

Early English Poetry

Read in Old and Middle English by Charles W. Dunn

Caedmon's Hymn

Excerpts from: Seafarer, Beowulf, Battle of Maldon

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Chaucer's Wife of the Bath's Tale

Cover design by Ronald Clyne

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EARLY ENGLISH POETRY

RECITED BY CHARLES W. DUNN

This record provides readings of some of the finest poetry produced in the English language prior to Shakespeare. Like any other language, English has been constantly changing, in sounds, forms, arrangements, syllabic stress, intonation, and vocabulary. We cannot be absolutely certain what it sounded like in the middle ages, but scholars have reconstructed reasonable approximations of the various periods, which have been followed here.

For the most part, it has also been possible to determine the precise meaning of Early English writings. All of the works read here have been printed in their original form. To illustrate word order and sentence structure, three of the Old English passages have been translated quite literally. Two longer passages, one in Old English and one in Middle English, have been accompanied with poetic translations to suggest something of the literary quality of the originals. The excerpt from Chaucer is sufficiently close to Modern English to require no further interpretation than the glosses provided.

The English language was brought to Britain about A.D. 450 by wandering Germanic tribes, who also brought with them a tradition of alliterative poetry and a repertoire of heroic legends. Though the English were Christianized at the end of the sixth century, the poetry surviving from the Old English period of the language (450-1100) is predominantly heroic in tone and Germanic in theme. With the coming of the French after the Conquest of 1066, a new kind of poetry emerged in the Middle English period (1100-1450), which was courtly rather than heroic. Each period achieved a grandeur of its own, as a comparison between Beowulf and Gawain will show. The other great achievement of the Middle English period lies in the comedy and humor of Chaucer's poetry.

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SIDE I -- OLD ENGLISH POETRY

Side I contains Old English poetry composed in alliterative verse. Each line contains four beats. The initial sounds of the first and third beats usually alliterate; the second may or may not alliterate; and the fourth generally provides contrast by not alliterating. (Any vowel may alliterate with either the same or any other vowel; each of the clusters sc, sp, and st alliterates only with the same cluster.)

SIDE I, Band 1: CAEDMON'S HYMN

Bede in his Ecclesiastical History attributes this hymn to Caedmon, who was a monk in the monastery of Whitby. The original was probably composed between A.D. 660 and 680 and is thus one of the oldest extant poems reflecting the Christianity which Augustine had first introduced in 597 among the English.

Text (a later Old English version): Bright's Anglo-Saxon Reader, rev. J. R. Hulbert (Henry Holt & Co., 1953), pp. 9-10. Translation: Charles W. Dunn.

Nū wē¹⁰ sculon herigean heofonrices Weard,
Meotodes meahte and his mōdgeþanc,
weorc¹¹ Wuldorfæder, swā hē wundra gehwæs,
ēce Drihten. ōr¹² onstealde.
Hē ærest scēop eorðan bearnum
heofon tō hrōfe, hālig Scyppend;
þā middangeard mōnncynnes Weard,
ēce Drihten, æfter tēode
firum foldan, Frēa ælmihtig.

Now we should praise heaven-Kingdom's guardian, the maker's might, and his mind's embrace, work of the father of glory, as he of each marvel, the eternal lord, the foundation has laid. First he shaped for earth's children heaven as a roof, the holy shaper; then middle-earth, mankind's guardian, the eternal lord, afterwards fashioned as land for men, the ruler almighty.

SIDE I, Band 2: THE BATTLE OF MALDON

This selection is an excerpt from an historical poem, of which only 325 lines survive. It deals with a minor victory of Danish raiders in Essex in A.D. 991 over a small English territorial force. The Essex leader, Byrhtnoth, rashly allows the Danes free access to land over a causeway. He is killed in battle. The more heroic among his followers, some of whom are named in the passage excerpted, fight to the death to avenge their leader.

Though composed late in the Old English period, the spirit of the poem is comparable to that of the earlier heroic poetry, and the sentiments actually preserve unchanged the very ideals attributed to the Germanic people on the continent by Tacitus in the first century: "it is a reproach and shame for life to have outlived the chieftain and to have returned from the battle-field. To defend and protect him and to ascribe one's own brave deeds to his renown is the height of loyalty. The chieftain fights for victory; his retainers fight for their chieftain."

Text: Bright's Anglo-Saxon Reader, pp. 158-159.
Translation: C. W. Dunn.

Ðā gýt on orde stōd Eadweard sē langa,
gearo¹ and geornful; gylpwordum spræc,
þæt hē nolde flēogan fōtmæl landes, [275]
ofer bæc būgan, þā his bētera læg²:
hē bræc þone bordweall, and wið ðā beornas feaht,
oð þæt hē his singgyfan on þām sāmnum
wurðlice wræc,³ ær hē on wæle lāge.
Swā dyde Ælfric, æpele gefēra, [280]
fūs and forðgeorn, feaht eornoste,
Sibyrhtes brōðor and swiðe mænig oþer
clufon celled bord, cēne hī wædon:
bæst bordes lārig, and sēo byrne sang
gryrelōða sum. Ðā æt gūðe slōh [285]
Offa þone sālidan, þæt hē on eorðan fēoll,
and ðær Gaddes mæg grund gesōhte:
raðe wearð æt hilde Offa forhēawen;
hē hæfde bēah geforþod þæt hē his frēan gehēt,
swā hē bēotode ær wið his bēahgifu, [290]
þæt hī sceoldon bēgen on burh ridan,
hāle tō hāme, oððe on hēre cūngan,⁴
on wælstōwe wundum sweltan;
hē læg tēgenlice ðeodne gehende.
Ðā wearð borda gebræc; brimmen wōdon, [295]
gūðe gegremode; gār oft purhwōd
fēages feorhhūs. Forð þā⁵ ēode Wistan,
Durstānes sunu, wið þās sēcgas feaht;
hē wæs on geþrange hyra prēora bana,
ær him Wigelines bearn on þām wæle lāge. [300]
Ðær wæs stlō gemōt: stōdon fæste
wigan on gewinne, wigend cruncon,
wundum wērige; wæl fēol on eorþan.
Oswold and Ealdwold ealle hwile,
bēgen þā gebrōþru, beornas trymedon, [305]
hyra winemāgas wordon bēdon
þæt hī þær æt bearme polian sceoldon,
unwāclīce wæpna⁶ neotan.
Byrhtwold mapelode, bord hafenode,
sē wæs eald genēat, æsc acwēhte, [310]
hē ful baldlice beornas lārde:
"Hige sceal þē heardra, heorte þē cēnre,
mōd sceal þē mære, þē ure mægen lytlað.
Hēr līð ure ealdor eall forhēawen,
gūð on grēote; ā mæg gnornian [315]
sē ðe nū fram þīs wigplegan wendan þenceð.
Ic eom frōd fēores: fram ic ne wille,
ac ic mē be healfe mīnum hlāforde
be swā lēofan mēn licgan þence."

Then Edward the tall still stood in the front, eager and pressing. In vaunting words he said that he would not flee one foot's length of land, would not draw back since one better than he lay dead. He burst through the shield-wall and fought against the warriors till he had worthily avenged his treasure-giver upon the sea-raiders, before he lay dead in the slaughter.

So did Ethric, a noble companion, ready and eager for action; earnestly he fought, Sibyrht's brother; and many, many another cleft the round shields. Boldly they battled. The shield-edge burst, and the battle-coat sang a song of horror.

