that courtesy had him shown, and his cry hearkened.  ‘Now hospitality,’ he said, ‘I beseech you grant!’  Then goads he on Gringolet, with his gilded heels,  and he by chance there has chosen the chief way,  that brought the man bravely to the bridge’s end  in haste.  The drawbridge was upraised,  the gates were firm and fast,  the walls were well arrayed –  it trembled at no wind’s blast.  34  The knight stuck to his steed, that hugged the bank,  of the deep double ditch driven round the place.  The wall washed in the water wonderfully deep,  and then a full huge height it haled up aloft,  of hard hewn stone to the entablature,  embedded under the battlements in best style;  and there were turrets full tall towering between,  with many lovely loopholes clean interlocked:  a better barbican that knight never beheld.  And innermost he beheld a hall full high,  towers trim between, crenellated full thick,  fair finials that fused, and fancifully long,  with carven copes, cunningly worked.  Chalk white chimneys he descried enough,  on tower rooftops that gleamed full white.  So many painted pinnacles powdered there  among castle crenellations, clustered so thick,  that pared out of paper purely it seemed.  the fair knight on the horse it fine enough thought,  if he might contrive to come the cloister within,  to harbour in that hostel while Holy Day lasted,  all content.  He called and soon there came  a porter pure pleasant.  From the wall his errand he craved,  and hailed the knight errant.  35  ‘Good sir,’ quoth Gawain, ‘will you do my errand  to the high lord of this house, harbour to crave?’  ‘Yes, by Saint Peter,’ quoth the porter, ‘for I believe  That you’ll be welcome to dwell as long as you like.’  Then the welcomer on the wall went down swiftly,  and folk freely him with, to welcome the knight.  They let down the great drawbridge and dignified  knelt down on their knees upon the cold earth  to welcome this knight as they thought the worthiest way.  They yielded him the broad gate, opened wide,  and he them raised rightly and rode over the bridge.  Several then seized his saddle, while he alighted,  and then strong men enough stabled his steed.  Knights and their squires came down then  for to bring this bold man blithely to hall,  When he lifted his helmet, they hastened forward  to heft it from his hand, the guest to serve;  his blade and his blazon both they took.  then hailed he full handily the host each one,  and many proud men pressed close, that prince to honour.  All clasped in his noble armour to hall they him brought,  where a fair fire on a hearth fiercely flamed.  Then the lord of that land left his chamber  for to meet with manners the man on the floor.  He said: ‘You are welcome to dwell as you like.  What is here, is all your own, to have at your will  and wield you.  ‘*Graunt merci*,’ quoth Gawain,  ‘May Christ reward it you.’  As friends that meet again  Each clasped the other true.  36  Gawain gazed on the gallant that goodly him greet,  and thought him a brave baron that the burg owned,  a huge man in truth, and mature in his years;  broad, bright was his beard and all beaver-hued,  stern, striding strongly on stalwart shanks,  face fell as the fire, and free of his speech;  and well he seemed to suit, as the knight thought,  the leading a lordship, along of lords full good.  The chief him led to a chamber, expressly commands  a lord be delivered to him, him humbly to serve;  and there were brave for his bidding a band of men,  that brought him to a bright bower, the bedding was noble,  of curtains of clear silk with clean gold hems,  and coverlets full curious with comely panels,  of bright ermine above embroidered sides,  curtains running on cords, red gold rings,  tapestries tied to the wall, of Toulouse, Turkestan,  and underfoot, on the floor, that followed suit.  There he was disrobed, with speeches of mirth,  the burden of his mail and his bright clothes.  Rich robes full readily retainers brought him,  to check and to change and choose of the best.  Soon as he held one, and hastened therein,  that sat on him seemly, with spreading skirts,  verdant in his visage Spring verily seemed  to well nigh everyone, in all its hues,  glowing and lovely, all his limbs under,  that a comelier knight never Christ made,  they thought.  However he came here,  it seemed that he ought  to be prince without peer  on fields where fell men fought.  37    A chair before the chimney, where charcoal burned,  graciously set for Gawain, was gracefully adorned,  coverings on quilted cushions, cunningly crafted both.  And then a mighty mantle was on that man cast  of a brown silk, embroidered full rich,  and fair furred within with pelts of the best –  the finest ermine on earth – his hood of the same.  And he sat on that settle seemly and rich,  and chafed himself closely, and then his cheer mended.  Straightway a table on trestles was set up full fair,  clad with a clean cloth that clear white showed,  the salt-cellars, napkins and silvered spoons.  The knight washed at his will, and went to his meat.  Servants him served seemly enough  with several soups, seasoned of the best,  double bowlfuls, as fitting, and all kinds of fish,  some baked in bread, some browned on the coals,  some seethed, some in stews savoured with spices,  and sauces ever so subtle that the knight liked.  While he called it a feast full freely and oft  most politely, at which all spurred him on politely  again:  ‘This penance now you take,  after it shall amend.’  That man much mirth did make,  for the wine to his head did tend.  38  Then they sparred and parried in precious style  with private points put to the prince himself,  so he conceded courteously of that court he came,  where noble Arthur is headman himself alone,  that is the right royal king of the Round Table;  and that it is Gawain himself that in that house sits,  come there at Christmas, as chance has him driven.  When the lord learned what prince that he there had,  loud laughed he thereat, so delightful he thought it,  and all the men in that manse made it a joy  to appear in his presence promptly that time,  who all prize and prowess and purest ways  appends to his person, and praised is ever;  above all men upon earth his honour is most.  Each man full softly said to his neighbour:  ‘Now shall we see show of seemliest manners  and the faultless phrases of noble speaking.  What superior speech is, unasked we shall learn,  since we have found this fine master of breeding.  God has given us of his goodly grace forsooth,  that such a guest as Gawain grants us to have,  when barons blithe at His birth shall sit  and sing.  The meaning of manners here  this knight now shall us bring.  I hope whoever may hear  Shall learn of love-making.’  39  When the dinner was done and the diners risen,  it was nigh on the night that the time was near.  Chaplains to the chapel took their course,  ringing all men, richly, as they rightly should,  to the holy evensong of that high eventide.  The lord goes thereto and the lady as well;  into a comely enclosure quietly she enters.  Gawain gaily goes forth and thither goes soon;  the lord grasps him by the gown and leads him to sit,  acknowledges him with grace, calls him by name,  and said he was the most welcome man in the world;  and he thanked him thoroughly, they clasped each other,  and sat with sober seeming the service through.  Then liked the lady to look on the knight;  and came from the close with many fine women.  She was the fairest in feature, in flesh and complexion,  and in compass and colour and ways, of all others,  and fairer than Guinevere, as the knight thought.  He strode through the chancel to squire the dame.  Another lady her led by the left hand,  who was older than her, and aged it seemed,  and highly honoured with her men about her.  Not alike though to look on those ladies were,  for if the one was fresh, the other was withered:  rich red in this one distinguished her,  rough wrinkled cheeks on that other, in rolls.  Kerchiefs on this one, with many clear pearls,  her breast and her bright throat bare displayed  shone sweeter than snow that’s shed on the hills;  that other swathed with a wimple wound at the throat,  clothed to her swarthy chin with chalk-white veils,  her forehead folded in silk, enveloped everywhere,  ringed and trellised with trefoils about,  that naught was bare of the lady but the black brows,  the two eyen and nose, the naked lips,  and those were sorry to see, and somewhat bleary –  a great lady on earth a man might her call,  by God!  Her body was short and thick,  her buttocks big and broad;  Much sweeter a sweet to lick  the one at her side for sure.  40  When Gawain gazed on that gracious-looking girl,  with leave asked of the lord he went to meet them.  The elder he hails, bowing to her full low;  the lovely-looking he laps a little in his arms,  he kisses her courteously and nobly he speaks.  They crave his acquaintance, and he quickly asks  to be their sworn servant, if they themselves wished.  They take him between them, and talking they lead him  to a chamber, to the chimney, and firstly they ask for  spices, which men unstintingly hastened to bring,  and the winning wine with them, every time.  The lord laughing aloft leaps full oft,  minding that mirth be made and many a time,  nobly lifted his hood, and on a spear hung it,  and wished him to win the worth and honour thereof  who most mirth might move at that Christmastide.  ‘And I shall swear, by my faith, to strive with the best  before I lose the hood, with the help of my friends.’  Thus with laughing words the lord makes all merry,  for to gladden Sir Gawain with games in the hall  that night.  Till, when it was time,  the lord demanded light.  Gawain his way did find  To bed as best he might.  41  On the morn, when each man minds that time  the dear Lord for our destiny to die was born,  joy waxes in each house in the world for His sake.  So did it there on that day with dainties many:  both when major and minor meals were eaten  deft men on the dais served of the best.  The old ancient wife highest she sits;  the lord, so I believe, politely beside her.  Gawain and the sweet lady together they sat  in the midst, as the masses came together;  and then throughout the hall, as seemed right,  each man in his degree was graciously served.  There was meat, there was mirth, there was much joy,  that it would be a trouble for me to tell all,  and however perchance I pined to make my point.  But yet I know Gawain and the sweet lady  such comfort of their company caught together  through their dear dalliance of courtly words,  with clean courteous chat, closed from filth,  their play surpassed every princely game with which it  compares.  Kettledrums and trumpets,  much piping there of airs;  Each man minded his,  and those two minded theirs.  42  Much mirth was there driven that day and another,  and a third as thickly thronged came in thereafter;  The joy of St John’s Day was gentle to hear,  and was the last of the larking, the lords thought.  There were guests set to go on the grey morn,  so they stayed wonderfully waking and wine drank,  dancing the day in with noble carols.  At the last, when it was time, they took their leave,  each one to wend on his way into strange parts.  Gawain gave them good day, the good man grasps him,  and leads him to his own chamber, the chimney beside,  and there he grips him tight, heartily thanks him  for the fine favour that he had shown him,  so to honour his house on that Christmastide,  and embellish his burg with his bright cheer.  ‘Indeed, sir, while I live, I am the better  for Gawain being my guest at God’s own feast.’  ‘Graunt merci, sir,’ quoth Gawain, ‘in good faith it’s yours,  all the honour is your own – the High King requite you!  And I am here, at your will, to work your behest,  as I am beholden to do, in high things and low,  by right.’  The lord was at great pains  To keep longer the knight;  To him answers Gawain  That by no means he might.  43  Then the lord aimed full fair at him, asking  what daring deed had him driven at that dear time  so keenly from the king’s court to stray all alone,  before the holy holiday was haled out of town.  ‘Forsooth, sir,’ quoth the knight, ‘you say but the truth,  a high errand and a hasty had me from those halls,  for I am summoned myself to seek for a place,  with no thought in the world where to go find it.  I would not dare fail find it by New Year’s morning  for all the land in Logres, so me our Lord help!  So, sir, this request I make of you here,  that you tell me true if ever you tale heard  of the green chapel, on what ground it stands,  and of the knight that keeps it, the colour of green.  There was established by statute a pact us between  both to meet at that mark, if I should live;  and of that same New Year but little is wanting,  and I would look on that lord, if God would let me,  more gladly, by God’s Son, than any goods gain.  So, indeed, by your leave, it behoves me to go.  Now to work this business I’ve barely three days,  and it’s fitter I fall dead than fail of my errand.’  Then, laughing, quoth the lord: ‘Now stay, it behoves you,  for I’ll teach you the trysting place ere the term’s end.  