

SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

When the siege and the assault were ended at Troy,
The city laid waste and burnt into ashes,
The man who had plotted the treacherous scheme
Was tried for the wickedest trickery ever.
It was princely Aeneas and his noble kin 5
Who then subdued kingdoms, and came to be lords
Of almost all the riches of the western isles.
Afterwards noble Romulus hastened to Rome,
With great pride he gave that city its beginnings,
And calls it by his own name, which it still has. 10
Tirius goes to Tuscany and sets up houses,
Langobard in Lombardy establishes homes,
And far over the French sea Felix Brutus
On many broad hillsides settles Britain
with delight; 15
Where war and grief and wonder
Have visited by turns,
And often joy and turmoil
Have alternated since.

And when Britain had been founded by this noble lord, 20
Valiant men bred there, who thrived on battle.
In many an age bygone they brought about trouble.
More wondrous events have occurred in this country
Than in any other I know of, since that same time.
But of all those who dwelt there, of the British kings 25
Arthur was always judged noblest, as I have heard tell.
And so an actual adventure I mean to relate
Which some men consider a marvellous event,
And a prodigious happening among tales about Arthur.
If you will listen to this story just a little while 30
I will tell it at once, as I heard it told

in court.

As it is written down
In story brave and strong,
Made fast in truthful words,
That has endured long.

35

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

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Luckiest under heaven,
King of loftiest mind
Hard it would be
Bolder men to find

60

When New Year was so fresh that it had hardly begun,
Double helpings of food were served on the dais that day.
By the time the king with his knights entered the hall
When the service in the chapel came to an end,
Loud cries were uttered by the clergy and others,
'Nowel' repeated again, constantly spoken;
And then the nobles hurried to hand out New Year's gifts,
Cried their wares noisily, gave them by hand,
And argued excitedly over those gifts.
Ladies laughed out loud, even though they had lost,
And the winner was not angry, you may be sure.

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5

And Agravain à la Dure Main on the other side; 110
Both the king's nephews and outstanding knights.
Bishop Baldwin heads the table in the highest seat,
And Ywain, son of Urien, dined as his partner.
These knights were set on the dais and sumptuously served, 115
And after them many a true man at the side tables.
Then the first course was brought in with trumpets blaring,
Many colourful banners hanging from them.
The novel sound of kettledrums with the splendid pipes
Waked echoes with shrill and tremulous notes, 120
That many hearts leapt at the outburst of music.
At the same time servings of such exquisite food,
Abundance of fresh meat, in so many dishes
That space could hardly be found in front of the guests
To set down the silverware holding various stews 125
on the board.
Each man who loved himself
Took ungrudged, pair by pair,
From a dozen tasty dishes,
And drank good wine or beer.

Now I will say nothing more about how they were served, 130
For everyone can guess that no shortage was there.
Another noise, quite different, quickly drew near,
So that the king might have leave to swallow some food.
For hardly had the music stopped for a moment, 135
And the first course been properly served to the court,
When there bursts in at the hall door a terrible figure,
In his stature the very tallest on earth.
From the waist to the neck so thick-set and square,
And his loins and his limbs so massive and long, 140
In truth half a giant I believe he was,
But anyway of all men I judge him the largest,
And the most attractive of his size who could sit on a horse.
For while in back and chest his body was forbidding,
Both his belly and waist were becomingly trim, 145
And every part of his body equally elegant
in shape.
His hue astounded them,
Set in his looks so keen;
For boldly he rode in,

Completely emerald green.

150

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

155

Neat tightly-drawn stockings coloured to match
Clinging to his calf, and shining spurs below
Of bright gold, over embroidered and richly striped silk;
And without shoes on his feet there the man rides.

160

And truly all his clothing was brilliant green,
Both the bars on his belt and other gay gems
That were lavishly set in his shining array
Round himself and his saddle, on embroidered silk.
It would be hard to describe even half the fine work
That was embroidered upon it, the butterflies and birds,
With lovely beadwork of green, always centred upon gold.
The pendants on the breast-trappings, the splendid crupper,
The bosses on the bit, and all the metal enamelled.
The stirrups he stood in were coloured the same,
And his saddlebow behind him and his splendid skirts
That constantly glittered and shone, all of green gems;
The horse that he rides entirely of that colour,

165

170

in truth.