Then in strife Offa struck the viking so that he fell to earth, and there Gadd's kinsman sought a resting-place. Soon in the conflict Offa was cut down. But he had performed what he promised his lord when earlier he avowed to his ring-giver that they should both ride back to their stronghold, home uninjured, or should fall in the ranks, should die of wounds in the field of slaughter. Faithful he fell beside his leader.

Then there was shattering of shields. The vikings advanced, enraged for action. Spear often pierced the life's core of the doomed. Forward then went Wistan, son of Thurstan; he fought against the foemen. He was in the throng a slayer of three of them before he lay dead in the slaughter, the offspring of Wigelin. Stubborn was the strife there. The fighters stood firm in the struggle; warriors fell, worn down with wounds; the slain fell to earth.

All this while Oswold and Ealdwold, the two brothers, encouraged the men, charged their fellow-kinsmen with words that they should endure there at need, should wield their weapons unwavering.

Byrhtwold spoke, raised his shield--he was a seasoned companion--, flourished the ash-wood. Full boldly he advised the warriors:

"Spirit shall be firmer, heart the braver, resolve shall be the greater, as our force becomes smaller. Here lies our lord, hewed all to death, the good man in the dust. Forever may he repent who thinks now to retreat from this play of conflict.

"I am old in age. Desert I will not, but for my part I think to lie beside my lord in death, beside so dear a man."

This remarkable lyric is the reverie of a man who cannot renounce his seafaring life despite all its hardships. The concluding lines, which moralize on human behavior, have been omitted.

Text: Bright's Anglo-Saxon Reader, pp. 169-171.

Translation: C. W. Dunn.

Mæg ic be mē sylfum sōðgied wrecan,
 sƿas secgan, hū ic geswinedagum
 earfoðhwile oft ƿrōwade,
 bitre brēostceare gebiden hæbbe,
 gecunnad in cēole cearselda fela,
 atol ƿƿa gewealc; ƿær mec oft bigeat
 nearo nihtwaco æt nacan stefnan,
 ƿonne hē be clifum cnossað; calde geƿrunge
 wæron mine fēt, forste gebunden
 caldum clommum; ƿær ƿa ceare seofedun
 hāt ymb heortan. Hungor innan slāt
 mere-wērges mōd. ƿæt sē mon ne wāt
 ƿe him on foldan fægrost limpeð,
 hū ic earm cearig is-cealdne sē
 winter wunade, wræccan lāstum
 [wynnum bilōren], wine-mægum bidroren,
 bihongen hrīm-gicelum; hægl scūrum flæg.
 ƿær ic ne gehyrde butan hlimman sē,
 is-caldne wæg, hwilum ylfete song;
 dyde ic mē tō gomene ganetes hlēoƿor
 and huilpan swēg fore hleahtor wera,
 mæw singende fore medo-drince.
 Stormas ƿær stān-clifu bēotan, ƿær him stearn
 oncwæð
 Isig-fepera. Ful oft ƿæt earn bigeal
 urig-fepera
 Nænig hlēo-mæga
 fēa-sceaftig ferð fēran meahte.
 For ƿon him gelyfeð līt, sē ƿe āh lifes wyn,
 gebiden in burgum bealo-sƿa hwōn,
 wlone and win-gāl, hū ic wērig oft
 in brim-lāde bīdan sceolde.
 Nāƿ niht-scūa, norpan sniwe,
 hrīm hrūsan bond, hægl feol on eorpan,
 corna caldast. For ƿon cnyssað nū
 heortan geƿohtas, ƿæt ic hēan strēamas,
 sealt-ƿƿa gelāc, sylf cunnige.
 Monað mōdes lust mæla gehwylce
 ferð tō fēran, ƿæt ic feor heonan
 elƿeodigra eard gesēce.
 For ƿon nis ƿæs mōd-wlone mon ofer eorpan,
 ne his gifena ƿæs gōd, ne in geoguƿe tō ƿæs hwæt,
 ne in his dædum tō ƿæs dēor, ne him his dryhten
 tō ƿæs hold,
 ƿæt hē ā his sē-fore sorge næbbe,
 tō hƿon hine Dryhten gedōn wille.
 Ne bīƿ him tō hearpan hyge, ne tō hring-ƿege,
 ne tō wife wyn, ne tō worulde hyht,
 ne ymbe ōwiht elles nefne ymb ƿða gewealc,
 ac ā hafað longunge, sē ƿe on lagu fundað.
 Bearwas blōstmum nimað, byrig fægriað,
 wongas wlitigað, woruld onetteð.
 Ealle ƿa gemoniað mōdes fūsne
 sefan tō siðe, ƿām ƿe swā ƿenceð.
 On flōd-wegas feor gewitað.
 Swylce gēac monað gēomran reorde;
 singeð sumeres weard, sorge bēodeð,
 bitter in brēost-hord. ƿæt se beorn ne wāt,
 ēst-ēadig secg hwæt ƿa sume drēogað,
 ƿe ƿa wræc-lāstas widost leogað!
 For ƿon nū mīn hyge hweorfeð ofer hreƿer-locan,
 mīn mōd-sefa mid mere-flōde
 ofer hwæles ēƿel, hweorfeð wide
 ofer eorpan scēatas, cymeð eft tō mē
 gifre and grædig, gielles ānfloga,
 hweteð on hwæl-weg hreƿer unwearnum
 ofer holma gelagu . . .

[5]

[10]

[15]

[20]

[25]

[30]

[35]

[40]

[45]

[50]

[55]

[60]

I can compose a song of truth about myself, can tell of journeys, how through wearisome days I have often endured times of hardship, have felt bitter heart's care, in ship have come to know many sad places, the terrible rolling of the waves. Anxious watching at night has often summoned me there at the bow of the vessel when she skirted the cliffs. With cold my feet were crippled, bound in the cold clasp of frost; there care has sobbed hot within my heart. Hunger has gnawed within my sea-weary spirit.

The man for whom life upon land prospers most fair does not know how I have spent the winter miserably wretched on the ice-cold sea, in the paths of exile deprived of pleasure, severed from kindly kinsmen, caked with hoary icicles; the hail has blown in gusts. There I have heard only the sea raging, the ice-cold wave, and at times the song of the swan. I have found sport in the voice of the gannet and call of the curlew in place of the laughter of men, the sea-mew singing in place of mead-drinking. There storms beat the stone-cliffs, where the tern called back, icy of feather. Full often the eagle has screamed, feather-soaked . . . No sheltering kinsman was there who could comfort (read *frefran*) my joyless mood.

He indeed who has known the delights of life, who has tasted in towns but little of miseries, bold and wine-heated, will scarcely believe how I often have been compelled to stay weary on the sea-ways. The night-shadow has darkened, snow has come from the north, frost has bound the earth, hail has fallen on land, the coldest of grains. Yet thoughts now goad my heart that I should try out the high seas myself, the salt waves' upheaving. Time after time the call of my spirit urges my soul to set out that I may discover far hence some strange country.

There is indeed no man on earth so proud in heart, or so rich in gifts, or so daring in his youthfulness, or so noble in his deeds, or with lord so kind to him, that in his sea-faring he will not always have care as to what his Lord will bring him. For him there will be no thought of harp, or ring-giving, or the joy of wife, or the world's reward, or anything else but the waves' swelling; but always he who fares on the waters will have longing.