The green chapel upon ground grieve for no more;  but you shall be in your bed, sir, at your ease,  while day unfolds, and go forth on the first of the year,  and come to that mark at mid-morn, to act as you wish  and when.  Dwell until New Year’s Day,  and rise and ride on then.  You shall be shown the way;  it is not two miles hence.’  44  Then was Gawain full glad, and gleefully he laughed:  ‘Now I thank you thoroughly beyond all things;  now achieved is my goal, I shall at your will  dwell here, and do what else you deem fit.’  Then the lord seized him and set him beside,  and the ladies had fetched, to please him the better.  There was seemly solace by themselves still.  The lord lofted for love notes so merry,  as one that wanted his wits, nor knew what he did.  Then he cried to the knight, calling aloud:  ‘You have deemed to do the deed that I bid.  Will you hold to this promise here and now?’  ‘Yes, sire, indeed,’ said the knight and true,  ‘While I bide in your burg, I’m at your behest.’  ‘As you have travelled,’ quoth the lord, ‘from afar,  and since then waked with me, you are not well served  neither of sustenance nor of sleep, surely I know.  You shall linger in your room and lie there at ease  tomorrow till Mass, and then to meat wend  when you will, with my wife, that with you shall sit  and comfort you with company, till I come to court:  time spend,  And I shall early rise;  a-hunting will I wend.’  Gawain thinks it wise,  as is fitting to him bends.  45  ‘And further,’ quoth the lord, ‘a bargain we’ll make:  whatsoever I win in the wood is worthily yours;  and whatever here you achieve, exchange me for it.  Sweet sir, swap we so – swear it in truth –  whether, lord, that way lies worse or better.’  ‘By God,’ quoth Gawain the good, ‘I grant it you,  and that you lust for to play, like it methinks.’  ‘Who’ll bring us a beverage, this bargain to make?’  so said the lord of that land. They laughed each one,  they drank and dallied and dealt in trifles,  these lords and ladies, as long as they liked;  and then with Frankish faring, full of fair words,  they stopped and stood and softly spoke,  kissing full comely and taking their leave.  By many lively servants with flaming torches,  each brave man was brought to his bed at last  full soft.  To bed yet ere they sped,  repeating the contract oft;  the old lord of that spread  could keep a game aloft. **Part III** 46  Full early before the day the folk were risen;  Guests who would go their grooms they called on,  and they busied them briskly the beasts to saddle,  tightening their tackle, trussing their baggage.  The richest ready themselves to ride all arrayed,  leaping up lightly, latched onto their bridles,  each rode out by the way that he most liked.  The beloved lord of the land was not the last  arrayed for the riding, with ranks full many;  ate a sop hastily, when he had heard Mass,  with horns to the hunting field he hastens away.  By the time that daylight gleamed upon earth,  he with his knights on high horses were.  Then the cunning hunters coupled their hounds,  unclosed the kennel door and called them out,  blew briskly on their bugles three bare notes;  braches bayed therefore, and bold noise made,  and men chastised and turned those that chasing went,  a hundred of hunters, as I have heard tell,  of the best.  To station, keepers strode,  huntsmen leashes off-cast;  great rumpus in that wood  there rose with their good blasts.  47  At the first call of the quest quaked the wild;  deer drove for the dales, darting for dread,  hied to the high ground, but swiftly they were  stayed by the beaters, with their stout cries.  They let the harts with high branched heads have way,  the brave bucks also with their broad antlers;  for the noble lord had bidden that in close season  no man there should meddle with those male deer.  The hinds were held back with a ‘Hey’ and a ‘Ware!’  The does driven with great din to the deep coves.  There might men see, as they loosed, the slanting of arrows;  at each winding of the wood whistled a flight,  that bit into brown flanks, with broad blade-heads.  What screaming and bleeding, by banks they lay dying,  and ever the hounds in a rush hard on them followed,  hunters with high horn-calls hastened them after,  with such a crack and cry as cliffs were bursting.  What wild beasts so escaped the men shooting  were all dragged down and rent by the new reserves,  when hunted from high ground, and harried to water.  The lads were so skilled at the lower stations,  and the greyhounds so great, that gripped so quickly  and dragged them down, as swift I swear,  as sight.  In bliss without alloy  the lord does spur or alight,  and passes that day with joy  and so to the dark night.  48  Thus larks the lord by linden-wood eaves,  while Gawain the good man gaily abed lies,  lurks till the daylight gleams on the walls,  under canopy full clear, curtained about.  And as in slumber he lay, softly he heard  a little sound at his door, and it slid open;  and he heaves up his head out of the clothes,  a corner of the curtain he caught up a little,  and watches warily to make out what it might be.  It was the lady, the loveliest to behold,  that drew the door after her full silent and still,  and bent her way to the bed; and the knight ashamed,  laid him down again lightly and feigned to sleep.  And she stepped silently and stole to his bed,  caught up the curtain and crept within,  and sat her full softly on the bedside  and lingered there long, to look when he wakened.  The lord lay low, lurked a full long while,  compassing in his conscience what this case might  mean or amount to, marvelling in thought.  But yet he said to himself: ‘More seemly it were  to descry with speech, in a space, what she wishes.’  Then he wakened and wriggled and to her he turned,  and lifted his eyelids and let on he was startled,  and signed himself with his hand, as with prayer, to be  safer.  With chin and cheek full sweet,  both white and red together,  full graciously did she greet,  lips light with laughter.  49  ‘**Good morning, Sir Gawain,’ said that sweet lady,**  **‘You are a sleeper unsafe, that one may slip hither.**  **Now are you taken in a trice, lest a truce we shape,**  **I shall bind you in your bed, that you may trust.’**  **All laughing the lady made her light jests.**  **‘Good morrow, sweet,’ quoth Gawain the blithe,**  **‘I shall work your will, and that I well like,**  **for I yield me swiftly and sue for grace;**  **and that is the best, to my mind, since behoves I must.’**  **And thus he jested again with much blithe** laughter.  ‘But would you, lovely lady, but grant me leave  and release your prisoner and pray him to rise,  I would bound from this bed and dress me better,  I should discover more comfort in speaking with you.’  ‘Nay, forsooth, beau sire,’ said that sweet,  ‘You shall not rise from your bed. I charge you better:  I shall wrap you up here on this other side,  and then chat with my knight whom I have caught;  for I know well, indeed, Sir Gawain you are,  that all the world worships, wherever you ride.  Your honour, your courtesy, is nobly praised  among lords, among ladies, all who life bear.  And now you are here, indeed, and we on our own;  my lord and his lords are far off faring,  other knights are abed, and my ladies also,  the door drawn and shut with a strong hasp.  And since I have in this house him who all like,  I shall work my time well, while it lasts,  with a tale.  Your are welcome to my body,  Your pleasure to take all;  I must by necessity  your servant be, and shall.’  50  ‘In good faith,’ quoth Gawain, ‘a gain’s that me thinks,  though I be not now him of whom you are speaking;  to reach to such reverence as you rehearse here,  I am all ways unworthy, I know well myself.  By God, I’d be glad though if you thought it fit  in speech or service that I might set myself  to the pleasing of your worth – that were a pure joy.’  ‘In good faith, Sir Gawain,’ quoth the sweet lady,  ‘The worth and the prowess that pleases all others,  if I slighted or thought light of it, that were little grace;  but there are ladies enough that would far rather  have you, dear man, to hold, as I have you here,  to dally dearly in your delightful words,  comfort themselves and ease their cares,  than make much of the treasure and gold they have.  But as I love that same Lord that the heavens rules,  I have wholly in my hand what all desire  through grace.’  She made him thus sweet cheer,  who was so fair of face;  the knight with speeches clear  answered her every case.  51  ‘Madam,’ quoth the merry man, ‘Mary give you grace,  for I have found, in good faith, your friendship is noble.  Others gain full much of other folks praise for their deeds,  but the deference they deal me is undeserved in my case.  It is honour to you that naught but good you perceive.’  ‘By Mary,’ quoth the lady, ‘methinks it otherwise;  for were I worth all the wonder of women alive,  and all the wealth of the world were in my hand,  and I should bargain to win myself a brave lord,  with the qualities that I know of you, knight, here,  of beauty and debonair and blithe seeming,  that I hearkened to ere now and have here found true,  then should no errant on earth before you be chosen.’  ‘Indeed, lady,’ quoth the knight, ‘you have done much better;  but I am proud of the value you place on me,  and, solemnly your servant, my sovereign I hold you,  and your knight I become, and Christ reward you!’  Thus they mulled many matters till mid-morn passed,  and ever the lady let fall that she loved him much;  yet the knight held to his guard, and acted full fair.  ‘Though I were loveliest lady,’ so her mind had it,  ‘the less is there love in his load’ – for his fate he sought  that one,  the stroke that should him cleave,  and it must needs be done.  The lady then sought to leave,  he granting her that boon.  52  Then she gave him good day, with a laughing glance,  and stunned him as she stood there, with cutting words:  ‘May He who speeds each speech reward you this sport!  But that you should be Gawain, it baffles the mind.’  ‘Wherefore?’ quoth the knight, and urgently asked,  fearful lest he had failed in forms of politeness.  But the lady blessed him and spoke as follows:  ‘One gracious as Gawain is rightly held to be,  with courtesy contained so clear in himself,  could not lightly have lingered so long with a lady,  but he had craved a kiss out of courtesy,  with some trifling touch at some tale’s end.’  Then quoth Gawain: ‘Indeed, let it be as you like;  I shall kiss at your command, as befits a knight,  and further, lest I displease you, so plead no more.’  She comes nearer at that, and catches him in her arms,  leans lovingly down, and the lord kisses.  They graciously commend to Christ one another;  and she goes out at the door with not a word more;  And he readies himself to rise and hurries anon,  calls to his chamberlain, chooses his clothes,  going forth, when he is ready, blithely to Mass.  And then he went to the noble meal that awaited,  and made merry all day till the moonrise,  at games.  Was never knight fairer sung  between two such noble dames,  the elder and the young;  much joy had they of the same.  53  And ever the lord of the land intent on his games,  hunted, in holts and heath, for barren hinds,  Such a sum he there slew by the set of sun,  of does and other deer, it were deemed a wonder.  Then fiercely they flocked in, folk at the last,  and quickly of the quenched deer a heap they made.  The noblest sped there with servants enough,  gathered the quarry greatest in flesh that were there,  and had them deftly undone as custom demands.  Some that were there searched them in assay,  and two fingers of fat they found on the feeblest.  Then they slit the slot, and seized the first stomach,  shaved it with sharp knives, and knotted the sheared.  Then lopped off the four limbs and rent off the hide,  next broke they the belly, the bowels out-taking,  deftly, lest they undid and destroyed the knot.  They gripped the gullet, and swiftly severed  the weasand from the windpipe and whipped out the guts.  Then sheared out the shoulders with their sharp knives,  hauled them through a little hole, left the sides whole.  Then they slit up the breast and broke it in twain.  And again at the gullet one then began  rending all readily right to the fork,  voiding the entrails, and verily thereafter  all the membranes by the ribs readily loosened.  So too they cleared to the backbone, rightly,  even down to the haunch that hangs from the same,  and heaved it all up whole and hewed it off there.  and that they properly call the *numbles*, I deem,  by kind.  At the fork then of the thighs  they loose the lappets behind;  to hew it in two they hie,  by the backbone it to unbind.  54  Both the head and the neck they hewed off then,  and after sundered the sides swift from the chine,  and the ravens’ fee they cast into a grove.  Then they skewered each thick flank by the ribs,  and hung each up by the hocks of the haunches,  every fellow taking his fee as it fell to him.  On a skin of the fair beast fed they their hounds  with the liver and lights, and the stomach lining,  and bread bathed in blood blent there among.  Boldly they blew the kill their hounds a-baying;  then rode home with the flesh tightly packed,  stalwartly sounding out many stout notes.  