A green horse huge and strong,
A proud steed to restrain,
Spirited under bridle,
But obedient to the man.

175

Most attractive was this man attired in green,
With the hair of his head matching his horse.
Fine outspreading locks cover his shoulders;
A great beard hangs down over his chest like a bush,
That like the splendid hair that falls from his head
Was clipped all around above his elbows,
So that his upper arms were hidden, in the fashion
Of a royal capados that covers the neck.
That great horse's mane was treated much the same,
Well curled and combed, with numerous knots

180

185

Plaited with gold thread around the fine green,
Always a strand of his hair with another of gold. 190
His tail and his forelock were braided to match,
Both tied with a ribbon of brilliant green,
Studded with costly gems to the end of the tail,
Then tightly bound with a thong to an intricate knot
Where many bright bells of burnished gold rang. 195
No such horse upon earth, nor such a rider indeed,
Had any man in that hall before thought to see
with his eyes.

His glance was lightning swift,
All said who saw him there; 200
It seemed that no one could
His massive blows endure.

Yet he had no helmet nor hauberk either,
No neck-armour or plate belonging to arms,
No spear and no shield to push or to strike; 205
But in one hand he carried a holly-branch
That is brilliantly green when forests are bare,
And an axe in the other, monstrously huge;
A cruel battle-axe to tell of in words, if one could.
The great head was as broad as a measuring-rod, 210
The spike made entirely of green and gold steel,
Its blade brightly burnished, with a long cutting-edge
As well fashioned to shear as the keenest razor.
The grim man gripped the handle, a powerful staff,
That was wound with iron to the end of the haft 215
And all engraved in green with craftsmanly work.
It had a thong wrapped about it, fastened to the head,
And then looped round the handle several times,
With many splendid tassels attached to it
With buttons of bright green, richly embroidered. 220
This giant bursts in and rides through the hall,
Approaching the high dais, disdainful of peril,
Greeting none, but haughtily looking over their heads.
The first words he spoke, 'Where is,' he demanded,
'The governor of this crowd? Glad should I be 225
To clap eyes on the man, and exchange with him
a few words.'

He looked down at the knights.

As he rode up and down,
Then paused, waiting to see
Who had the most renown. 230

For long there was only staring at the man,
For everyone marvelled what it could mean
That a knight and a horse might take such a colour
And become green as grass, and greener it seemed 235
Than green enamel shining brightly on gold.
All those standing there gazed, and warily crept closer,
Bursting with wonder to see what he would do;
For many marvels they had known, but such a one never;
So the folk there judged it phantasm or magic. 240
For this reason many noble knights feared to answer:
And stunned by his words they sat there stock-still,
While dead silence spread throughout the rich hall
As though everyone fell asleep, so was their talk stilled
at a word. 245

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

Then Arthur confronts that wonder before the high table, 250
And saluted him politely, for afraid was he never,
And said, 'Sir, welcome indeed to this place;
I am master of this house, my name is Arthur.
Be pleased to dismount and spend some time here, I beg,
And what you have come for we shall learn later.' 255
'No, by heaven,' said the knight, 'and him who sits there,
To spend time in this house was not the cause of my coming.
But because your name, sir, is so highly regarded,
And your city and your warriors reputed the best, 260
Dauntless in armour and on horseback afield,
The most valiant and excellent of all living men,
Courageous as players in other noble sports,
And here courtesy is displayed, as I have heard tell,
And that has brought me here, truly, on this day. 265
You may be assured by this branch that I carry
That I approach you in peace, seeking no battle.
For had I travelled in fighting dress, in warlike manner,

A man's fate must be tried.'

565

He stays there all that day, and makes ready the next,
Calls early for his accoutrement, and all was brought in.
First a crimson carpet was stretched over the floor,
A heap of gilded armour gleaming brightly piled there.
The brave knight steps on it and examines his armour,
Dressed in a costly doublet of silk

570

Under a well-made capados, fastened at the top
And trimmed with white ermine on the inside.
Then they fitted metal shoes upon the knight's feet,
Clasped his legs in steel with elegant greaves
With knee-pieces attached to them, highly polished
And fastened to his knees with knots of gold.