The groves will bear blossoms, dwelling-places will flourish, plains become beautiful, the world will grow forth. All these things then urge on the spirit of the eager-hearted who is so minded to journey (read *gewitan*) afar over the ways of the flood. The cuckoo also urges with his sad call, summer's har-binger sings, foretells sorrow, bitter in breast. The man does not know, the person favored by fortune, what some undergo then, those who follow farthest the paths of exile. But yet, now my spirit soars beyond my soul's confinement, my mind's mood with the sea-tides over the whale's home widely soars, over the earth's bounds, comes back again to me whetted and greedy; the lone flyer screams, she summons my soul out onto the whale's way beyond resistance, over the width of waters.

Beowulf is the only epic which has survived complete from the Old English period. It was probably composed about the middle of the eighth century and was originally intended to be recited orally or sung to the accompaniment of a harp. The poet, who was presumably attached to some Anglo-Saxon court, had a profound knowledge of the pre-Christian Germanic tribal traditions but was concerned with their Christian and philosophic implications.

The setting, which is partially historical, is laid in sixth-century Scandinavia. The hero, Beowulf of Geatland (South Sweden), is legendary, as are the principal events. In the first part of the poem, Beowulf as a young prince frees the Danish court, which had once sheltered his father in exile, from

the ravages of supernatural sea-monsters. In the second part, the conclusion of which is here presented, Beowulf as an aged king rids his own Geatland of a destructive dragon.

The treatment of this folkloristic plot is both subtle and refined. Beowulf exemplifies the ideal tribal chieftain; the unearthly monsters reflect human error and sin; the collapse of kingdoms results from the failure of their leaders and retainers; and the death of the hero reveals the transitoriness of human achievement.

Text: F. Klaeber, *Beowulf*³ (D. C. Heath & Co., 1950), lines 2724-2927, 2999-3057, 3076-3182.
Translation: C. W. Kennedy, *Beowulf* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1940).

Biowulf mabelode — hē ofer benne spræc,
 2725 wunde wælbēate; wisse hē gearwe,
 þæt hē dæghwīla gedrogen hæfde,
 eorðan wynn(e); ðā wæs eall sceacen
 dōgorgermes, dēað ungemete nēah — :
 'Nū ic suna mīnum sylan wolde
 2730 gūðgewædu, þær mē gifeðe swā
 ænig yrfeheard æfter wurde
 lice gelenge. Ic ðas lēgde hēold
 fiftig wintra; næs sē folccyning,
 ymbesittendra ænig ðara,
 2735 þē mec gūðwinum grētan dorste,
 egesan ðēon. Ic on earde bād
 mælgescæfta, hēold min tela,
 ne sōhte searoniðas, nē mē swōr fela
 aða on unriht. Ic ðas ealles mæg
 2740 feorhbennum sēc gefēan habban;
 forðam mē witan ne ðearf Waldend fira
 morðorbealo māga, þonne min sceaceð
 lif of lice. Nū ðu lungre geong
 hord scēawian under hārne stān,
 2745 Wiglāf lēofa, nū se wyrm ligeð,
 swefeð sære wund, since berēafod.
 Bio nū on ofoste, þæt ic ærwean,
 goldæht ongite, gearo scēawige
 swegle searogimmas, þæt ic ðy sēft mæge
 2750 æfter mādūmwelan mīn alātan
 lif ond lēodscepe, þone ic longe hēold.'
 XXXVIII Ðā ic snūde gefrægn sunu Wihstānes
 æfter wordcwydum wundum dryhtne
 hýran heaðoslocum, hringnet beran,
 2755 brogdne beadusercean under beorges hrōf.
 Geseah ðā sigehrēðig, þā hē bi sesse geong,
 magoþegn mōdig mādūmsigla fealo,
 gold glitnian grunde getenge,
 wundur on wealle, ond þæs wyrmes denn,
 2760 ealdes uhtflogas, orcas stondan,
 fyrrmanna fatu, feormendlēase,
 hyrstum behorene; þær wæs helm monig
 eald ond ðmig, earmbēaga fela
 scarwum gesæled. — Sinc ðaðe mæg,
 2765 gold on grund(e) gumcynnes gehwone
 oferhigian, hýde sē ðe wylle! —
 Swylce hē siomian gesæh segn eallgylden
 hēah ofer horde, hondwundra mæst,
 gelocen leoðocræftum; of ðam lēoma stōd,
 2770 þæt hē þone grundwong ongitan mehte,
 wræte giondwiltan. Næs ðæs wyrmes þær
 onsýn ænig, ac hyne ecg forðam.
 Ðā ic on hlāwe gefrægn hord rēafian,
 eald enta geweorc ænne mannan,
 2775 him on bearm hlodon bunan ond discas
 sylfes dōme; segn ðac genōm,
 bēacna beorhtost. Bill ær gescōd
 — ecg wæs ien — ealdhlāfordes
 þam ðara mādma mundbora wæs
 2780 longe hwile, ligegesas wæg
 hātne for horde, bioroweallende
 middelnihum, oð þæt hē morðre swealt.
 År wæs on ofoste, eftsiðes georn,

frætsum gefyrðred; hyne fyrwet bræc,
 2785 hwæðer collenferð cwicne gemette
 in ðam wongstede Wedra þeoden
 ellenslocne, þær hē hine ær forlēt.
 Hē ða mid þam mādum mārne þeoden,
 dryhten sinne driofigne fand
 2790 ealdres æt ende; hē hine eft ongon
 wæteres weorpan, oð þæt wordes ord
 brēosthord purhbræc.
 [Biorncynig spræc]
 gomel on giohðe — gold scēawode — :
 'Ic ðara frætwa Frēan ealles ðanc,
 2795 Wuldurcynige wordum secge,
 ecum Dryhtne, þē ic hēr on starie,
 þæs ðe ic mōste mīnum lēodum
 ær swyltdæge swylc gestrynan.
 Nū ic on mādma hord mīne bebohte
 2800 frōde feorhlege, tremmað gena
 lēoda þearfe; ne mæg ic hēr leng wesan.
 Hātað heaðomære hlāw gewyrcean
 beorhtne æfter bāle æt brimes nosan;
 sē scel tō gemyndum mīnum lēodum
 2805 hēah hlifian on Hronesnesse,
 þæt hit sælðend syððan hātan
 Biowulfes biorh, ðā ðe brentingas
 ofer flōða genipu feorran drifað.'
 Dyde him of healse hring gyldenne
 2810 þeoden prīsthýdig, þegne gesælde,
 geongum gārigan, goldfāhne helm,
 bēah ond byrnan, hēt hyne brūcan well — :
 'Þu eart endelāf ðisses cynnes,
 Wægmunðinga; ealle wyrd forswēop
 2815 mīne māgas tō metodscæfte,
 eorlas on elne; ic him æfter sceal.'
 þæt wæs þam gomelan gingæste word
 brēostgehygdum, ær hē bæl cure,
 hāte heaðowylmas; him of hræðre gewāt
 2820 sǣwol sēccean sōðfæstra dōm.
 [XXXVIII] Ðā wæs gegongen guman unfrōdum
 earfoðlice, þæt hē on eorðan geseah
 þone lēofestan lifes æt ende
 blēate gebæran. Bona swylce læg,
 2825 egeslic eorðdraca ealdre berēafod,
 bealwe gebæded. Bēahhordum leng
 wyrm wōhbogen wealdan ne mōste,
 ac him irenna ecga fornāmon,
 hearde heaðoscearpe homera lāfe,
 2830 þæt se widdfoga wundum stille
 hrēas on hrūsan horderne nēah.
 Nalles æfter lyfte lācende hwearf
 middelnihum, mādmehta wlanc
 ansýn sýwe, ac hē eorðan gefēoll
 2835 for ðæs hildfruman hondgeweorce.
 Hūru þæt on lande lýt manna ðah
 mægenāgendra mīne gefræge,
 þeah ðe hē dæda gehwæs dystig wære,
 þæt hē wið attorsceaðan oreðe gerædsde,
 2840 oððe hringsele hondum styrede,
 gif hē wæccende weard onfunde
 būon on beorge. Biowulf wearð