As the daylight was done, the company came  to the comely castle, where our knight bides  all still,  in bliss by bright fire set.  The lord is come from the hill;  when Gawain with him is met,  there they but joy as they will.  55  Then the lord commanded all be summoned to the hall,  both the ladies, aloft, to descend with their maids.  Before all the folk on the floor, he bid men  verily his venison to bring there before him;  and all gaily in courtesy Gawain he called,  and tells over the tally of full fat beasts,  shows him the fine flesh shorn from the ribs.  ‘How does this sport please you? Have I won praise?  Have I won thanks, thoroughly served by my craft?’  ‘Yes, indeed,’ quoth the other, ‘here spoils are fairest  of all I have seen this seven-year in season of winter.’  ‘And I give all this to you, Gawain,’ quoth the man then,  ‘for according to covenant you may call it your own.’  ‘That is so,’ quoth the knight, ‘I say you the same:  what I have worthily won this house within,  shall with as good a will be worthily yours.’  And he clasps his fair neck his arms within,  and kisses him in as comely a way as he can:  ‘Take you there my prize, I received no more;  I would grant it all, though it were greater.’  ‘That is good,’ quoth the lord, ‘many thanks therefore.  This may be the better gift, if you would tell me  where you won this same prize by your own wits.’  ‘That was not pledged,’ quoth he, ‘ask me no more;  for you have taken what’s due, none other to you  I owe.’  They laughed and made blithe  with words worth praise, and so  to supper then side by side,  with dainties in plenty go.  56  And then by the chimney in chamber sitting,  servants brought to them choice wines oft,  and in their banter they agreed in that morn  to fulfil the same bond they had made before:  what chance might betide, their prize to exchange,  each new thing they named, at night when they met.  They made accord of this covenant before all the court;  and beverage was brought forth in banter at this time.  Then they lovingly took their leave at the last,  each man at his leaving going brisk to his bed.  When the cock had crowed and cackled but thrice,  the lord leapt from his bed, the liegemen each one,  so that meat and a Mass were swiftly delivered,  the company off to the wood, ere daylight sprang,  to the chase.  Proudly with huntsmen and horns  through wilds they passed apace,  uncoupled among the thorns,  the hounds ran headlong race.  57  Soon they called for a search by the marsh-side,  the huntsman urged on the first hounds up,  wild cries he uttered with wondrous noise.  The hounds that heard him hastened there swiftly,  and fell as fast to the trail, forty at once.  Then such a baying and clamour of gathered hounds  rose that the rocks rang out all about.  Huntsmen harried them with horn and by mouth;  then all in a pack they swung together  between a pool in that place and a cruel crag.  On a knoll by a cliff, at the marsh side,  where the rough rock had ruggedly fallen,  they sped to the finding, the huntsmen after.  They surrounded the crag and the knoll both,  while they made sure they had well within  the beast that was bayed at, there, by their bloodhounds.  Then they beat at the bushes and bade him rise up,  and he savagely swung athwart the huntsmen –  a most splendid boar it was, rushed out there,  solitary through age, long split from the herd,  but he was still mighty, the greatest of boars,  full grim when he grunted. Then grieved many  for three hounds at first thrust he felled to the earth,  and sped him forth at great speed all unscathed.  The hunt hallooed ‘Hi!’ full loud, and cried ‘Hey! Hey!  and horns to mouths, hastily recalled them.  Many were the merry cries of men and of hounds  that brisk chased the boar, with barking and clamour,  to quell,  Full oft he bides at bay  and downs the dogs pell-mell;  he harries the hounds, and they  full piteously yowl and yell.  58  Shaping to shoot him some shoved through then,  hurling their arrows at him, hitting him often;  but their points were parried by bristling flanks,  and their barbs would not bite there in his brow,  though the smooth shaft were shattered in pieces,  the head skipped away wherever it hit.  but when by dint of dire strokes they damaged him,  then, maddened by baiting, he rushes the men,  hurts them full heavily as forth he hies,  and many were awed at that and drew backwards.  But the lord on a lithe horse lunges after him,  as knight bold in the battle his bugle he blows,  rallied the hounds as he rode through rank thicket,  pursuing this wild swine till the sun had set.  The day with these same deeds they passed in this wise,  while our courteous knight lay in his bed,  Gawain gladly at home, in gear full rich  of hue.  The lady did not forget,  to come to greet him too;  full early she him beset  to seek a change of mood.  59  She came to the curtain and peeped at the knight.  Sir Gawain welcomed her courteously first,  and she answered him again eager her words,  sits herself soft by his side, and sweetly she laughs,  and with a loving look she led with these words:  ‘Sir, if you be Gawain, it’s a wonder methinks,  why one so well disposed always to good,  knows not how to manage his manners in company,  and if any teach you to know them, you cast them from mind.  You have swiftly forgot what but yesterday I taught  with all the truest tokens of talk that I could.’  ‘What is that?’ quoth the knight, ‘Indeed I know not.  If it be truth that you breathe, the blame is mine own.’  ‘Yet I taught you of kissing.’ quoth the fair dame,  ‘where countenance is fair, quick make your claim;  that becomes every knight that courtesy uses.’  ‘Unsay,’ quoth that brave man, ‘my dear, that speech,  for that I dare not do, lest I were denied;  if I were spurned, I’d be wrong, indeed, to have proffered.’  ‘By my faith,’ quoth the lady, ‘you cannot be spurned;  you are strong enough to constrain by strength, if you like,  if any were so villainous as to deny you.’  ‘Yes, by God,’ quoth Gawain, ‘true is your speech,  but threats do never thrive in the land where I live,  nor any gift that is given without a good will.  I am at your command, to kiss when you like;  you may lip when you will, and leave when you wish  in a space.’  The lady bends her adown  and sweetly she kisses his face;  much speech they there expound  of love, its grief and grace.  60  ‘I would know of you, knight,’ that lady then said,  ‘if you are not angered by this, what is the reason  that so young and lively a one as you at this time,  so courteous, so knightly, as widely you’re known  (and from all chivalry to choose, the chief things praised  are the laws of loyal love, and the lore of arms;  for in telling those tales of the truest of knights,  all the title and text of their works is taken  from how lords hazard their lives for loyal love,  endured for that duty’s sake dreadful trials,  and after with valour avenged, and void their cares,  brought bliss to the bower by bounties their own)  and you, the knight, the noblest child of your age,  your high fame and honour told everywhere,  why I have sat by yourself here separately twice,  yet heard I never that your head held even a word  that ever belonged to love, the less nor the more.  And you, that are so courteous and coy of your vows,  ought, to a young thing, to yearn to show  and teach some tokens of true love’s craft  What! Are you ignorant, who garner all praise,  or else do you deem me too dull to heed your dalliance?  For shame!  I come hither single and sit  to learn of you some game;  do teach me of your wit,  while my lord is away.’  61  ‘In good faith,’ quoth Gawain, ‘may God reward you!  Great is the gladness, and pleasure to me,  that so worthy as you should wind her way hither,  at pains with so poor a man as to sport with your knight  with any show of favour – it sets me at ease.  But to take on the travail myself of expounding true love,  and touch on the themes of the texts and tales of arms  to you who, I know well, wield more skill  in that art, by half, than a hundred of such  as I am or ever shall be, on this earth where I live –  that were a manifold folly, my dear, by my troth.  I would your wishes work if ever I might,  as I am highly beholden, and evermore will  be servant to yourself, so save me God!’  Thus that lady framed her questions and tempted him oft,  for to win him to woe, whatever else she thought of;  but he defended himself so fairly no fault it seemed,  no evil on either hand, nor did they know aught  but bliss.  They laughed and larked full long;  at the last she did him kiss,  farewell was on her tongue,  and went her way, with this.  62  Then bestirs him the knight and rises for Mass,  and then the dinner was done and duly served.  The knight with the ladies larked all day,  but the lord of the land gallops full oft,  hunts the ill-fated swine, that surges by banks  and bites the best of his hounds’ backs asunder  biding at bay, till bowmen bettered him,  made him head for the open, for all he could do,  so fast flew the arrows where those folk gathered.  But yet at times the bravest he made to start,  till at the last so weary he was he could not run,  but, with best haste he might, to a hole he wins  in the bank, by a rock where runs the burn.  He got the bank at his back, began to scrape,  the froth foamed from his mouth foul at the corners,  and he whet his white tusks. It was irksome then  to the all the beaters so bold that by him stood  to harass him from afar, but nigh him no man  dared go.  He had hurt so many before  that all were then full loath  to be torn by his tusks once more,  that was fierce and frenzied both.  63  Till the lord came himself, urged on his horse,  saw the boar bide at bay, his men beside.  He alights lively adown, leaves his courser,  brings out a bright blade and boldly strides forth,  fast through the ford, where the fell foe bides.  The wild beast was wary of one with a weapon in hand,  his bristles rose high, so fiercely he snorts  that folk feared for the lord, lest worst him befell.  The swine straight away set on the man,  that the baron and boar were both in a heap,  in the white water. The worst had the creature,  For the man marked him well, as they first met,  set the sharp point firm in its chest-hollow,  hit him up to the hilt, so the heart burst asunder,  and he yielded him snarling, downstream was swept  outright.  A hundred hounds him rent,  that bravely could him bite;  beaters brought him to bank  and the dogs to death, in fight.  64  There was blowing the kill on many brave horns,  hallooing on high as loud as men might;  Hounds bayed at the beast, as bid by their masters,  who of that hard chase were the chief huntsmen.  Then a man who was wisest in woodcraft  with loving care to undo the beast begins:  first he hews off his head and sets it on high,  then rends him roughly along the ridge of his back,  brings out the bowels, and broils them on coals,  with bread blent therewith his hounds rewards.  Then he breaks out the brawn in broad bright slabs,  and has out the entrails, as is seemly and right;  attaches the two halves wholly together,  and then on a strong stake stoutly them hangs.  Now with this same swine they set off for home;  the boar’s head was borne before the baron himself,  who felled him down by the ford through force of his hand  so strong.  Till he saw Sir Gawain  in the hall it seemed full long;  he calls, and he comes again  for the dues that to him belong.  65  The lord, full loud he cried, laughed merrily  when he saw Sir Gawain; and with joy he speaks.  The good ladies were summoned, the household gathered;  he shows him the boar’s sides, and shapes him the tale  of the largeness and length, the malignity also,  of the war on the wild swine in woods where he fled.  So the other knight full nobly commended his deeds,  and praised it, the great merit that he had proved;  for such brawn from a beast, the brave knight said,  nor such flanks on a swine he’d not seen before.  Then they handled the huge head, the knight gave praise,  and showed horror at it, for the lord to hear.  ‘Now Gawain,’ quoth the good man, ‘this game is your own,  by a firm and fast promise, as in faith you know.’  ‘That is true,’ quoth the knight, ‘and as surely true  is that all I got I shall give you again, by my troth.’  He clasped the lord at the neck and gently kissed him,  and after that of the same he again served him there.  ‘Now are we even quit,’ quoth the knight, ‘this eventide,  of all the covenants made here, since I came hither,  by law.’  The lord said: ‘By Saint Giles,  you are the best that I know;  you’ll be rich in a while,  if your trade continues so.’  66  Then they set up tables on trestles aloft,  casting cloths on them. Clear light then  wakened the walls, waxen torches  servants set, and served food all about.  Much gladness and glee gushed out therein  round the fire on the floor, and in fulsome wise  at the supper and after, many noble songs,  such as Christmas carols and dances new,  with all manner of mirth that man may tell of,  and ever our courteous knight the lady beside.  Such sweetness to that man she showed all seemly,  with secret stolen glances, that stalwart knight to please,  that all wondering was the man, and wrath with himself;  but he could not out of breeding spurn her advances,  but dealt with her daintily, howsoever the deed might  be cast.  