575

Next fine cuisses that neatly enclosed
His thick muscular thighs, with thongs attached,
And then the linked mail-shirt made of bright steel rings
Covered that man and his beautiful clothes:

580

Well burnished braces on both his arms,
With fine elbow-pieces and gloves of steel plate,
And all the splendid equipment that would benefit him
at that time;

585

With costly coat-armour,
His gold spurs worn with pride,
Girt with a trusty sword,
A silk belt round him tied.

All locked in his armour his gear looked noble:
The smallest fastening or loop was gleaming with gold.

590

In armour as he was, he went to hear mass
Offered and celebrated for him at the high altar.

Then he comes to the king and his fellows at court,
Graciously takes his leave of lords and ladies;

595

And they kissed and escorted him, commending him to Christ.

By then Gringolet was ready, fitted with a saddle
That splendidly shone with many gold fringes,

Newly studded all over for that special purpose;
The bridle striped all along, and trimmed with bright gold;

600

The adornment of the trapping and the fine saddle-skirts,
The crupper and the horse-cloth matched the saddle-bows,
All covered with gold studs on a background of red,

So that the whole glittered and shone like the sun.
Then Gawain seizes his helmet and kisses it quickly, 605
That was strongly stapled and padded inside.

It stood high on his head, fastened at the back
With a shining silk band over the mailed neck-guard,
Embroidered and studded with the finest gems
On a broad border of silk with birds covering the seams - 610
Popinjays depicted between periwinkles,
Turtledoves and true-love flowers embroidered so thick
As if many women had worked on it seven years
in town.

A circlet still more precious 615
Was ringed about his head,
Made with perfect diamonds
Of every brilliant shade.



Then they brought out the shield of shining gules,
With the pentangle painted on it in pure gold. 620
He swings it over his baldric, throws it round his neck,
Where it suited the knight extremely well.
And why the pentangle should befit that noble prince
I intend to explain, even should that delay me.
It is a symbol that Solomon designed long ago 625
As an emblem of fidelity, and justly so;
For it is a figure consisting of five points,
Where each line overlaps and locks into another,
And the whole design is continuous, and in England is called
Everywhere, I am told, the endless knot. 630
Therefore it suits this knight and his shining arms,
For always faithful in five ways, and five times in each case,
Gawain was reputed as virtuous, like refined gold,
Devoid of all vice, and with all courtly virtues 635
adorned.

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

First he was judged perfect in his five senses, 640
And next his five fingers never lost their dexterity;
And all his earthly faith was in the five wounds

That Christ suffered on the cross, as the creed declares.
And wherever this man found himself in battle
His fixed thought was that, above all other things,
All his fortitude should come from the five joys 645
That the mild Queen of Heaven found in her child.
For this reason the gracious knight had
Her image depicted on the inside of his shield,
So that when he glanced at it his heart never quailed. 650
The fifth group of five the man respected, I hear,
Was generosity and love of fellow-men above all;
His purity and courtesy were never lacking,
And surpassing the others, compassion: these noble five
Were more deepy implanted in that man than any other. 655
Now truly, all these five groups were embodied in that knight,
Each one linked to the others in an endless design,
Based upon five points that was never unfinished,
Not uniting in one line nor separating either;
Without ending anywhere at any point that I find, 660
No matter where the line began or ran to an end.
Therefore the knot was fashioned on his bright shield
Royally with red gold upon red gules,
That is called the true pentangle by learned people
who know. 665
Now Gawain, lance in hand,
Is ready to depart;
He bade them all farewell,
Not to return, he thought. ✓

He set spurs to his horse and sprang on his way 670
So vigorously that sparks flew up from the stones.
All who watched that fair knight leave sighed from the heart,
And together whispered one to another,
Distressed for that handsome one, 'What a pity indeed
That your life must be squandered, noble as you are! 675
To find his equal on earth is not easy, in faith.
To have acted more cautiously would have been much wiser,
And have appointed that dear man to become a duke:
To be a brilliant leader of men, as he is well suited,
And would better have been so than battered to nothing, 680
Beheaded by an ogrish man out of excessive pride.
Whoever knew a king to take such foolish advice

As knights offer in arguments about Christmas games?
A great deal of warm water trickled from eyes
When that elegant lord set out from the city 685
that day.