dryhtmāðma dæl dēaðe forgolden;
 hæfde æghwæðer ende gefered
 2845 lānan lifes.
 Næs ðā lang tō ðon,
 þæt ðā hildlatan holt ofgefān,
 týdre trēowlogas týne ætsomne,
 ðā ne dorston ær dareðum lācan
 on hyra mandryhtnes miclan þearfe;
 2850 ac hý scamienðe scyldas bæran,
 gūðgewædu þær se gomela læg;
 wlitān on Wilāf. Hē gewergad sæt,
 fēðecempa frēan ealrum nēah,
 wehte hyne wætre; him wiht ne spēow.
 2855 Ne meahte hē on eorðan, ðeah hē uðe wēl
 on ðam frumgære feorh gehealdan,
 nē ðas Wealdendes wiht oncirran;
 wolde dōm Godes dædum rædan
 gumena gehwylcum, swā hē nū gēn dēð.
 2860 Þā wæs æt ðam geongan grim andswaru
 eðbegēte þam ðe ær his elne forlēas.
 Wiglāf mædelode, Wēohstānes sunu,
 sec[g] sārigerð — seah on unlēofe — :
 'þæt, lā, mæg secgan sē ðe wyle sōð specan,
 2865 þæt se mondryhten, sē eow ðā mādmas geaf,
 eoredgeatwe, þē gē þær on standað, —
 þonne hē on ealubence oft gesealde
 healsittendum helm ond byrnan,
 þeoden his þegnum, swylce hē þryðlicost
 2870 ower feor oððe nēah findan mehte — ,
 þæt hē gēnunga gūðgewædu
 wræðe forwurpe, ðā hyne wig beget.
 Nealles folccyning fyrdgesteallum
 gylpan þorfte; hwæðre him God uðe,
 2875 sigora Waldend, þæt hē hyne sylfne gewræc
 āna mid ecge, þa him wæs elnes þearl.
 Ic him lifwraðe lýtne mehte
 ætgifan æt gūðe, ond ongan swā þeah
 ofer mīn gemet mæges helpān;
 2880 symle wæs þý sāmra, þonne ic sweorde drep
 ferhðgeniðlan, fyr unswiðor
 wēoll of gewitte. Wergendra tō lýt
 þrong ymbe þeoden, þā hyne sio þræg becwōm.
 Nū sceal sincþego ond swyrdgifu,
 2885 eall eðelwyn eowrum cynne,
 lufen ālicgean; londrihtes mōt
 þære mægburge monna æghwylc
 idel hweorfan, syððan æðelingas
 feorran gefricgean flēam eowerne,
 2890 dōmlēasan dæd. Dēað bið sēlla
 eorla gehwylcum þonne edwitlif!'
 XL Heht ðā þæt heaðoweorc tō hagan bīodan
 up ofer ecgclif, þær þæt eorlweorod
 morgenlongne dæg mōdgiomor sæt,
 2895 bordhæbbende, bēga on wēnum,
 endedogores ond eftcymes
 lēofes monnes. Lýt swigode
 niwra spella sē ðe næs gerād,
 ac hē sōðlice sægde ofer ealle:
 2900 'Nū is wilgeofa Wedra lēoda,
 dryhten Gēata dēaðbedde fæst,

wunað wælreste wyrmes dædum;
him on efn ligeð ealdorgewinna
sexbennum seoc; sweorde ne meahte
2905 on ðam æglæcean ænige þinga
wunde gewyrcean. Wigláf siteð
ofer Blowulfe, byre Wihstānes,
eorl ofer ðorum unligendum,
healdeð higemæðum hæfodwearde
2910 lēofes ond lāðes.

Nū ys lēodum wēn
orleghwile, syððan under[ne]
Froncum ond Frýsum fyll cyninges
wide weorðeð. Wæs sio wrōht scepen
heard wið Hugas, syððan Higelāc cwōm
2915 faran fliotherge on Frēsna land,
þær hyne Hetware hilde genægdon,
elne geædon mid ofermaegene,
þæt se byrnwiga bûgan sceolde,
fæoll on fēðan; nalles frætwe geaf
2920 ealdor dugoðe. Ūs wæs ā syððan
Merewioingas milts ungyfeðe. —
Nē ic te Swēoðeode sibbe oððe trēowe
wihthe ne wēne, ac wæs wide cūð,
þætte Ongenðio ealdre besnyðede
2925 Hæðcen Hreþling wið Hrefnawudu,
þā for onmēðlan ærest gesōhton
Gēata lēode Gūð-Scilfingas.

þæt ys sio fāhðo ond se fēondscipe,
3000 wælnið wera, ðæs ðe ic [wēn] hafo,
þē ūs sēceað tō Swēona lēoda,
syððan hie gefricgeað frēan ūserne
ealdorlēasne, þone ðe ær gehēold
wið hettendum hord ond rice,
3005 æfter hælca hryre, hwate scildwigan,
folcrēd fremede, oððe furður gēn
eorlscipe efnde. — Nū is ofost betost,
þæt wē þeodcynning þær scēawian,
ond þone gebringan, þē ūs bēagas geaf,
3010 on ādfære. Ne scel ānes hwæt
meltan mid þām mōdigan, ac þær is mǣðma hord,
gold unrime grimme gecea[po]d,
ond nū æt siðestan sylfes fēore
bēagas (geboh)te; þā sceall brond fretan,
3015 æled þeccean, — nalles eorl wegan
mǣððum tō gemyndum, nē mægð scýne
habban on healse hringweorðunge,
ac sceal geōmormōd, golde berēafod
oft nalles æne elland tredan,
3020 nū se herewisa hleahtor ālegde,
gamen ond glēodream. Forðon sceall gār wesan
monig morgenceald mundum bewunden,
hæfen on handa, nalles hearpan swēg
wigend wecccean, ac se wonna hrefn
3025 fūs ofer fægum fela reordian,
earne secgan, hū him æt æte spēow,
þenden hē wið wulf wæl rēafode.
Swā se secg hwata secggende wæs
lāðra spella; hē ne lēag fela
3030 wyrda nē worda. Weorod eall ārās;
ædon unblīðe under Earnanæs,
wollentfære wundur scēawian.
Fundon ðā on sande sǣwullēasne
hlimbed healdan þone þe him hringas geaf
3035 ærran mælum; þā wæs endedæg
gōdum gegongen, þæt se gūðcynning,
Wedra þeoden wundorðeade swealt.
Ær hī þær gesēgan syllicran wiht,
wyrn on wonge wiðerræhtes þær
3040 lāðne licgean; wæs se lēgdraca
grimlic gry(refah) glēdum beswæled;
sē wæs fiftiges fōtgemeaces
lang on legere; lyftwynne hēold
nihtes hwilum, nyðer eft gewāt

3045 dennes niosian; wæs ðā dēaðe fæst,
hæfde eorðscrafa ende genyttod.
Him big stōðan bunan ond orcas,
discas lāgon ond dýre swyrd,
ðmige þurhetone, swā hie wið eorðan fæðm
3050 þusend wintra þær eardodon;
þonne wæs þæt yrfe æacencræftig,
iūmonna gold galdre bewunden,
þæt ðam hringsele hrinan ne mōste
gumena ænig, nefne God sylfa,
3055 sigora Sōðcynning sealde þām ðe hē wolde
— hē is manna gehyld — hord openian,
efne swā hwylcum manna, swā him gemet ðūhte.