When they had dallied in hall  as long as their will might last,  to chamber the lord him called,  and to the hearth they passed.  67  And there they drank and debated and decided anew  to act on the same terms on New Year’s Eve;  but the knight craved leave to go forth on the morn,  for it was nearing the time when he must go.  The lord persuaded him not to, pressed him to linger,  and said: ‘As I am true, I pledge you my troth  you shall gain the Green Chapel, and render your dues,  sir, by New Year’s light, long before prime.  And so go lie in your room and take your ease,  and I shall hunt in the holt and hold to the covenant,  exchanging what has chanced, when I spur hither;  for I have tested you twice, and faithful I find you.  Now: “third time pays all,” think on that tomorrow;  Make we merry while we may, and mind only joy,  for a man may find sorrow whenever he likes.’  This was graciously granted and Gawain lingered;  Blithely they brought him drink, and bed-wards they went  with light.  Sir Gawain lies down and sleeps  full still and soft all night;  the lord who to woodcraft keeps,  rises early and bright.  68  After Mass a morsel he and his men took;  merry was the morning, his mount he summoned.  All the men that a-horse were followed him after,  ready set on their steeds before the hall gates.  Fairest of fair was the field, for the frost clung.  In red ruddiness on wrack rises the sun,  and, full clear, casts the clouds from the welkin.  Huntsmen unleashed the hounds by a holt side;  rocks in woods rang out with the cry of the horns.  some hounds fell to the track where the fox lurked,  oft traversing the trail by dint of their wiles.  A little one cried scent, the huntsman to him called;  his fellows fell to, panting full thick,  running forth in a rabble on the right track.  And fox frisked before them; they found him soon,  and when they had him in sight pursued him fast,  marking him clearly with wrathful noise;  and he twists and turns through many a tangled grove,  doubles back and hearkens by hedges full often.  At the last by a little ditch he leaps over a thicket,  steals out full silent by the side of a valley,  thinks to slip from the wood by guile, from the hounds.  Then he came, ere he knew it, to a fine hunt-station,  where three hounds in a cleft threaten him together,  all grey.  There he started aside  and boldly he did stray;  with all the woe in life,  to the wood he went away.  69  Then was it lively delight to list to the hounds,  when all the meet had met him, mingled together.  Such curses at that sight rained down on his head  as if all the clinging cliffs clattered down in a heap.  Here was he hallooed when huntsmen met him,  loud was he greeted with snarling speech;  there he was threatened and called thief often,  and ever the hounds at his tail, that he might not tarry.  Oft he was rushed at when he made for the open,  and often swerved back again, so wily was Reynard.  and so he led them astray, the lord and his liegemen,  in this manner by mountains till after mid-morning,  while the honoured knight at home happily slept  within the comely curtains, on that cold morn.  But the lady for love could get no sleep,  nor could the purpose impair pitched in her heart,  but rose up swiftly, and took herself thither  in a merry mantle, that reached the earth,  that was furred full fine with purest pelts;  without coif on her head, but the noblest gems  traced about her hair-net by twenties in clusters;  her fair face and her throat shown all naked,  her breast bare before, and her back the same.  She came in by the chamber door and closed it after,  threw open a window and to the knight called,  and roundly thus rebuked him with her rich words  with cheer:  ‘Ah! Man, how can you sleep?  This morning is so clear.’  He was in slumber deep,  and yet he could her hear.  70  In heavy depths of dreaming murmured that noble,  as one that was troubled with thronging thoughts,  of how destiny would that day deal him his fate  at the Green Chapel, where he must meet his man,  bound there to bear his buffet without more debate.  But when he had fully recovered his wits,  he started from dreaming and answered in haste.  The lovely lady with laughter so sweet,  bent over his fair face and fully him kissed.  He welcomed her worthily with noble cheer;  he saw her so glorious and gaily attired,  so faultless of feature and of such fine hue,  bright welling joy warmed all his heart.  With sweet smiling softly they slip into mirth,  that to all bliss and beauty, that breaks between them,  they win.  They spoke in words full good,  much pleasure was therein;  in great peril would have stood,  kept not Mary her knight from sin.  71  For that peerless princess pressed him so closely,  urged him so near the edge, he felt it behoved him  either to bow to her love, or with loathing refuse her.  He cared for his courtesy, lest he were churlish,  and more for the mischief if he should work sin  and be traitor to that lord who held the dwelling.  ‘God shield us!’ quoth the knight, ‘that must not befall!’  With loving laughter a little he put aside  all the special pleading that sprang from her mouth.  Quoth beauty to the brave: ‘Blame you deserve,  if you love not that live lady that you lie next,  who above all of the world is wounded in heart,  unless you have a leman, a lover, that you like better,  and firm of faith to that fair one, fastened so hard  that you list not to loose it – and that I believe.  If that you tell me that truly, I pray you;  by all the lovers alive, hide not the truth  with guile.’  The knight said: ‘By Saint John,’  and gentle was his smile  ‘In faith I love no one,  nor none will love the while.’  72  ‘These words,’ said the lady, ‘are the worst words of all;  but I am answered forsooth, so that it grieves me.  Kiss me now gently, and I shall go hence;  I may but mourn upon earth, a maid that loves much.’  Sighing she stooped down, and sweetly him kissed,  and then she severs from him, and says as she stands:  ‘Now, dear, at this our parting set me at ease:  give me something, a gift, if only your glove,  that I may think of you, man, my mourning to lessen.’  ‘Now indeed,’ quoth the knight, ‘I would I had here  the dearest thing, for your sake, I own in the world,  for you have deserved, forsooth, and in excess,  a richer reward, by rights, than I might reckon;  but as a love-token, this would profit you little.  It is not to your honour to have at this time  a glove of Gawain’s giving to treasure;  and I am here on an errand in lands unknown,  and have no servants with sacks of precious things.  I dislike this, my lady, for your sake, at this time;  but each man must do as he must, take it not ill  nor pine.’  ‘Nay, knight of high honours,’  quoth that love-some lady fine,  ‘though I shall have naught of yours,  yet shall you have of mine.’  73  She proffered him a rich ring of red gold work,  with a sparkling stone glittering aloft,  that blazed brilliant beams like the bright sun;  know you well that it’s worth was full huge.  But the knight refused it and he readily said:  ‘I’ll no gifts, before God, my dear, at this time;  I have none to give you, nor naught will I take.’  She offered it him eagerly, yet he her gift spurned,  and swore swiftly his oath that he would not seize it;  and she grieved he refused her, and said thereafter:  ‘Since you reject my ring, too rich it may seem,  for you would not be so high beholden to me,  I shall give you my girdle: that profits you less.’  She loosed a belt lightly that lay round her sides,  looped over her kirtle beneath her bright mantle.  Gear it was of green silk and with gold trimmed,  at the edges embroidered, with finger-stitching;  and that she offered the knight, and blithely besought  that he would take it though it were unworthy.  but he said he might have nigh him in no wise  neither gold nor treasure, ere God sent him grace,  to achieve the errand he had chosen there.  ‘And therefore, I pray you, be not displeased,  and let your gift go, for I swear it I can never  you grant.  To you I am deeply beholden,  your kindness is so pleasant,  and ever in heat and cold, then  I’ll be your true servant.’  74  ‘Now do you shun this silk,’ said the lady,  ‘because it is simple in itself? And so it may seem.  Lo! It is slight indeed, and so is less worthy.  But whoso knew the worth woven therein  he would hold it in higher praise, perchance;  for whatever man is girt with this green lace,  while he has it closely fastened about him,  there is no man under heaven might hew him,  for he may not be slain by any sleight upon earth.’  Then the knight thought, and it came to his heart,  it was a jewel for the jeopardy judged upon him,  when he gained the Green Chapel, his fate to find;  if he might slip past un-slain, the sleight were noble.  Then he indulged her suit, and told her to speak.  And she pressed the belt on him urging it eagerly;  and he granted it, and she gave it him with goodwill,  and besought him, for her sake, never to reveal it,  but loyally conceal it from her lord. The knight agrees  that no one should know of it, indeed, but they two,  betimes.  He thanked her as he might,  with all his heart and mind.  By then the gallant knight,  she had kissed three times.  75  Then took she her leave and left him there,  for more of that man she might not get.  When she is gone, Sir Gawain attires himself,  rises and dresses himself in noble array,  lays aside the love-lace the lady gave him,  hides it full handily where he might find it.  Then swiftly to the chapel took he his way,  privately approached a priest, and there prayed him  that he would enlighten his life and teach him better  how his soul might be saved when he went hence.  Then he shrove himself fully, eschewed his misdeeds  the major and minor, and mercy beseeches,  and calls on the priest for absolution;  and he absolved him surely and left him so pure  that Doomsday yet might be declared on the morn.  And then he made himself merry among the fair ladies,  with comely carols and all manner of joy,  more than ever before that day, till the dark night,  in bliss.  Each one had courtesy there  of him, and said: ‘He is  the merriest he was ever  since he came hither, ere this.’  76  Now long in that leisure there let him abide!  Yet is the lord on his land, pursuing his sport.  He has done for the fox that he followed so long.  As he spurred through a spinney to spy the shrew,  there where he heard the hounds harry him on,  Reynard came rushing through the rough grove,  and all the rabble in a race, right at his heels.  The lord, aware of the wild thing, warily waits,  and brandishes his bright blade, drives at the beast.  And it shunned the sharp edge and sought to retreat;  but a hound rushed at him, before ere he might,  and right before the horse’s feet they fell on him all  and worried the wily one with a wrathful noise.  The lord swiftly alighted then and latched on,  raised him full suddenly out of the ravening mouths,  holds him high over his head, halloos full loud,  while there bayed at him many brave hounds.  Huntsmen hied them thither with horns full many,  sounding the rally aright till they saw their lord.  When his noble company had all come in,  all that ever bore bugle blew at once,  and all the others hallooed who had no horn.  It was the merriest meet that ever men heard,  the ripe roar raised there for Reynard’s soul from every  man’s throat.  Their hounds they then reward,  Their heads they fondle and stroke;  and then they take Reynard  and strip him of his coat.  77  And then they hurry for home, for it was nigh night,  striking up strongly on their stout horns.  The lord alights at last at his much-loved home,  finds fire upon hearth, the knight there beside,  Sir Gawain the good who glad was withal –  for among the ladies he was joyfully beloved.  He wore a gown of blue that reached to the ground.  His surcoat suited him well, all soft with fur,  and his hood of the same hung from his shoulder,  trimmed all with ermine were both all about.  He met with the lord in the midst of the floor,  and all with joy did him greet, and gladly he said:  ‘I shall fulfil the first our contract now,  that we settled so speedily sparing no drink.’  Then he clasped the lord and kissed him thrice,  as strongly and steadily as he well could.  ‘By Christ,’ quoth the other, ‘you’ve found much luck  in transacting this trade, if your profit was good.’  ‘You need not care about profit,’ quick quoth the other,  ‘as I’ve promptly paid over the profit I took.’  ‘Marry,’ quoth the other, ‘my own falls behind,  for I have hunted all this day, and naught have I got  but this foul fox fell – the fiend take such goods! –  and that’s a poor price to pay for such precious things  as you so have given me here, three such kisses  so good.’  ‘Enough,’ quoth Sir Gawain,  ‘I thank you, by the Rood.’  And how the fox was slain  the lord told as they stood.  78  With mirth and minstrelsy, with meals at will,  they made as merry as any men might,  with laughter of ladies, and jesting with words.  Gawain and the good man so glad are they both:  must be, lest the diners are drunkards or dotards.  Both master and men played many jokes,  till the time it was come that they must sever;  his men at the last must go to their beds.  