He did not linger there,
But swiftly went his way;
Taking perplexing roads 690
As I have heard books say.

Now rides this knight through the realm of England,
Sir Gawain, in God's name, though he found it no pleasure.
Often friendless and alone he passes his nights,
Finding before him no food that he liked.
He had no fellow but his horse by forest and hill, 695
And no one but God to talk to on the way,
Until he came very close to the north part of Wales.
All the islands of Anglesey he keeps on his left,
And crosses over the fords at the headlands,
There at the Holyhead, and came ashore again 700
In the wilderness of Wirral. There few people lived
Whom either God or good-hearted men could love.
And always as he rode he asked those whom he met
If they had heard anyone speak of a green knight
Or of a green chapel in any place round about; 705
And they all answered him no, that never in their lives
Had they ever seen a man who had such colour
of green.

Strange roads the knight pursued
Through many a dreary space, 710
Turning from side to side
To find the meeting-place.

Many fells he climbed over in territory strange,
Far distant from his friends like an alien he rides.
At every ford or river where the knight crossed 715
He found an enemy facing him, unless he was in luck,
And so ugly and fierce that he was forced to give fight.
So many wonders befell him in the hills,
It would be tedious to recount the least part of them.
Sometimes he fights dragons, and wolves as well, 720
Sometimes with wild men who dwelt among the crags;

Both with bulls and with bears, and at other times boars,
And ogres who chased him across the high fells.
Had he not been valiant and resolute, trusting in God,
He would surely have died or been killed many times. 725
For fighting troubled him less than the rigorous winter,
When cold clear water fell from the clouds
And froze before it could reach the faded earth.
Half dead with the cold Gawain slept in his armour
More nights than enough among the bare rocks, 730
Where splashing from the hilltops the freezing stream runs,
And hung over his head in hard icicles.
Thus in danger, hardship and continual pain
This knight rides across the land until Christmas Eve
alone. 735

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

Over a hill in the morning in splendour he rides 740
Into a dense forest, wondrously wild;
High slopes on each side and woods at their base
Of massive grey oaks, hundreds growing together;
Hazel and hawthorn were densely entangled, 745
Thickly festooned with coarse shaggy moss,
Where many miserable birds on the bare branches
Wretchedly piped for torment of the cold.
The knight on Gringolet hurries under the trees,
Through many a morass and swamp, a solitary figure, 750
Troubled about his plight, lest he should be unable
To attend mass for that lord who on that same night
Was born of a maiden, our suffering to end;
And therefore sighing he prayed, 'I beg of you, Lord,
And Mary, who is gentlest mother so dear, 755
For some lodging where I might devoutly hear mass
And your matins tomorrow, humbly I ask;
And to this end promptly repeat my pater and ave
and creed.'

Bewailing his misdeeds, 760
And praying as he rode,
He often crossed himself

They laughed and joked awhile
In speech deserving praise;
Then quickly went to sup
On new delicacies.

1400

Afterwards they sat by the fire in the lord's chamber,
And servants many times brought in marvellous wine;
And once again in their jesting they agreed the next day
To observe the same covenant as they had made before:
Whatever fortune befell them, to exchange what they won,
Whatever new things they were, at night when they met.
They renewed the agreement before the whole court —
The pledge-drink was brought in with jokes at that time —
Then they graciously took leave of each other at last,
Every man hastening quickly to bed.

1405

1410

By the time cock-crow had sounded three times
The lord had leapt out of bed and each of his men,
So that breakfast and mass were duly done,
And long before daybreak they were all on their way
to the chase.

1415

Through fields they canter soon,
Loud with hunting-horns;
Headlong the hounds run
Uncoupled among the thorns.

1420

Soon they give tongue at the edge of a marsh;
The huntsman urged on the hounds that found the scent first,
Shouting at them wildly in a loud voice.
The hounds who heard him raced there in haste
And rushed towards the trail, forty of them together.
Then such a deafening babel from gathered hounds rose
That the rocky bank echoed from end to end.
Huntsmen encouraged them with horn-blasts and shouts;
And then all in a throng they rushed together
Between a pool in that thicket and a towering crag.
On a wooded knoll near a cliff at the edge of the marsh
Where fallen rocks were untidily scattered,
They ran to the dislodging, with men at their heels.
The hunters surrounded both the crag and the knoll —
Until they were certain that inside their circle
Was the beast which had made the bloodhounds give tongue.