Wigláf mǣðelode, Wihstānes sunu:
“Oft sceall eorl monig ānes willan
wræc ādrēogan, swā ūs geworden is.
Ne meahton wē gelæran lēofne þeoden,
3060 rices hyrde ræd ænigne,
þæt hē ne grētte goldweard þone,
lēte hyne licgean, þær hē longe wæs,
wicum wunian oð woruldende.
Hēold on hēahgesceap; hord ys gescēawod,
3065 grimme gegongen; wæs þæt gifeðe tō swið,
þē ðone [þeodcynning] þyder ontyhte.
Ic wæs þær inne ond þæt eall geondseh,
recedes geatwa, þā mē gerýmed wæs,
nealles swæslice sið ālyfed
3070 inn under eorðweall. Ic on ofoste gefēng
micle mid mundum mægenbyrðenne
hordgestreona, hider ūt ætbær
cyninge minum. Cwico wæs þā gēna,
wis ond gewittig; worn eall gespræc
3075 gomol on gehðo, ond ēowic grētan hēt,
bæd þæt gē geworhton æfter wines dædum
in bǣlstede beorh þone hēan,
micelne ond mærne, swā hē manna wæs
wigend weorðfullost wide geond eorðan,
3080 þenden hē burhwelan brūcan mōste.
Uton nū efstan oðre [siðe],
sēon ond sēcean searo[gimma] geþræc,
wundur under wealle, ic ēow wisige,
þæt gē genōge nēon scēawiað
3085 bēagas ond brād gold. Sie sio bær gearo,
ædre geæfned, þonne wē ūt cymen,
ond þonne geferian frēan ūserne,
lēofne mannan þær hē longe sceal
on ðæs Waldendes wære gepolian.
3090 Hēt ðā gebēodan byre Wihstānes,
hæle hnaedior hæleoa monegum,
boldāgendra, þæt hie bǣlwudu
feorran feredon, folcāgende,
gōdum tōgēnes: “Nū sceal glēd fretan
3095 (weaxan)wonna lēg) wigena strengel,
þone ðe oft gebād isernscūre,
þonne stræla storm strengum gebæded
scōc ofer scildweall, sceft nytte hēold,
fæðergearwum fūs flāne fullēode.”
3100 Hūru se snotra sunu Wihstānes
ācīgde of corðre cyniges þegnas
syfone (tō)somne, þā sēlestan,
ēode eahta sum under inwithrōf
hilderinc[a]; sum on handa bær
3105 æledlēoman, sē ðe on orde gēong.
Næs ðā on hlytme, hwā þæt hord strude,
syððan orwearde ænigne dæl
secgas gesēgon on sele wunian,
lēne licgan; lýt ænig mearn,
3110 þæt hī ofostlic(e) ūt geferedon
dýre mǣðmas; dracan ēc scufun,
wyrn ofer weallclif, lēton wēg niman,
fōd fæðmian frætwa hyrde.
þā wæs wunden gold on wæn hladen,
3115 æghwæs unrīm, æpeling boren,

hār hilde[rinc] tō Hronesesse.
 XLIII Him ōā gegiredan Gēata lēode
 ād on eorðan unwāclīcne,
 helm[um] behongen, hildebordum,
 3140 beorhtum byrnum, swā hē bēna wæs;
 aledon ōā tōmiddes mārne þōden
 hæleð hiofende, hlāford lēofne.
 Ongunnon þā on beorge hēlfyra mæst
 wīgend weccan; wud(u)rēc āstāh
 3145 sweart ofer swiðeole, swōgende lēg
 wōpe bewunden — windblond gelæg —,
 oð þæt hē ōā bānhūs gebrocen hæfde
 hāt on hreðre. Higum unrōte
 mōðceare mændon, mondryhtnes cw(e)alm;
 3150 swylce giðmorgyd (s)io g(eð)mēowle
 (æfter Biowulfe b)undenheorde
 (song) sorgcearig, sēde geneahhe,
 þæt hio hyre (hearmda)gas hearde (ondrē)de,
 welfylla worn, (wigen)des egesan,
 3155 hȳ[n]ðo (ond) h(eftnȳ)d. Heofon rēce swe(a)lg.
 Geworhton ōā Wedra lēode
 hl(æw) on [h]līðe, sē wæs hēah ond brād,
 (wæ)glīðendum wide g(e)sȳne,
 ond betimbredon on tȳn dagum
 3160 beadurōfes bēcn, bronda lāfe

Beowulf spoke, though his hurt was sore,
 The wounds of battle grievous and grim.
 Full well he weened that his life was ended,
 And all the joy of his years on earth;
 That his days were done, and Death most near:
 'My armor and sword I would leave to my son
 Had Fate but granted, born of my body,
 An heir to follow me after I'm gone.
 For fifty winters I've ruled this realm,
 And never a lord of a neighboring land
 Dared strike with terror or seek with sword.
 In my life I abode by the lot assigned,
 Kept well what was mine, courted no quarrels,
 Swore no false oaths. And now for all this
 Though my hurt is grievous, my heart is glad.
 When life leaves body, the Lord of mankind
 Cannot lay to my charge the killing of kinsmen!
 Go quickly, dear Wiglaf, to gaze on the gold
 Beneath the hoar stone. The dragon lies still
 In the slumber of death, despoiled of his hoard.
 Make haste that my eyes may behold the treasure,
 The gleaming jewels, the goodly store,
 And, glad of the gold, more peacefully leave
 The life and the realm I have ruled so long.'
 Then Weohstan's son, as they tell the tale,
 Clad in his corselet and trappings of war,
 Harkened at once to his wounded lord.
 Under roof of the barrow he broke his way.
 Proud in triumph he stood by the seat,
 Saw glittering jewels and gold on the ground,
 The den of the dragon, the old dawn-flir,
 And all the wonders along the walls.
 Great bowls and flagons of bygone men
 Lay all unburnished and barren of gems,
 Many a helmet ancient and rusted,
 Many an arm-ring cunningly wrought.
 Treasure and gold, though hid in the ground,
 Override man's wishes, hide them who will!
 High o'er the hoard he beheld a banner,
 Greatest of wonders, woven with skill,
 All wrought of gold; its radiance lighted
 The vasty ground and the glittering gems.
 But no sign of the worm! The sword-edge had slain him.
 As I've heard the tale, the hero unaided
 Rifled those riches of giants of old,
 The hoard in the barrow, and heaped in his arms
 Beakers and platters, picked what he would
 And took the banner, the brightest of signs.
 The ancient sword with its edge of iron
 Had slain the worm who watched o'er the wealth,
 In the midnight flaming, with menace of fire
 Protecting the treasure for many a year