Then humbly his leave of the lord at first  takes the noble knight, and fairly him thanks:  ‘For such a splendid sojourn as I have had here,  your honour at this high feast, the High King reward you!  I would give myself as one of your men, if you so like;  but I must needs, as you know, move on tomorrow,  if you’ll grant me a guide to show, as you promised,  the way to the Green Chapel, as God wills for me  to be dealt on New Year’s day the doom my fate brings.’  ‘In good faith,’ quoth the good man, ‘by my goodwill  all that ever I promised you, I shall hold ready.’  Then he assigned him a servant to show him the way  and conduct him through the hills, so he’d not delay,  and faring through forest and thickset the shortest way  he’d weave.  The lord Gawain did thank,  such honour he did receive.  Then of the ladies of rank  the knight must take his leave.  79  With sad care and kissing he spoke to them still,  and full heartfelt thanks he pressed on them:  and they yielded him again replies the same,  commending him to Christ then with frozen sighs.  So from the company he courteously parts;  each man that he met, he gave him his thanks  for his service and for the solicitous care  that they had shown busied about him in serving;  and all were as sorry to sever from him there  as if they had dwelt nobly with that knight ever.  Then the lads with lights led him to his chamber,  and blithely brought him to bed to be at his rest.  If he did not sleep soundly, I dare say nothing,  for he had much on the morrow to mind, if he would,  in thought.  Let him lie there quite still,  he is near what he sought;  and quiet you a while until  I tell you of all that they wrought. **Part IV** 80  Now nears the New Year and the night passes,  the day drives away dark, as the Deity bids.  But wild weather awoke in the world outside,  clouds cast cold keenly down to the earth,  with wind enough from the north, to flail the flesh.  The snow sleeted down sharp, and nipped the wild;  the whistling wind wailed from the heights  and drove each dale full of drifts full great.  The knight listened full well, as he lay in his bed.  Though he closes his lids, full little he sleeps;  with each cock that crew he well knew his tryst.  Deftly he dressed himself, ere the day sprang,  for there was a lighted lamp gleamed in his chamber.  He called to his servant who promptly replied,  and bade him bring coat of mail and saddle his mount;  the man rises up and fetches him his clothes,  and attires Sir Gawain in splendid style.  First he clad him in clothes to ward off the cold,  and then in his harness, that burnished was kept,  both his belly-armour and plate, polished full bright,  the rings of his rich mail-coat rubbed free of rust;  and all was as fresh as at first, and he to give thanks  was glad.  He had put on each piece  and in bright armour clad ;  fairest from here to Greece,  his steed to be brought he bade.  81  While he wound himself in the most splendid weeds –  his coat-armour with its badge of clear deeds,  set out upon velvet, with virtuous stones  embellished and bound about it, embroidered seams,  and fair lined within with fine furs –  yet he forgot not the lace, the lady’s gift;  that Gawain did not fail of, for his own good.  when he had bound the blade on his smooth haunches,  then he wound the love-token twice him about,  swiftly swathed it about his waist sweetly that knight.  The girdle of green silk that gallant well suited,  upon that royal red cloth that rich was to show.  But it was not for its richness he wore this girdle,  nor for pride in the pendants, though polished they were,  and though the glittering gold gleamed at the ends,  but to save himself when it behoved him to suffer,  to abide baneful stroke without battling with blade  or knife.  With that the knight all sound,  goes swift to risk his life;  all the men of renown  he thanks, prepares for strife.  82  Then was Gringolet readied, that was huge and great,  and had been stabled snugly and in secure wise;  he was eager to gallop, that proud horse then.  The knight went to him and gazed at his coat,  and said soberly to himself, and swore by the truth:  ‘Here are many, in this motte, that of honour think.  The man who maintains it, joy may he have!  The fair lady through life may love her befall!  Thus if they for charity cherish a guest,  and hold honour in their hand, the Lord them reward  who upholds the heavens on high, and also you all!  And if I should live for any while upon earth,  I would grant you some reward readily, if I might.’  Then steps he into the stirrup and strides aloft.  His man showed him his shield; on shoulder he slung it,  gives spur to Gringolet with his gilded heels,  and he starts forth on the stones – pausing no longer  to prance.  His servant to horse got then,  who bore his spear and lance.  ‘This castle to Christ I commend:  May he grant it good chance!’  83  The drawbridge was let down, and the broad gates  unbarred and flung open upon both sides.  The knight blessed himself swiftly, and passed the boards;  praised the porter kneeling before the prince,  who gives him God and good-day, that Gawain He save;  and goes on his way with his one man,  who shall teach him the path to that perilous place  where the grievous blow he shall receive.  They brushed by banks where boughs were bare,  they climbed by cliffs where clung the cold.  the heavens were up high, but ugly there-under  mist moved on the moors, melted on mountains,  each hill had a hat, a mist-mantle huge.  Brooks boiled and broke their banks about,  sheer shattering on shores where they down-flowed.  Well wild was the way where they by woods rode,  till it was soon time that the sun in that season  does rise.  They were on a hill full high,  the white snow lay beside;  the man that rode him by  bade his master abide.  84  ‘For I have brought you hither, sir, at this time,  and now you are not far from that noted place  that you have sought and spurred so specially after.  But I must say, forsooth, that since I know you,  and you are a lord full of life whom I well love,  if you would hark to my wit, you might do better.  The place that you pace to full perilous is held;  there lives a man in that waste, the worst upon earth,  for he is strong and stern and loves to strike,  and more man he is than any upon middle-earth,  and his body bigger than the best four  that are in Arthur’s house, Hector, or others.  He makes it so to chance at the Green Chapel,  that none passes by that place so proud in arms  that he but does him to death by dint of his hand;  for he is a mighty man, and shows no mercy,  for be it churl or chaplain that rides by the chapel,  monk or priest of the Mass, or any man else,  he is as quick to kill him, as to live himself.  Therefore I say, as true as you sit in the saddle,  come there, and you will be killed, if he has his way,  trust me truly in that, though you had twenty lives  to spend.  He has lived here of yore,  and battled to great extent.  Against his blows full sore,  you may not yourself defend.’  85  ‘Therefore, good Sir Gawain, let him alone,  and go by some other way, for God’s own sake!  Course some other country where Christ might you speed.  And I shall hie me home again, and undertake  that I shall swear by God and all his good saints –  so help me God and the Holy things, and oaths enough –  that I shall loyally keep your secret, and loose no tale  that ever you fled from any man that I know of.’  ‘Grant merci,’ quoth Gawain, and galled he said:  ‘It is worthy of you, man, to wish for my good,  and loyally keep my secret I know that you would.  But, keep it ever so quiet, if I passed here,  and fled away in fear, in the form that you tell of,  I were a cowardly knight, I might not be excused.  For I will go to the chapel, whatever chance may befall,  and talk with that same fellow in whatever way I wish,  whether it’s weal or woe, as fate may to me  behave.  Though he be a stern fellow  to manage, armed with a stave,  full well does the Lord know  His servants how to save.’  86  ‘Marry!’ quoth the other man, ‘now you spell it out  that you will take all your own trouble on yourself,  if you will lose your life, I’ll not you delay.  Have your helm here on your head, your spear in your hand,  and ride down this same track by yon rock side,  till you’re brought to the bottom of the wild valley,  then look a little on the level, to your left hand,  and you shall see in that vale that selfsame chapel  and the burly giant on guard that it keeps.  Now farewell, in God’s name, Gawain the noble!  For all the gold in the ground I’d not go with you,  nor bear fellowship through this forest one foot further.’  With that the man in the wood tugs at his bridle,  hits his horse with his heels as hard as he might,  leaps away over the land, and leaves the knight there  alone.  ‘By God’s self,’ quoth Gawain,  ‘I will neither weep nor groan;  to God’s will I bend again  and I am sworn as His own.’  87  So he gives spur to Gringolet and picks up the path,  pushing on through, by a bank, at the side of a wood,  rode down the rough slope right to the dale.  And then he gazed all about, and wild it seemed,  and saw no sign of shelter anywhere near,  but high banks and steep upon either side,  and rough rugged crags with gnarled stones;  so the sky seemed to be grazed by their barbs.  Then he halted and reined in his horse awhile,  and scanned all about this chapel to find.  He saw no such thing either side, and thought it quite strange,  save a little mound, as it were, off in a field,  a bald barrow by a bank beside the burn,  by a force of the flood that flowed down there;  the burn bubbled therein as if it were boiling.  The knight urges on his mount and comes to the mound,  alights there lightly, and ties to a lime-tree  the reins of his horse round a rough branch.  Then he goes to the barrow, and about it he walked,  debating with himself what it might be.  It had a hole at each end and on either side,  and was overgrown with grass in great knots;  and all was hollow within, naught but an old cave,  or a crevice of an old crag – he could not distinguish  it well.  ‘Who knows, Lord,’ quoth the gentle knight  ‘whether this be the Green Chapel?  Here might about midnight  the Devil his Matins tell!’  88  ‘Now indeed,’ quoth Gawain, ‘desolation is here;  this oratory is ugly, with weeds overgrown;  well is it seemly for the man clad in green  to deal his devotion here in the devil’s wise.  Now I feel it’s the Fiend, in my five senses,  who set me this meeting to strike at me here.  This is a chapel of mischance – bad luck it betide!  It is the most cursed church that ever I came to.’  With high helm on his head, his lance in his hand,  he roamed up to the roof of that rough dwelling.  Then he heard from that high hill, from a hard rock  beyond the brook, on the bank, a wondrous brave noise.  What! It clanged through the cliff as if it would cleave it,  as if on a grindstone one ground a great scythe.  What! It whirred and whetted, as water in a mill.  What! It rushed and rang, revolting to hear.  Then ‘By God,’ quoth Gawain, ‘this here I believe  is arranged to reverence me, to greet rank  by rote.  ‘Let God’s will work! “Alas” –  will help me not a mote.  My life though it be lost  I dread no wondrous note.’  89  Then the knight called out loud on high;  ‘Who stands in this stead, my tryst to uphold?  For now is good Gawain grounded right here.  If any man wills aught, wind hither fast,  either now or never his needs to further.’  ‘Abide,’ quoth one on the bank above his head,  ‘and you shall have all in haste I promised you once.’  Yet he then turned to his tumult swiftly a while,  and at whetting he worked, ere he would alight.  And then he thrust by a crag and came out by a hole,  whirling out of the rocks with a fell weapon,  a Danish axe new honed, for dealing the blow,  with a biting blade bow-bent to the haft,  ground on a grindstone, four feet broad –  no less, by that love-lace gleaming full bright.  And the giant in green was garbed as at first,  both the looks and the legs, the locks and the beard,  save that firm on his feet he finds his ground,  sets the haft to the stones and stalks beside it.  When he came to the water, he would not wade,  he hopped over on his axe and boldly he strides,  blazing with wrath, on a bit of field broad about  in snow.  Sir Gawain the man did greet,  he bowed to him, nothing low;  the other said: ‘Now, Sir Sweet,  men may trust your word, I owe.’  90  ‘Gawain,’ quoth the green man, ‘God may you guard!  Indeed you are welcome, knight, to my place,  and you have timed your travel as true man should.  And you know the covenant pledged between us:  at this time twelvemonth gone you took what befell,  that I should at this New Year promptly requite.  And we are in this valley verily alone;  here are no ranks to sever us, serve as you will.  Heft your helm off your head, and have here your pay.  Ask no more debate than I did of you then  when you whipped off my head at a single blow.’  ‘Nay, by God,’ quoth Gawain, ‘who lent me a soul,  I shall bear you no grudge for the grief that befalls.  Strike but the one stroke, and I shall stand still  and offer no hindrance, come work as you like,  I swear.’  