1425

1430

1435

Then they beat on the bushes and called him to come out;
And he broke cover ferociously through a line of men.
An incredible wild boar charged out there,
Which long since had left the herd through his age, 1440
For he was massive and broad, greatest of all boars,
Terrible when he snorted. Then many were dismayed,
For three men in one rush he threw on their backs,
And made away fast without doing more harm.
The others shouted 'hi!' and 'hay, hay!' at the tops of their voices, 1445
Put horns to mouth and loudly sounded recall.
Many hunters and hounds joyfully gave tongue,
Hurrying after this boar with outcry and clamour
to kill.

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

Men press forward to shoot at him then,
Loosed their arrows at him, hit him many times; 1455
But those that struck his shoulders were foiled by their toughness,
And none of them could pierce through the bristles on his brow.
Although the polished shaft shivered into pieces,
The head rebounded away wherever it struck.
But when the hits hurt him with their constant blows, 1460
Frenzied with fighting he turns headlong on the men,
And injures them savagely when he charges out,
So that many grew fearful and drew back further.
But the lord on a lively horse races after him,
Like a valiant hunter, blowing his horn. 1465
He urged the hounds on, and through dense thickets rode
Following this wild boar until the sun went down.
So they spent the day in this manner, in this wild chase,
While our gracious knight lies in his bed:
Gawain, happily at home amid bright-coloured bedding 1470
so rich.

Nor did the lady fail
To wish her guest good day;
Early she was there 1475
His mood to mollify.

She comes to the curtain and peeps in at the knight.
Sir Gawain welcomes her politely at once,
And she returns his greeting with eager speech,
Seats herself gently at his side and quickly laughs,
And with a charming glance at him uttered these words: 1480
'Sir, if you are Gawain, it astonishes me
That a man always so strongly inclined to good,
Cannot grasp the rules of polite behaviour,
And if someone instructs him, lets them drop out of mind.
You have quickly forgotten what I taught you yesterday, 1485
By the very truest lesson I could put into words.'
'What was that?' said the knight, 'Indeed, I don't know at all.
If what you say is true, the blame is all mine.'
'Yet I told you about kissing,' the fair lady replied,
'To act quickly wherever a glance of favour is seen; 1490
That befits every knight who practises courtesy.'
'Dear lady, enough of such talk,' said that brave man,
'For I dare not do that, lest I were refused.
If repulsed, I should be at fault for having presumed.'
'Ma foi,' said the gay lady, 'you could not be refused; 1495
You are strong enough to force your will if you wish,
If any woman were so ill-mannered as to reject you.'
'Yes, indeed,' said Gawain, 'what you say is quite true;
But in my country force is considered ignoble,
And so is each gift that is not freely given. 1500
I am at your disposal, to kiss when it pleases you,
You may take one when you like, and stop as seems good,
in a while.'
She bends down over him
And gives the knight a kiss; 1505
For long they then discuss
Love's misery and bliss.
'I would learn from you, sir,' said that gentle lady,
If the question was not irksome, what the reason was
That someone as young and valiant as yourself, 1510
So courteous and chivalrous as you are known far and wide —
And of all the aspects of chivalry, the thing most praised
Is the true practice of love, knighthood's very lore;
For to speak of the endeavours of true knights,
The written heading and text of their deeds is that: 1515

Because of the agreement we made on the first night,
When you faithfully and truly kept your pledged word,
Gave me all your winnings, as an honest man should.
That other feint, sir, I gave you for the next day,
When you kissed my lovely wife and gave me those kisses. 2350
For both occasions I aimed at you two mere mock blows
without harm.

True man must pay back truly,
Then he need nothing fear;
You failed me the third time 2355
And took that blow therefore.

'For it is my belt you are wearing, that same woven girdle,
My own wife gave it to you, I know well in truth.
I know all about your kisses, and your courteous manners, 2360
And my wife's wooing of you: I arranged it myself.