Till he died the death. Then Wiglaf departed
 In haste returning enriched with spoil.
 He feared, and wondered if still he would find
 The lord of the Weders alive on the plain,
 Broken and weary and smitten with wounds.
 With his freight of treasure he found the prince,
 His dear lord, bloody and nigh unto death.
 With water he bathed him till words broke forth
 From the hoard of his heart and, aged and sad,
 Beowulf spoke, as he gazed on the gold:
 'For this goodly treasure whereon I gaze
 I give my thanks to the Lord of all,
 To the Prince of glory, Eternal God,
 Who granted me grace to gain for my people
 Such dower of riches before my death.
 I gave my life for this golden hoard.
 Heed well the wants, the need of my people;
 My hour is come, and my end is near.
 Bid warriors build, when they burn my body,
 A stately barrow on the headland's height.
 It shall be for remembrance among my people
 As it towers high on the Cape of the Whale,
 And sailors shall know it as Beowulf's Barrow,
 Sea-faring mariners driving their ships
 Through fogs of ocean from far countries.'
 Then the great-hearted king unclasped from his throat
 A collar of gold, and gave to his thane;
 Gave the young hero his gold-decked helmet,
 His ring and his byrny, and wished him well.
 'You are the last of the Wægmunding line.
 All my kinsmen, earls in their glory,
 Fate has sent to their final doom,
 And I must follow.' These words were the last
 The old king spoke ere the pyre received him,
 The leaping flames of the funeral blaze,
 And his breath went forth from his bosom, his soul
 Went forth from the flesh, to the joys of the just.

Then bitter it was for Beowulf's thane
 To behold his loved one lying on earth
 Suffering sore at the end of life.
 The monster that slew him, the dreadful dragon,
 Likewise lay broken and brought to his death.
 The worm no longer could rule the hoard,
 But the hard, sharp sword, the work of the hammer,
 Had laid him low; and the winged dragon
 Lay stretched near the barrow, broken and still.
 No more in the midnight he soared in air,
 Disclosing his presence, and proud of his gold;
 For he sank to earth by the sword of the king.
 But few of mankind, if the tales be true,
 Has it prospered much, though mighty in war
 And daring in deed, to encounter the breath

wealle beworhton, swā hyt weorðlicost
 foresnotre men findan mihton.
 Hi on beorg dydon bēg ond siglu,
 eall swylce hyrsta, swylce on horde ær
 3165 nīðhēdige men genumen hæfdon;
 forlētton eorla gestreon eorðan healdan,
 gold on grēote, þær hit nū gēn lifað
 eldum swā unnyt, swā hi(t æro)r wæs.
 Þā ymbe hlæw riðdan hildedēore,
 3170 æþelinga bearn, ealra twelfe,
 woldon (care) cwīðan, [ond] kyning mænna,
 wordgyd wrecan, ond ymb w(er) sprecan;
 eahtodan eorlsceipe ond his ellenweorc
 duguðum dēmdon, — swā hit gedē(fe) bið,
 3175 þæt mon his winedryhten wordum herge,
 ferðum frēoge, þonne hē forð scile
 of līchaman (læded) weorðan.
 Swā begnornodon Gēata lēode
 hlāfordes (hry)re, heorðgenēatas;
 3180 cwædon þæt hē wære wyruld cyning[a]
 manna mildust ond mon(ðw)ærust,
 lēodum līðost ond lofgeornost.

Of the venomous worm or plunder his wealth
 When the ward of the barrow held watch o'er the mound.
 Beowulf bartered his life for the treasure;
 Both foes had finished this fleeting life.

Not long was it then till the laggards in battle
 Came forth from the forest, ten craven in fight,
 Who had dared not face the attack of the foe
 In their lord's great need. The shirkers in shame
 Came wearing their bucklers and trappings of war
 Where the old man lay. They looked upon Wiglaf.
 Weary he sat by the side of his leader
 Attempting with water to waken his lord.
 It availed him little; the wish was vain!
 He could not stay his soul upon earth,
 Nor one whit alter the will of God.
 The Lord ruled over the lives of men
 As He rules them still. With a stern rebuke
 He reproached the cowards whose courage had failed.
 Wiglaf addressed them, Weohstan's son;
 Gazed sad of heart on the hateful men:
 'Lo! he may say who would speak the truth—
 That the lord who gave you these goodly rings,
 This warlike armor wherein you stand—
 When oft on the ale-bench he dealt to his hall-men
 Helmet and byrny, endowing his thanes
 With the fairest he found from near or from far—
 That he grievously wasted these trappings of war
 When battle befell him: The king of the folk
 Had no need to boast of his friends in the fight.
 But the God of victory granted him strength
 To avenge himself with the edge of the sword
 When he needed valor. Of little avail
 The help I brought in the bitter battle!
 Yet still I strove, though beyond my strength,
 To aid my kinsman. And ever the weaker
 The savage foe when I struck with my sword;
 Ever the weaker the welling flame!
 Too few defenders surrounded our ruler
 When the hour of evil and terror befell.
 Now granting of treasure and giving of swords,
 Inherited land-right and joy of the home,
 Shall cease from your kindred. And each of your clan
 Shall fail of his birthright when men from afar
 Hear tell of your flight and your dastardly deed.
 Death is better for every earl
 Than life besmirched with the brand of shame!

☞[The Messenger Foretells the Doom of the Geats]

Than Wiglaf bade tell the tidings of battle
 Up over the cliff in the camp of the host
 Where the linden-bearers all morning long
 Sat wretched in spirit, and ready for both,

The return, or the death, of their dear-loved lord.
 Not long did he hide, who rode up the headland,
 The news of their sorrow, but spoke before all:
 'Our leader lies low, the lord of the Weders,
 The king of the Geats, on the couch of death.
 He sleeps his last sleep by the deeds of the worm.
 The dreadful dragon is stretched beside him
 Slain with dagger-wounds. Not by the sword
 Could he quell the monster or lay him low.
 And Wiglaf is sitting, Weohstan's son,
 Bent over Beowulf, living by dead.
 Death watch he keeps in sorrow of spirit
 Over the bodies of friend and foe.

*Now comes peril of war when this news is rumored abroad,
 The fall of our king known afar among Frisians and Franks!
 For a fierce feud rose with the Franks when Hygelac's warlike host
 Invaded the Frisian fields, and the Hetware vanquished the Geats,
 Overcame with the weight of their hordes, and Hygelac fell in the
 fray;*

*It was not his lot to live on dispensing the spoils of war.
 And never since then of the Franks had we favor or friend.*

*And I harbor no hope of peace or faith from the Swedish folk,
 For well is it known of men that Ongentheow slew with the sword
 Hæthcyn, the son of Hrethel, near Ravenswood, in the fight
 When the Swedish people in pride swept down on the Geats.*

**This is the fighting and this the feud,
 The bitter hatred, that breeds the dread
 Lest the Swedish people should swarm against us
 Learning our lord lies lifeless and still.
 His was the hand that defended the hoard,
 Heroes, and realm against ravaging foe,
 By noble counsel and dauntless deed.
 Let us go quickly to look on the king
 Who brought us treasure, and bear his corpse
 To the funeral pyre. The precious hoard
 Shall burn with the hero. There lies the heap
 Of untold treasure so grimly gained,
 Jewels and gems he bought with his blood
 At the end of life. All these at the last
 The flames shall veil and the brands devour.
 No man for remembrance shall take from the treasure,
 Nor beauteous maiden adorn her breast
 With gleaming jewel; bereft of gold
 And tragic-hearted many shall tread**

A foreign soil, now their lord has ceased
 From laughter and revel and rapture of joy.
 Many a spear in the cold of morning
 Shall be borne in hand uplifted on high.
 No sound of harp shall waken the warrior,
 But the dusky raven despoiling the dead
 Shall clamor and cry and call to the eagle
 What fare he found at the carrion-feast
 The while with the wolf he worried the corpses.'