He leant down his neck, and bowed,  and showed the white flesh all bare,  as if he were no way cowed;  for to shrink he would not dare.  91  Then the man in green readies him swiftly,  girds up his grim blade, to smite Gawain;  with all the strength in his body he bears it aloft,  manages it mightily as if he would mar him.  Had he driven it down as direly as he aimed,  one had been dead of the deed who was dauntless ever.  But Gawain glanced at the grim blade sideways,  as it came gliding down on him to destroy him,  and his shoulders shrank a little from the sharp edge.  The other man with a shrug the slice withholds,  and then reproves the prince with many proud words:  ‘You are not Gawain,’ quoth the man, ‘held so great,  that was never afraid of the host by hill or by vale,  for now you flinch for fear ere you feel harm.  Such cowardice of that knight have I never heard.  I neither flinched nor fled, friend, when you let fly,  nor cast forth any quibble in King Arthur’s house.  My head flew off, at my feet, yet fled I never;  yet you, ere any harm haps, are fearful at heart.  And I ought to be branded the better man, I say,  therefore.’  Quoth Gawain: ‘I flinched once,  Yet so will I no more;  Though if my head fall on the stones,  I cannot it restore.’  92  ‘Be brisk, man, by your faith, and bring me to the point.  Deal me my destiny and do it out of hand,  for I shall stand your stroke, and start no more  till your axe has hit me – have here my troth.’  ‘Have at you, then,’ quoth the other, and heaves it aloft  and glares as angrily as if he were mad.  He menaces him mightily, but touches him not,  swiftly withholding his hand ere it might hurt.  Gawain gravely it bides and moves not a muscle,  but stands still as a stone or the stump of a tree  that is riven in rocky ground with roots a hundred.  Then merrily again he spoke, the man in green:  ‘So now you have your heart whole, it me behoves.  Hold you safe now the knighthood Arthur gave you,  and keep your neck from this cut, if ever it may!’  Gawain full fiercely with anger then said:  ‘Why, thrash on, you wild man, threaten no longer;  it seems your heart is warring with your own self.’  ‘Forsooth,’ quoth the other, ‘so fiercely you speak,I’ll not a moment longer delay your errand  I vow.’  Then he takes up his stance to strike  pouts lips and puckers his brow;  Nothing there for him to like  who hopes for no rescue now.  93  Up the weapon lifts lightly, is let down fair,  and the blade’s border beside the bare neck.  Though heaved heavily it hurt him not more,  but nicked him on the one side, and severed the skin.  The sharp edge sank in the flesh through the fair fat,  so that bright blood over his shoulders shot to the earth.  And when the knight saw his blood blotting the snow,  he spurted up, feet first, more than a spear-length,  seized swiftly his helm and on his head cast it,  shrugged with his shoulders his fine shield under,  broke out his bright sword, and bravely he spoke –  never since he was a babe born of his mother  had he ever in this world a heart half so blithe –  ‘Back man, with your blade, and brandish no more!  I have received a stroke in this place without strife,  and if you offer another I’ll readily requite you  and yield it you swiftly again – of that be you sure –  as foe.  But one stroke to me here falls;  the covenant stated so,  arranged in Arthur’s halls,  so lay your weapon, now, low!’  94  The other then turned away and on his axe rested,  set the haft to the earth and leant on the head,  and looked at the lord who held to his ground,  how doughty, and dread-less, enduring he stands  armed, without awe; in his heart he him liked.  Then he spoke merrily in a mighty voice,  and with a ringing roar to the knight he said:  ‘Bold man be not so fierce in this field.  No man here has mistreated you, been unmannerly,  nor behaved but by covenant at King’s court made.  I hit with a stroke, and you have it, and are well paid;I release you from the rest of all other rights.  If I had been livelier, a buffet perchance  I could have worked more wilfully, to bring you anger.  First I menaced you merrily with a single feint,  and rent you with no riving cut, rightly offered  for the pledge that we made on the very first night;  for you truthfully kept troth and dealt with me true,  all the gain you gave me, as good men should.  The next blow for the morn, man, I proffered;  you kissed my fair wife, the kisses were mine.  For both these days I brought you but two bare feints,  without scathe.  Truth for the truth restore,  then man need dread no wraith.  On the third you failed for sure,  and so took that blow, in faith.’  95  ‘For it is mine that you wear, that same woven girdle;  my own wife gave it you, I know it well forsooth.  Now, know I well your kisses and conduct too,  and the wooing of my wife; I wrought it myself.  I sent her to test you, and truly I think you  the most faultless man that was ever afoot.  As a pearl beside whitened pea is more precious,  so is Gawain, in good faith, beside other good knights.  But here sir you lacked a little, wanting in loyalty;  but that was for no wily work, nor wooing neither,  but for love of your life – so I blame you the less.’  The other strong man in study stood a great while,  so aggrieved that for grief he grimaced within.  All the blood of his breast burnt in his face,  that he shrank for shame at all the man said.  The first words the knight could frame on that field:  ‘Curse upon cowardice and covetousness both!  In you are villainy and vice that virtue distress.’  Then he caught at the knot and pulled it loose,  and fair flung the belt at the man himself:  ‘Lo! There’s the falseness, foul may it fall!  For fear of your knock cowardice me taught  to accord with covetousness, forsake my kind,  the largesse and loyalty that belongs to knights.  Now am I faulted and false, and ever a-feared;  from both treachery and untruth come sorrow  and care!  I confess to you knight, here, still,  my fault in this affair;  let me understand your will,  and henceforth I shall beware.’  96  Then laughed that other lord and lightly said:  ‘I hold it happily made whole, the harm that I had;  You are confessed so clean, cleared of your faults,  and have done penance plain at the point of my blade,  I hold you absolved of that sin, as pure and as clean,  as though you were never at fault since first you were born.  And I give you, sir, the girdle that is gold-hemmed.  As it is green as my gown, Sir Gawain, you may  think upon this same trial when you throng forth  among princes of price, and this the pure token  of the test at the Green Chapel to chivalrous knights.  And you shall this New Year come back to my castle,  and we shall revel away the remnant of this rich feast  I mean’  Thus urged him hard the lord,  and said: ‘With my wife, I ween,  we shall bring you in accord,  who was your enemy keen.’  97  ‘Nay, forsooth,’ quoth the knight, and seized his helm  doffed it deliberately, and dealt his thanks:  ‘I have sojourned enough. May luck you betide,  and may He yield you reward that rewards all men!  And commend me to the courteous, your comely wife,  both the one and the other, my honoured ladies,  that thus their knight with a trick have cunningly beguiled.  But it is no wonder for a fool to run mad  and through wiles of woman be won to sorrow.  For so was Adam on earth with one beguiled,  and Solomon with many such, Samson too –  Delilah dealt him his doom – and David thereafter  was blinded by Bathsheba, and suffered much ill.  Since these were wounded with wiles, it were wise  to love them well and believe them not, if a lord could.  For these were the finest formerly, favoured by fate  excellently of all those under heaven’s rule  ill used;  And all these were beguiled  with women that they used.  If I am now beguiled  I think I should be excused.’  98  ‘For your girdle,’ quoth Gawain, ‘God reward you!  That I will wear with good will, not for the white gold,  nor the stuff, the silk, nor the slender pendants,  its worth, nor richness, nor for the fine working;  but as a sign of my sin I shall see it often  when I ride in renown, remorseful, remembering  the fault and the frailty of perverse flesh,  how it tends to entice to the tarnish of sin.  And thus when pride shall stir me in prowess of arms,  one look at this love-lace shall lower my heart.  But one thing I would you pray, displease you never:  Since you are lord of yonder land where I lingered  Say you by your knighthood – may He reward you  that upholds the heavens and on high sits –  how you tell your true name, and then no more?’  ‘That shall I tell you truly,’ quoth the other then,  ‘Bertilak de Hautdesert I am in this land,  through might of Morgan la Faye, that dwells in my house,  and is mistress of magic, by crafts well learned  the mysteries of Merlin, many has she taken,  for she has dealt in depths full dearly sometime  with that excellent sage, and that know all your knights  at home.  Morgan the Goddess  therefore is now her name;  none has such high haughtiness  that she cannot make full tame.’  99  ‘She sent me in this same wise to your wide hall  for to assay its pride, test if all that were truth  that runs on the great renown of the Round Table.  She worked all this wonder your wits to ravel,  to grieve Guinevere and to bring her to die  aghast at that same ghoul with his ghostly speech  with his head in his hand before the high table.  That is she that is at home, the ancient lady;  she is even your aunt, Arthur’s half-sister,  daughter of Tintagel’s Duchess that dear Uther after  had Arthur upon, who now is your king.  Therefore, sir, I entreat you, come to your aunt,  make merry in my house. My men do love you,  and I wish you as well, man, by my faith,  as any man under God, for your great truth.’  Yet Gawain denied him, nay, he would in no way.  They clasped and kissed, commending each other  to the Prince of Paradise, parted in the cold where  they stood.  Gawain on steed I ween  to the King goes fast as he could,  and the man in the emerald green  whithersoever he would.  100  Wild ways in the world Gawain now rides,  on Gringolet, he whom grace had gifted with life.  Often he harboured in houses, and often outside,  had adventures much in the vales, often vanquisher,  that I do not at this time intend to recall.  The hurt was all whole that he had in his neck,  and the bright belt he bore all thereabout,  obliquely, as a baldric, bound at his side,  tied under his left arm, the lace, with a knot,  as token he was tainted with guilt of his fault.  And so he comes to the court, all safe and sound.  Delight dawned in that dwelling when the great knew  that good Gawain was come; and thought it gain.  The King kisses the knight, and the queen also,  and then many staunch knights sought to salute him,  to know how he had fared; and faithfully he tells  confessing all the cost of the cares he had suffered –  what chanced at the chapel, the cast of its lord,  the love of the lady, the lace at the last.  The nick in the neck he naked them showed,  that he had for his lie, from the lord’s hands,  in blame.  He was pained he must tell,  he groaned for grief at the same;  blood ran to his face pell-mell,  when he showed the mark, for shame.  101  ‘Lo, Lord!’ quoth the knight, and handled the lace,  ‘This is the belt of blame I bear at my neck,  this is the hurt and the harm that I have learned  through the cowardice and covetousness I caught there.  This is the token of the untruth I am taken in,  and I must needs it wear while I may last.  For none may hide harm done, and go unscathed,  for where it is once attached depart will it never.’  The King comforts the knight, and all the court also,  laughing loudly thereat, and lovingly agreeing,  those lords and ladies that belonged to the Table,  that each born to the brotherhood, a baldric should have,  a belt, oblique him about, of a bright green,  and that for the sake of the knight, the same hue.  For it was accorded to the renown of the Round Table,  and he that had it was honoured, evermore after,  as is borne out by the best book of romance.  Thus in Arthur’s day this adventure was tried,  the books of Brutus thereof bear witness.  Since Brutus, the bold baron, first bent hither,  after the siege and assault had ceased at Troy,  there is,  many an adventure born  befallen such, ere this.  Now who bears the crown of thorn,  May He bring us to his bliss! **AMEN**.  **HONY SOYT QUI MAL PENCE** | Parte I  Dopo che l’assedio e l’assalto a Troia fu cessato  la città cadde e bruciò in tizzone e cenere  il guerriero che le trame del tradimente li tessè  fu provato per il suo tradimento, il peggior al mondo.  Fu Enea il nobile e la sua alta stirpe  che sottomisero province, signori divennero  quasi tutto il patrimonio delle isole occidentali:  avanti il ricco Romolo a Roma arrivò rapido,  con gran alacrità quella città per prima costruì,  e la nomina col suo nome, che ora ha,  Tirius in Toscana, e cittadine fonda;  I Longobardi in Lombardia innalzano case;  e viaggiò sul mare francese Fexlix Brutus  Su molte sponde della Britannia si stabilì  allora,  dove guerra e distruzione e meraviglia  col tempo operarono dall’interno  e spesso la gioia e il disastro  hanno dominato rapidi da allora.  