I sent her to test you, and to me truly you seem
One of the most perfect men who ever walked on the earth.
As pearls are more valuable than the white peas,
So is Gawain, in all truth, before other fair knights. 2365

Only here you fell short a little, sir, and lacked fidelity,
But that was not for fine craftsmanship, nor wooing either,
But because you wanted to live: so I blame you the less.'

That other brave man stood speechless a long while,
So mortified and crushed that he inwardly squirmed; 2370
All the blood in his body burned in his face,
So that he winced with shame at what the man said.

The first words that the knight uttered there
Were, 'A curse upon cowardice and covetousness!
You breed boorishness and vice that ruin virtue.' 2375

Then he took hold of the knot and looses the buckle,
Flung the belt violently towards that man:

'There it is, the false thing, may the devil take it!
For fear of your blow taught me cowardice, 2380
To give way to covetousness, be false to my nature,

The generosity and fidelity expected of knights.
Now I am false and unworthy, and have always dreaded
Treachery and deceit: may misfortune and grief

befall both! 2385
Sir, humbly I confess
My good name is marred.

Let me regain your trust,
Next time I'll be on guard.'

Then the other man laughed, and graciously said,
'The wrong you did me I consider wiped out.
You have so cleanly confessed yourself, admitted your fault, 2390
And done honest penance on the edge of my blade.
I declare you absolved of that offence, and washed as clean
As if you had never transgressed since the day you were born.
And I make you a gift, sir, of my gold-bordered belt;
Since it is green like my gown, Sir Gawain, you may 2395
Remember this meeting in the world where you mingle
With princes of rank: it will be a true token
Of the exploit of the Green Chapel among chivalrous knights.
And you shall come back to my castle at this New Year,
And we will see out the revelry of this high feast 2400
with joy.'

He pressed him earnestly
And said, 'We shall, I know,
Reconcile you with my wife,
Who was your cunning foe.' 2405

'No, indeed,' said the knight, and seizing his helmet
Takes it off politely and gives the lord thanks;
'I have stayed long enough: good fortune attend you,
And may he who gives all honours soon send you reward! 2410
And commend me to that gracious one, your lovely wife,
Both the one and the other of those honourable ladies
Who have so cleverly deluded their knight with their game.
But it is no wonder if a fool acts insanely
And is brought to grief through womanly wiles; 2415
For so was Adam beguiled by one, here on earth,
Solomon by several women, and Samson was another —
Delilah was cause of his fate — and afterwards David
Was deluded by Bathsheba, and suffered much grief.
Since these were ruined by their wives, it would be a great gain 2420
To love women and not trust them, if a man knew how.
For these were the noblest of old, whom fortune favoured
Above all others on earth, or who dwelt
under heaven. 2425
Beguiled were they all

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

'But for your belt,' said Gawain, 'God repay you for that!
I accept it gratefully, not for its wonderful gold, 2430
Nor for the girdle itself nor its silk, nor its long pendants,
Nor its value nor the honour it confers, nor its fine workmanship,
But I shall look at it often as a sign of my failing,
And when I ride in triumph, recall with remorse
The corruption and frailty of the perverse flesh, 2435
How quick it is to pick up blotches of sin.
And so, when pride in my knightly valour stirs me,
A glance at this girdle will humble my heart.
Just one thing I would ask, if it would not offend you,
Since you are the lord of the country that I have dwelt in, 2440
Honourably treated in your house — may he reward you
Who holds up the heavens and sits upon high! —
What do you call yourself rightly, and then no more demands?'
'I will tell you that truthfully,' replied that other man,
'Bertilak of Hautdesert I am called in this land. 2445
Through the power of Morgan le Fay, who lives under my roof,
And her skill in learning, well taught in magic arts,
She has acquired many of Merlin's occult powers —
For she had love-dealings at an earlier time
With that accomplished scholar, as all your knights know 2450
at home.

Morgan the goddess
Therefore is her name;
No one, however haughty 2455
Or proud she cannot tame.

'She sent me in this shape to your splendid hall
To make trial of your pride, and to judge the truth
Of the great reputation attached to the Round Table.
She sent me to drive you demented with this marvel, 2460
To have terrified Guenevere and caused her to die
With horror at that figure who spoke like a spectre
With his head in his hand before the high table.
That is she who is in my castle, the very old lady,
Who is actually your aunt, Arthur's half-sister,