So the stalwart hero had told his tidings,
 His fateful message; nor spoke amiss
 As to truth or telling. The host arose;
 On their woeful way to the Eagles' Ness
 They went with tears to behold the wonder.
 They found the friend, who had dealt them treasure
 In former days, on the bed of death,
 Stretched out lifeless upon the sand.
 The last of the good king's days was gone;
 Wondrous the death of the Weder prince!
 They had sighted first, where it lay outstretched,
 The monstrous wonder, the loathsome worm,
 The horrible fire-drake, hideous-hued,
 Scorched with the flame. The spread of its length

Was fifty foot-measures! Oft in the night
 It sported in air, then sinking to earth
 Returned to its den. Now moveless in death
 It had seen the last of its earthly lair.
 Beside the dragon were bowls and beakers,
 Platters lying, and precious swords
 Eaten with rust, where the hoard had rested
 A thousand winters in the womb of earth.
 That boundless treasure of bygone men,
 The golden dower, was girt with a spell
 So that never a man might ravage the ring-hall
 Save as God himself, the Giver of victory—
 He is the Shelter and Shield of men—
 Might allow such man as seemed to Him meet,
 Might grant whom He would, to gather the treasure.

Then spoke Wiglaf, Weohstan's son:
 'Often for one man many must sorrow
 As has now befallen the folk of the Geats.
 We could not persuade the king by our counsel,
 Our well-loved leader, to shun assault
 On the dreadful dragon guarding the gold;
 To let him lie where he long had lurked
 In his secret lair till the world shall end.
 But Beowulf, dauntless, pressed to his doom.
 The hoard was uncovered; heavy the cost;
 Too strong the fate that constrained the king!
 I entered the barrow, beholding the hoard
 And all the treasure throughout the hall;
 In fearful fashion the way was opened,
 An entrance under the wall of earth.
 Of the hoarded treasure I heaped in my arms
 A weighty burden, and bore to my king.
 He yet was living; his wits were clear.
 Much the old man said in his sorrow;
 Sent you greeting, and bade you build
 In the place of burning a lofty barrow,
 Proud and peerless, to mark his deeds;
 For he was of all men the worthiest warrior
 In all the earth, while he still might rule
 And wield the wealth of his lordly land.
 Let us haste once more to behold the treasure,
 The gleaming wonders beneath the wall.
 I will show the way that you all may see
 And closely scan the rings and the gold.
 Let the bier be ready, the pyre prepared,
 When we come again to carry our lord,
 Our leader beloved, where long he shall lie
 In the kindly care of the Lord of all.'

§[Beowulf's Funeral]

Then the son of Weohstan, stalwart in war,
 Bade send command to the heads of homes
 To bring from afar the wood for the burning
 Where the good king lay: 'Now glede shall devour,
 As dark flame waxes, the warrior prince
 Who has often withstood the shower of steel
 When the storm of arrows, sped from the string,
 Broke over shield, and shaft did service,
 With feather-fittings guiding the barb.'

Then the wise son of Weohstan chose from the host
 Seven thanes of the king, the best of the band;
 Eight heroes together they hied to the barrow
 In under the roof of the fearful foe;
 One of the warriors leading the way
 Bore in his hand a burning brand.
 They cast no lots who should loot the treasure
 When they saw unguarded the gold in the hall

Lying there useless; little they scrupled
 As quickly they plundered the precious store.
 Over the sea-cliff into the ocean
 They tumbled the dragon, the deadly worm,
 Let the sea-tide swallow the guarder of gold.
 Then a wagon was loaded with well-wrought treasure,
 A countless number of every kind;
 And the aged warrior, the white-haired king,
 Was borne on high to the Cape of the Whale.

The Geat folk fashioned a peerless pyre
 Hung round with helmets and battle-boards,
 With gleaming byrnies as Beowulf bade.
 In sorrow of soul they laid on the pyre
 Their mighty leader, their well-loved lord.
 The warriors kindled the bale on the barrow,
 Wakened the greatest of funeral fires.
 Dark o'er the blaze the wood-smoke mounted;
 The winds were still, and the sound of weeping
 Rose with the roar of the surging flame
 Till the heat of the fire had broken the body.
 With hearts that were heavy they chanted their sorrow,
 Singing a dirge for the death of their lord;
 And an aged woman with upbound locks
 Lamented for Beowulf, wailing in woe.
 Over and over she uttered her dread
 Of sorrow to come, of bloodshed and slaughter,
 Terror of battle, and bondage, and shame.
 The smoke of the bale-fire rose to the sky!

The men of the Weder folk fashioned a mound
 Broad and high on the brow of the cliff,
 Seen from afar by seafaring men.
 Ten days they worked on the warrior's barrow
 Inclosing the ash of the funeral flame
 With a wall as worthy as wisdom could shape.
 They bore to the barrow the rings and the gems,
 The wealth of the hoard the heroes had plundered.
 The olden treasure they gave to the earth,
 The gold to the ground, where it still remains
 As useless to men as it was of yore.
 Then round the mound rode the brave in battle,
 The sons of warriors, twelve in a band,
 Bemoaning their sorrow and mourning their king.
 They sang their dirge and spoke of the hero,
 Vaunting his valor and venturous deeds.
 So is it proper a man should praise
 His friendly lord with a loving heart,
 When his soul must forth from the fleeting flesh.
 So the folk of the Geats, the friends of his hearth,
 Bemoaned the fall of their mighty lord;
 Said he was kindest of worldly kings,
 Mildest, most gentle, most eager for fame.

SIDE II, Band 1: SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Sir Gawain is a romance composed about 1375 in the West Midland dialect of Middle English. The poet uses a form of alliterative verse derived from the Old English period, but the work is divided into stanzas (101 in all), each, unlike Old English poetry, concluding with a five-line riming "bob and wheel."

One New Year in Arthur's court, Gawain beheads a superhuman Green Knight and promises to submit to

an exchange beheading game at the Green Chapel a year later. On the way to the encounter the following Christmas he stays at a strange castle. There his resolution is challenged by a seductive hostess from whom he accepts a magic girdle of invulnerability. In the present selection, which suggests something of the unparalleled atmosphere of this courtly romance, he leaves the castle to keep his tryst at the Green Chapel.

Text: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. Sir I. Gollancz (Early English Text Society, 210), lines 2077-2211. Translation (which does not entirely follow the readings of the latest edition): T. H. Banks, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1929).

Pay bozen bi bonkkeȝ þer boȝeȝ ar bare,
 Þay clomben bi clyffeȝ þer clenȝeȝ þe colde;
 Þe heuen watȝ vp-halt, bot vgly þer-vnder
 2080 Mist mused on þe mor, malt on þe mounteȝ;
 Vch hille hade a hatte, a myst-hakel huge;
 Brokeȝ byled & breke bi bonkkeȝ aboute,
 Schyre schaterande on schoreȝ, þer þay doun
 schowued.

2084 Welawylle watȝ þe way þer þay bi wod schulden,
 Til hit watȝ sone sesoun þat þe sunne rysea
 þat tyde;

2088 Þay were on a hille ful hyȝe,
 Þe quyte snaw lay bisyde;
 Þe burne þat rod hym by
 Bede his mayster abide.

[V.]