2  E quando questa Britannia fu costruita da questo ricco barone  uomini coraggiosi nacquero lì, che amavan la guerra,  e in molti tempi irrequieti ciò causò agitazione,  Più fiamme su questa terra son spesso cadute,  che in qualsiasi altra conosco, da quel tempo.  But di tutti che qui costruirono, dei re di Britannia,  Artù fu sempre il più grande, da ciò che ho sentito dire,  E perciò una avventura intendo narrare,  stupefacente alla vista degli uomini che la vedono,  una grandiosa impresa tra le meraviglie di Artù,  se ascolterete questa storia solo un po’,  La dirò com’è, come in città l’ho sentita,  a voce;  come fu detta e raccontata,  con una trama solida e forte,  carica di parole incrociate,  quanto è grande questa terra.  3  Il re stava a Camelot, quasi Natale,  con molti bei signori, dei condottieri i migliori,  osservando tutti i ricchi fratelli della Tavola Rotonda,  con baldoria ricca e divertimento sfrenato.  Gareggiavano i guerrieri numerose volte,  giostravano allegramente questi gentili cavalieri,  poi si portarono a corte, per cantare canzoni.  Che vi era sempre festa per quindici giorni,  con tutto il cibo e il divertimento che si può avere:  unn clamore e allegria stupendo da ascoltare,  Rumori allegri di giorni, danze di notte;  tutto era gran allegria nelle sale e nelle stanze  coi signori e le signore, come più gli aggradava.  Con tutto il bene del mondo erano insieme,  i cavalieri più conosciuti sotto Cristo in persona,  e le più belle dame che la vita mai onorò,  e il re più grazioso che governa la corte.  Poiché tutti erano belli e ancora nella prima  età,  la più felice sotto il cielo.  il re più grande per volontà  era difficile trovare  uno così forte sulla collina.  4  L’anno nuovo era così giovane, era appena arrivato  quel giorno sul palco fu servito il cibo due volte,  poiché il re era arrivato coi cavalieri nella sala,  e i canti nella cappella risuonati fino alla fine.  Alte gride furono fatte dai chierici ed altri,  Il Natale nasceva di nuovo, e spesso menzionato;  e vedere i ricchi correre a dare i regali,  gridare i loro doni in alto, darli in mano,  e discutere alacremente di quei doni.  Le dame ridevano forte, anche se avevano perso,  mentre colui che vinceva non era sdegnoso, sappiatelo.  Questa allegria vi era ad ora di pranzo.  Quando si furon lavati andarono a sedersi,  i baroni più grandi in alto, come sembrava più conveniente,  con Ginevra, tutta leggiadra, che adornava la loro schiera,  vestita sul palco, tutta adornata –  splendida seta sui fianchi e vero velo di Tolosa  sopra, con abbondanza di arazzi tartari,  che erano ricamati, brillanti delle gemme migliori  che possono essere acquistate per soldini  ogni giornio.  I più belli da descrivere  guardavano con occhi grigi  una vista più attraente  nessun uomo può dirla in verità.  5  Ma Artù non mangiava finchè tutti non erano serviti  era così gioioso nella sua gioventù, un po’ fanciullesco,  amava vivacemente la vita, amava meno  giacere o sedere a lungo,  lo eccitava il suo sangue giovane e mente vivace.  E anche un’altra questione lo portava a questo,  che egli aveva nobilmente dichiarato che non avrebbe mai mangiato  in questi bei giorni, finchè non gli fosse stata raccontata  una qualche impresa avventurosa, una storia sconosciuta,  di qualche gran meraviglia, a cui lui potesse credere,  di antenati, armi, o altre avventure;  oppure qualcuno pregasse qualche gran cavaliere  di unirsi a lui nella giostra e rischiare insieme,  giocarsi vita per vita, concedendo ciascuno all’altro,  se la fortuna dovesse favorirli, un giusto vantaggio.  Questa era l’uso del re quando era a corte,  ad ogni bel banchetto con i suoi amici nella sala.  Perciò volto senza paura  egli sta dritto e alto  pieno di vita, quel nuovo anno,  e grandi risate si fa con gli altri.  6  Lì sta in piedi il re in persona dritto e alto  parlando all’alto tavolo di frivolezze cortesemente.  Il buon Galvano era graziato da Ginevra accanto,  e Agravain *a la dure main* siede all’altro lato,  entrambi figli della sorella del re e cavalieri in piena regola;  Il vescovo Baldwin sopra, è a capotavola  e Ywain, figlio di Urien, mangiava accanto a lui.  Questi sedevano in alto su palco e ben serviti,  e moltri alti sedevano ai tavoli laterali.  Poi arrivo il primo piatto con uno scroscio di trombe,  con molti stendardi splendenti lì appesi;  nuovi suoni di tamburi e zampogne,  note gagliarde e echi lontani,  che molti cuori in alto si levarono ai suoni.  Prelibatezze prese da carni buone,  cibi dei più freschi e in tal file di piatti  che non vi era posto per metterli davanti alla gente  e di poggiare l’argento che contiene queste portate  sulla tovaglia.  Ciascuno si servì il proprio come voleva lui  si servì e niente di cattivo;  Ogni due avevano dodici piatti,  buona birra e vino vivace entrambi.  7  Ora non vi dirò più del servizio,  perché ogni uomo può star sicuro che non c'era mancanza  un altro suono nuovo si sentì rapido,  che avrebbe dato al signore il permesso di mangiare.  Poiché a stento il suono fu cessato,  e il primo piatto nella corte fu servito a dovere,  ecco che alla porta della sala entra un uomo impressionante,  il piu' alto di tutte le misure del mondo,  dalla nuca alla vita cosi' robusto e spesso,  e i suoi lombi e le sue membra cosi' lunghe e grandi  un semigigante della terra mi figuro ora che fosse;  ma il più grande dell’umanità ritengo,  e il più elegante nella sua grandezza che potesse cavalcare,  perché, sebbene il suo corpo fosse forte di schiena e di petto,  sia il ventre che la vita erano adeguatamente piccoli,  e i suoi lineamenti erano, per la sua forma,  ben fatti.  .Gli uomini si meravigliavano della sua tinta,  si vedevano le sue sembianze;  egli camminava come se un gigante,  e dappertutto era del verde più profondo.  8  E tutto vestito di verde questo gigante e il suo equipaggiamento:  un mantello dritto e attillato che gli arrivava ai fianchi,  un magnifico mantello sopra, foderato all'interno  con pellicce ben tagliate, l'abito luccicante  di bel ermellino luminoso, e il suo cappuccio,  rimosso dai capelli e posato sulle spalle;  calze pulite e ben pettinate dello stesso verde  che gli stringevano i polpacci e gli speroni appuntiti sotto  d'oro brillante, su calze di seta riccamente barrate,  e le scarpe sotto la suola dove cavalcava.  E tutto il suo abbigliamento era davvero di un verde brillante,  sia le barre della sua cintura che le altre pietre lucenti,  che erano riccamente splendevano sui suoi ornamenti luminosi  su se stesso e sulla sua sella, in seta lavorata,  sarebbe tortuoso dire di queste inezie la metà,  ricamata in alto con uccelli e farfalle,  con gaio sfarzo di verde, con oro sempre in mezzo.  I ciondoli dei suoi finimenti, la bella groppa,  la sua briglia e tutto il metallo era smaltato;  le staffe su cui stava colorate dello stesso,  gli archetti della sella e le gonne della sella,  tutto luccicava e brillava di pietre verdi.  Anche il cavallo che cavalcava era di quella tinta,  certo:  Un cavallo verde, grande e grosso,  un destriero forte da trattenere,  a briglia ricamata, veloce.  al gigante portava vantaggio.  9  Ben vestito era questo gigante vestito di verde  e i capelli della sua testa come la criniera del suo cavallo.  Un bel lino a ventaglio gli cinge le spalle;  Una barba grande come un cespuglio pende sul suo petto,  che, con il ciuffo di capelli che gli arriva dalla testa  era stato tagliata tutto intorno sopra i gomiti,  e metà delle sue mani erano nascoste nellel pieghe  dell'ampio mantello regale fermato intorno al collo.  La criniera di quel possente cavallo era molto simile,  ben pettinata, con molti nodi  intrecciati in filo d'oro sul bel verde,  qui un filo di pelo e là d'oro.  La coda e il ciuffo intrecciati, similmente,  e legati entrambi con una fascia di un verde brillante,  vestita di pietre preziose, per tutta la sua lunghezza;  poi intrecciati con una cinghia, un nodo stretto in alto,  dove suonano molti campanelli brillanti d'oro brunito.  Un tale uomo a cavallo, un tale gigante che cavalca,  non era mai stato prima d'allora nella sala dinanzi  ad occhio umano.  Sembrava un fulmine luminoso,  così diceva tutti che lo descrivevano;  sembrava che nessun uomo potesse  sopravvivere ai suoi potenti colpi.  10  Eppure non aveva né elmo né maglia,  né protezioni, né piastre sulle braccia,  né un'asta, né uno scudo per colpire e abbattere,  ma in una mano teneva un ramo d'agrifoglio,  che è il più verde quando i boschi sono spogli,  e nell'altra un'ascia, enorme, mostruosa,  un’asta pericolosa per dirla a parole, chi ne fosse in grado.  La testa di un'ascia aveva la lunga asta,  la punta tutta d'acciaio verde e d'oro,  la lama lucida e brunita con un largo bordo  così ben modellato a taglio come lo sono i rasoi affilati.  L'uomo di poppa impugnava l'asta di un forte bastone,  che era avvolta con ferro fino all'estremità del manico,  e tutta incisa di verde in graziose lavorazioni;  Una corda vi era avvolta, che collegava la testa,  e così intorno al manico si avvolgeva tutta,  con nappe assicurate e ben attaccate  con bottoni di verde brillante bordata riccamente.  Questo straniero cavalca ed entra nella sala,  e si dirige verso l’alto palco, senza temere il pericolo.  Non salutò mai niuno, ma dall’alto squadrò.  Le prime parole enunciò: "Dov'è", disse,  il governatore di questa folla? Volentieri vorrei  vedere quell' anima con gli occhi e con lui parlare  ragionevolmente".  Sui cavalieri gettò gli occhi  e li rotolò su e giù.  Si fermò e studiò  chi fosse di maggior fama.  11  Guardarono a lungo quel tipo,  perché ogni uomo si meravigliava di quel che poteva significare  che un cavaliere e il suo cavallo possedessero una tal tinta  verde come cresce l'erba e più verde sembrava,  che lo smalto verde sull'oro che brilla più luminoso.  Tutti studiavano quel destriero, e lo seguivano da vicino,  incerti del tutto su quello che poteva fare.  perché non avevano mai visto meraviglie del genere prima d'ora;  e così dei fantasmi e delle fate la gente lì lo riteneva.  Perciò molti cavalieri ebbero paura di rispondere,  e tutti rimasero attoniti al suo discorso e rimasero fermi  in un improvviso silenzio per tutta la ricca sala;  Come se tutti si fossero addormentati, così cessò il rumore  e le grida.  Non credo tutti per paura,  ma alcuni per cortesia;  per lasciare che tutti onoravano  parlasse prima con lui.  12  Poi Artù davanti all’alto palco che osserva questa meraviglia,  educatamente, si inchinò, senza paura,  e disse: "Signore, benvenuto in questo luogo,  il capo di questa casa, io, Artù, mi chiamo.  Smonta subito e riposa, ti prego,  e noi aspetteremo la tua volontà".  "No, che mi aiuti", disse l'uomo, "colui che siede in alto":  Aspettare anche po' in questo modo non era la mia missione.  Ma siccome la tua luce, signore, si alza così in alto,  e il tuo borgo e i tuoi baroni sono i migliori,  i piu' forti con armi d'acciaio sui destrieri a cavalcare,  i piu' saggi e i piu' degni del mondo,  pronti a giostrare in altre competizioni,  e qui si mostra cortesia, come ho sentito dire,  percio' ho vagato fin qui, a quest'ora.  Per questo ramo che qui porto, tu puoi esser certo  che passo in pace e non cerco guai.  Poiché se fossi qui, fiero, e esperto a combattere,  avrei a casa una corazza e un elmo,  uno scudo e una lancia affilata, splendente,  e altre armi da brandire, lo farei volentieri;  ma siccome non voglio la guerra, indosso abiti morbidi.  Ma se sei audace come dicono tutti i bambini,  mi concederai il dono che ti chiedo  per diritto".  Artù rispose lì,  e disse: "Signore, cortese cavaliere,  se desideri la battaglia a mani nude,  qui non ti manca il combattimento".  13  'No, non perseguo nessun combattimento, dico in verità.  Su queste panche ci sono solo bambini sbarbatelli;  se io fossi stretto in un'armatura su un alto destriero,  qui non vi è uomo che sia mio pari, la loro forza è così debole.  Da te chiedo in questa corte un regalo di Natale,  perché è Natale e Capodanno, e qui ci sono molti giovani.  Se in questa casa c'è qualcuno di così ardito,  e' cosi' audace nel sangue, e dalla testa così impetuosa,  che osa sferrare un colpo in cambio di un altro,  io gli darò in dono quest'arma così ricca,  questa lama, che è abbastanza pesante da maneggiare come vuole,  e io soporterò il primo colpo, nudo come sono.  Se qualche amico è così tosto da fare come dico io,  venga rapido da me, afferri quest'arma.  Io rinuncio ai diritti per sempre, lui la tiene, sarà sua.  E io sosterrò il suo colpo in piedi, su questo pavimento,  se voi mi concederete il dono di ridargliene un altro  indietro;  e però gli darò una proroga  di dodici mesi e un giorno.  Ora affrettatevi, vediamo bene  se qualcuno qui osa dire qualcosa".  14  Se all'inizio li aveva storditi, ora erano ancora più immobili  tutto l'esercito nella sala, i grandi e i piccoli.  L'uomo sul suo cavallo si volse in sella,  e in giro gli occhi rossi roteò,  piegò le sopracciglia irte, verdi e ardenti,  agitando la barba in attesa di chi si sarebbe alzato.  Quando nessuno venne al suo richiamo, tossì a pieni polmoni,  e si schiarì forte la gola, pronto a parlare:  "Cosa, è questa la casa di Artù?", disse allora il cavaliere,  "di cui si parla in così tanti regni?  Dove sono ora la tua grandezza e le tue conquiste,  il tuo furore e la tua rabbia, le tue grandi parole?  Ora la allegria e la fama della Tavola Rotonda  sono state distrutte dalla parola di un vagabondo,  perché tutti si nascondono nel terrore senza bisogno di un colpo!  Con questo rise così forte che il signore si addolorò;  il sangue colorò per la vergogna il suo bel viso  e lì,  divenne furioso come il vento;  Così fecero tutti quelli che c'erano.  Il re, così acuto per gentilezza,  si avvicinò a quell'uomo forte.  15  E disse: "Cavaliere, per il cielo tu chiedi come uno stolto  e poiché la follia ti piace, dimostrarlo mi compete.  Io non so di alcuno che sia scosso dalle tue gran parole.  Dammi ora la tua arma, in nome di Dio,  e io ti darò la grazia che desideri avere".  con passo leggero balzò e gli afferrò la mano;  poi fiero l'altro smontò.  Ora ha Artù ha la sua ascia, e il manico impugna,  e lo agita con forza, deciso a colpire.  L'uomo davanti a lui si erse in tutta altezza,  più alto di ogni altro nella casa di una testa e più.  Con sguardo erio in piedi si accarezzava la barba  e con lo sguardo fisso si tirava il vestito,  non più mosso o preoccupato dei colpi poderosi  che se qualcuno al banco gli avesse portato un bicchiere  di vino.  Gawain, che sedeva presso la regina,  si rivolse al re:  "Ti prego, in parole povere  che questo incontro sia mio".  16  Vorreste, nobile signore', disse Gawain al re,  chiedermi di allontanarmi da questa panca e di stare lì al vostro fianco,  così che io, senza scortesia, possa lasciare questa tavola,  e se a mia signora e sovrana non ne ha a male,  verrei a consigliarvi davanti alla vostra ricca corte.  Perché non mi sembra opportuno, come si sa,  che una tale richiesta si levi così alta nella vostra sala,  che voi stesso siate tentato di farvene carico,  mentre tanti uomini coraggiosi intorno a te siedono sulle panche,  che sotto il cielo, spero, non hanno pari per volontà,  né migliori nel corpo sui campi di battaglia.  Io sono il più debole, lo so, e il più debole di intelligenza.  vale meno la perdita della mia vita, in verità.  Solo perché tu sei mio zio, vengo lodato:  non conosco altra grazia che il tuo sangue nelle mie vene.  E poiche' questa cosa e' una follia e nulla che a te competa  e io te l'ho chiesto per primo, concedimelo;  e se la mia richiesta non è ben fatta, che questa corte sia libera  dalla colpa".  I nobili mormoravano intorno,  e dopo suggerirono la stessa cosa,  di liberare il re e la corona,  e dare a Galvano il gioco.  17  Allora il re ordinò al cavaliere di alzarsi  ed egli prontamente si alzò e si preparò bene,  s'inginocchiò davanti al re e prese l'arma;  ed egli la lasciò con leggerezza, e alzò la mano  e gli diede la benedizione di Dio, e con gioia gli disse  che il suo cuore e la sua mano fossero entrambi saldi.  Sta' attento, cugino", disse il re, "a come agisci,  e se lo comprendi bene, credo che facilmente,  che resisterai al colpo che ti dara'.  Gawain va dal gigante, con l'arma in mano,  e lo affronta coraggiosamente, per nulla preoccupato.  Poi a Sir Gawain dice il cavaliere in verde:  'Riaffermiamo i nostri giuramenti prima di andare oltre.  Prima ti prego, amico, dimmi come ti chiami,  in verità, allora, che io possa fidarmi.  "In fede di Dio", disse il buon cavaliere, "io sono Gawain,  che ti offre questo colpetto, qualunque cosa accada dopo,  e dopo questo tempo di dodici mesi avrò da te un altro  con l'arma che vuoi, e nessun aiuto da nessun  vivente".  L'altro parlò di nuovo:  "Sir Gawain, possa io finir male,  se non sono meravigliosamente felice  che tu questo colpo dia".  18  Per Dio", disse il cavaliere verde, "Sir Gawain, mi piace  ch'io affronti prima dal tuo pugno quel ch'io trovai qui.  E tu hai prontamente riassunto, con ragionamenti giusti  chiaramente l’accordo che io, al re, ho chiesto,  se non che tu mi assicuri, in fede,  che tu stesso mi cercherai, dove credi  che io possa essere trovato in campo, e che ricevi un compenso  come quello che oggi mi dai davanti a questa cara compagnia".  'Dove dovrei cercare', disse Gawain, 'dov'è il tuo posto?  Non so nulla di dove cammini, per colui che mi ha fatto,  né conosco te, cavaliere, la tua corte o il tuo nome.  Ma insegnami bene la via, dimmi come ti chiami,  e io mettero' in moto tutto il mio ingegno per portarmi li';  e questo te lo giuro in verità e sul mio vero onore".  "Questo è sufficiente per questo nuovo anno, non c'è bisogno di altro,  disse il gigante in verde al cortese Gawain:  "se ti dirò la verità, quando mi avrai colpito  e mi avrai facilmente abbattuto, io ti insegnerò in breve,  della mia casa e del mio paese e del mio nome.  Allora scoprirai cosa faccio e manterrai la tua parola;  e se non spendo parole, meglio sarà per te,  perche' puoi fermarti nella tua terra e non cercare oltre.  ma oh!  Prendi ora il tuo minaccioso acciaio,  e vedi come si abbattono le querce".  "Con piacere, signore, davvero", disse  disse Gawain; e la sua ascia accarezzò.  19  Il cavaliere verde sul terreno sta elegante:  con il capo leggermente chinato, scopre la carne;  le sue lunghe e belle ciocche le stende sulla testa,  e lascia che il collo nudo si mostri al colpo.  Gawain impugnò l’ascia e la alzò in alto,  il suo piede sinistro per terra davanti appoggiò,  lasciandola cadere rapida sul nudo,  cosicchè la lama dell'acciaio spaccò le ossa,  e affondò nella morbida carne, la tagliò in due,  la lama dell'acciaio lucente mordeva la terra.  La bella testa dal corpo cadde in terra,  la gente la colpì con i piedi, facendolo rotolare avanti;  il sangue schizzò dal corpo, luminoso sul verde.  Eppure non vacilla né cade il tipo,  ma si mette a camminare con forza su gambe robuste,  e rudemente allungò la mano, dove si trovavano i ranghi,  e afferrò la sua bella testa e la sollevò;  e poi si diresse verso il suo destriero, prese la briglia,  si mise alla staffa e si issò,  e teneva la testa per i capelli in mano.  e fermo e saldo in sella sedeva  come se non avesse alcun problema, anche se gli mancava la testa  invece.  Ruotò il torso,  quel corpo orribile che sanguinava;  molti di lui erano sbigottiti,  prima che il suo discorso fosse pronunciato.  20  Poiché la testa che ha in mano tiene dritta  verso il più nobile sul palco rivolge il volto;  ed essa sollevò le palpebre, e guardò con occhi ben aperti,  e fece questo con la bocca, come potete sentire ora;  'Guarda, Gawain, sii pronto ad andare come hai promesso,  e cerca lealmente finché non mi troverai, signore,  come hai giurato in questa sala, ascoltato da questi cavalieri.  Vai alla cappella verde, ti ordino per trovare  un'offerta come quella che hai fatto - e che ti sei meritato -  per essere prontamente data la mattina di Capodanno.  Il cavaliere della cappella verde, mi conoscono in molti;  perciò a trovarmi, se lo desideri, non fallirai.  Vieni, dunque, o ti si chiamerà spergiuro".  Con un suono ruvido le redini egli torce,  si precipitò fuori dalla porta della sala, con la testa in mano,  e scintille facevano sulla pietra i svelti zoccoli.  verso quale terra nessuno sapeva,  non più di quanto sapessero da dove fosse venuto.  E allora?  Il re e Gawain lì  di quell'uomo verde ridevano e sorridevano;  eppure fu descritto in giro  come di una meraviglia tra gli uomini.  21  Anche se Artù, l'alto re, in cuor suo dubitava,  non lasciò che trapelasse sul suo viso, ma disse ad alta voce  alla bella regina, con parole cortesi:  ‘Gentile dama, oggi non ti sgomentare;  ben si addicono a noi questi passatempi a Natale,  far baldoria negli intermezzi, ridere e a cantare  tra i canti di corte dei lord e delle dame.  Comunque ora posso dedicarmi al mio cibo,  perché la mia meraviglia l’ho vista, non posso negarlo".  Guardò Sir Gawain e disse cortese:  'Ora signore, appendi la tua ascia che ha tagliato abbastanza'.  Ed essa adornò il palco, appesa in mostra,  dove tutti gli uomini potevano meravigliarsi e guardarla,  e per vero titolo raccontarne la meraviglia.  Poi andarono alla tavola questi due insieme  il re e il cavaliere virtuoso, e gli uomini entusiasti li servirono  di tutte le prelibatezze, il doppio, il migliore che capitava,  con ogni sorta di cibo e di musica.  Passarono bene quel giorno finchè non arrivò alla fine  sulla terra.  Ora rifletti bene, Sir Gawain,  per evitar che il pericolo ti sconfigga,  su come affrontare questa avventura,  che ti sei presa sulle spalle.  Parte II  Tradotto con www.DeepL.com/Translator (versione gratuita)    'Buon giorno, Sir Gawain,' disse quella dolce signora,  'Sei un dormiente insicuro, che uno può scivolare qui.  Ora sei preso in un baleno, se non si forma una tregua,  Ti legherò nel tuo letto, perché tu possa fidarti".  Tutta ridendo la signora fece i suoi scherzi leggeri.  'Buon giorno, dolcezza', disse Gawain l'allegro,  "Farò la tua volontà, e questo mi piace,  perché mi arrendo in fretta e chiedo la grazia;  e questa è la cosa migliore, secondo me, perché mi conviene".  E così scherzò di nuovo con molte risate allegre.  Ma voi, bella signora, volete voi concedermi il permesso  e liberare il vostro prigioniero e pregarlo di alzarsi,  io mi alzerei da questo letto e mi vestirei meglio,  e troverei maggior conforto nel parlare con voi".  'Nay, forsooth, beau sire,' disse quel dolce,  'Non ti alzerai dal letto. Io ti incarico meglio:  Ti avvolgerò qui, da quest'altra parte,  e poi parlero' con il mio cavaliere che ho catturato;  perché so bene, infatti, Sir Gawain che tu sei,  che tutto il mondo adora, ovunque tu vada.  Il tuo onore, la tua cortesia, è nobilmente lodata  tra i signori, tra le dame, tra tutti i portatori di vita.  E ora voi siete qui, e noi siamo soli;  Il mio signore e i suoi signori sono lontani,  gli altri cavalieri sono a letto, e anche le mie dame,  la porta è tirata e chiusa con un forte chiavistello.  E poiché ho in questa casa colui che tutti amano,  lavorerò bene il mio tempo, finché dura,  con un racconto.  Siete i benvenuti nel mio corpo,  Il vostro piacere di prendere tutto;  Io devo per forza  essere il tuo servo, e lo sarò".  50  'In buona fede,' disse Gawain, 'un guadagno è quello che penso,  sebbene io non sia ora colui di cui parli;  per giungere a tanta reverenza come quella che tu qui descrivi,  sono indegno in tutti i modi, lo so bene io stesso.  Per Dio, sarei però lieto se tu ritenessi opportuno  nel discorso o nel servizio, che io possa pormi  al piacere del vostro valore - sarebbe una gioia pura".  'In buona fede, Sir Gawain,' disse la dolce signora,  'Il valore e l'abilità che piace a tutti gli altri,  se io lo sminuissi o lo prendessi alla leggera, sarebbe una piccola grazia;  ma ci sono abbastanza signore che preferirebbero di gran lunga  avere te, caro uomo, da tenere, come ti ho qui,  per dilettarsi con le tue deliziose parole,  confortarsi e alleviare le loro preoccupazioni,  piuttosto che fare molto del tesoro e dell'oro che hanno.  Ma come io amo quello stesso Signore che governa i cieli,  ho interamente in mano ciò che tutti desiderano  per grazia".  Ella lo rallegrava così dolcemente,  che era così bello di viso;  il cavaliere con chiari discorsi  rispondeva ad ogni caso.  51  Signora", disse l'uomo allegro, "Maria vi fa grazia  ché ho trovato, in buona fede, che la vostra amicizia è nobile.  Altri guadagnano molto di altrui lode per le loro azioni,  ma la deferenza che mi riservano è immeritata nel mio caso.  È un onore per te che non percepisci altro che il bene".  "Per Maria", disse la signora, "penso il contrario;  perché se io valessi tutta la meraviglia delle donne viventi  e avessi in mano tutte le ricchezze del mondo,  e dovessi mercanteggiare per conquistarmi un valoroso signore,  con le qualità che conosco di te, cavaliere, qui,  di bellezza, di disinvoltura e di aspetto allegro,  che ho ascoltato prima e che qui ho trovato vere,  allora non dovrebbe essere scelto nessun errante sulla terra prima di te.  "Infatti, signora", disse il cavaliere, "hai fatto molto meglio;  ma io sono fiero del valore che mi attribuite,  e, solennemente vostro servo, vi ritengo mio sovrano,  e divento il tuo cavaliere, e Cristo ti ricompensi!  Così rimuginarono su molte questioni fino a metà mattina,  e la dama fece capire che lo amava molto;  ma il cavaliere rimase in guardia e si comportò in modo corretto.  "Anche se io fossi la donna più bella", così pensava lei,  tanto meno c'è amore nel suo carico", per la sua sorte cercò  quello,  il colpo che lo avrebbe colpito,  e bisognava farlo.  La dama allora cercò di andarsene,  ed egli le concesse questa grazia.  52  Allora lei gli diede il buongiorno con uno sguardo ridente,  e lo stordì mentre stava lì, con parole taglienti:  'Possa Colui che accelera ogni discorso ricompensarti di questo sport!  Ma che tu sia Gawain, la mente è confusa".  'Perché?' disse il cavaliere, e chiese con urgenza,  temendo di aver fallito nelle forme della cortesia.  Ma la dama lo benedisse e parlò come segue:  "Uno grazioso come è giustamente ritenuto Gawain,  con la cortesia contenuta così chiaramente in se stesso,  non avrebbe potuto indugiare così a lungo con una signora,  ma aveva chiesto un bacio per cortesia,  con qualche tocco insignificante alla fine di qualche storia.  Allora Gawain disse: 'In effetti, sia come vuoi tu;  bacerò al tuo comando, come si addice a un cavaliere,  e inoltre, per non dispiacerti, non chiedere altro.  A questo punto lei si avvicina e lo prende tra le braccia,  si china amorevolmente, e il signore la bacia.  Si raccomandano graziosamente a Cristo l'un l'altro;  e lei esce dalla porta senza dire più una parola; |