'For I haf wonnen yow hider, wyȝe, at þis tyme,
 2092 & now nar ȝe not fer fro þat note place
 þat ȝe han spied & spured so specially after;
 Bot I schal say yow forsope, syȝen I yow knowe,
 & ȝe ar a lede vpon lyue þat I wel louy,
 2096 Wolde ȝe worch bi my wytte, [yow] worped þe
 better.

þe place þat ȝe prece to ful perelous is halden;
 þer woneȝ a wyȝe in þat waste, þe worst vpon
 erpe;

For he is stiffe & sturne, & to strike louies,
 2100 & more he is þen any mon vpon myddelerde,
 & his body bigger þen þe best fowre
 þat ar in Arpureȝ hous, Hestor oper oper.
 He cheueȝ þat chaunce at þe chapel grene,

2104 þer passes non bi þat place so proude in his armes
 þat he ne dyn[ge]ȝ hym to depe with dynt of his
 honde;

For he is a mon methles, & mercy non vses,
 For be hit chorle oper chaplayn þat bi þe chapel
 rydes,

2108 Monk oper masse-prest oper any mon elles,
 Hym þynk as queme hym to quelle as quyȝ go
 hym-seluen.

For-þy I say [yow] as sope as ȝe in sadel sitte,
 Com ȝe pere, ȝe be kyllid, may þe knyȝt rede,
 2112 Trawe ȝe me þat trwely, þaȝ ȝe had twenty lyues
 to spende;

He hatȝ wonyd here ful ȝore,
 On bent much baret bende,
 2116 Aȝayn his dynteȝ sore
 ȝe may not yow defende.'

[VI.]

'For-þy, goude sir Gawayn, let þe gome one,
 & gotȝ a-way sum oper gate, vpon Goddeȝ halue;
 2120 Cayreȝ bi sum oper kyth, þer Kryst mot yow
 speȝe;

& I schal hyȝ me hom aȝayn & hete yow fyrre
 þat I schal swere bi God & alle his gode halȝeȝ,
 As help me God & þe halydam & oȝeȝ in-noghe,
 2124 þat I schal lelly yow layne & lauce neuer tale
 þat euer ȝe fondet to fle for freke þat I wyst.'
 'Grant merci,' quop Gawayn, & gruchyng he
 sayde,

'Wel worth þe, wyȝe, þat woldeȝ my gode,
 2128 & þat lelly me layne, I leue wel þou woldeȝ.
 Bot helde þou hit neuer so holde, & I here passed,
 Founded for ferde for to fle, in fourme þat þou
 telleȝ,

I were a knyȝt kowarde, I myȝt [n]ot be excused.
 2132 Bot I wyl to þe chapel, for chaunce þat may falle,
 & talk wyth þat ilk tulk þe tale þat me lyste,
 Worpe hit wele oper wo, as þe wyrde lykeȝ
 hit hafe;

2136 Þaȝe he be a sturn knape
 To stiȝtel, & † stad with staue,
 Ful wel con dryȝtyn schape
 His seruanteȝ forto saue.'

[VII.]

2140 'Mary!' quop þat oper mon, 'now þou so much
 spelleȝ

þat þou wylt þyn awen nye nyme to þy-seluen,
 & þe lyst lese þy lyf, þe lette I ne kepe;
 Haf here þi helme on þy hede, þi spere in þi
 honde,

2144 & ryde me doun þis ilk rake, bi ȝon rokke syde,
 Til þou be broȝt to þe boȝem of þe brem
 valay;

þenne loke a littel on þe launde, on þi lyfte
 honde,

& þou schal se in þat slade þe self chapel
 2148 & þe borelych burne on bent þat hit kepeȝ.

Now fareȝ wel on Godeȝ half, Gawayn þe noble,
 For alle þe golde vpon grounde I nolde go wyth
 þe

Ne bere þe felazschyp þurȝ þis fryth on fote
 fyrre.'

2152 Bi þat þe wyȝe in þe wod wendeȝ his brydel,
 Hit þe hors with þe heleȝ as harde as he myȝt,
 Leȝeȝ hym ouer þe launde & leueȝ þe knyȝt þere
 al one.

2156 'Bi Goddeȝ self,' quop Gawayn,
 'I wyl nauper grete ne grone,
 To Goddeȝ wyll I am ful bayn,
 & to hym I haf me tone.'

[VIII.]

2160 Thenne gyrdeȝ he to Gryngolet & gedereȝ þe
 rake,

Schowueȝ in bi a schore at a schaze syde,
 Rideȝ þurȝ þe roȝe bonk ryȝt to þe dale;
 & þenne he wayted hym aboute, & wylde hit
 hym þoȝt,

2164 & seȝe no syngne of resette bisydeȝ nowhere,
 Bot hyȝe bonkkeȝ & brent vpon boȝe halue,
 & ruȝe knokled knarreȝ with knorned stoneȝ;
 þe skweȝ of þe scowtes skayned hym þoȝt.

2168 Þenne he houeȝ & wyth-hylde his hors at þat
 tyde,

& ofte chaunged his cher þe chapel to seche;
 He seȝ non suche in no syde, & selly hym þoȝt,
 Saue a lyttel on a launde, a lawe as hit we[re],

2172 A balȝ berȝ bi a bonke þe brymme by-syde,
 Bi a forȝ of a flode þat ferked pare;

þe borne blubred þer-inne as hit boyled hade.
 þe knyȝt kacheȝ his caple & com to þe lawe,

2176 Liȝteȝ doun luffly & at a lynde tacheȝ
 þe rayne, & hi[t] riche[d] with a roȝe braunche;

þenne he boȝeȝ to þe berȝe, aboute hit he walkeȝ,
 Debatande with hym-self quat hit be myȝt.

2180 Hit hade a hole on þe ende & on ayȝer syde,
 & ouer-grown with gresse in glodes ay-where,
 & al watȝ holȝ in-with, nobot an olde caue,
 Or a creuisse of an olde cragge; he coupe hit
 noȝt deme

2184 with spelle,
 'We, lorde,' quop þe gentyle knyȝt,
 'Wheȝer þis be þe grene chapelle?
 He[re] myȝt aboute myd-nyȝt
 2188 þe dele his matynnes telle.'

[IX.]

'Now i-wysse,' quop Wowayn, 'wysty is here;
 þis oritore is vgly, with erbeȝ ouer-grown;
 Wel bisemeȝ þe wyȝe wruxled in grene

2192 Dele here his deuocioun on þe deueleȝ wyȝe;
 Now I fele hit is þe fende, in my fyue wyteȝ,
 þat hatȝ stoken me þis steuen, to strye me here;
 þis is a chapel of meschaunce,—þat chekke hit
 by-tyde!

2196 Hit is þe corsesdest kyrk þat euer I com inne.'
 With heȝe helme on his hede, his launce in his
 honde,

He romeȝ vp to þe roffe of þe roȝe woneȝ;
 þene herde he of þat hyȝe hil, in a harde roche,

2200 Biȝonde þe broke, in a bonk, a wonder breme
 noyse.

Quat! hit clatered in þe clyff as hit cleue schulde,
 As one vpon a gryndelston hade grounden a syȝe;
 What! hit wharred & whette as water at a
 mulle.

2204 What! hit rusched & ronge, rawȝe to here.
 Þenne 'bi Godde,' quop Gawayn, 'þat gere
 a[s] I trowe,

Is ryched at þe reuerence me, renk, to mete
 bi rote;

2208 Let God worche; we loo,
 Hit helpeȝ me not a mote.
 My lif þaȝ I for-goo,
 Drede dotȝ me no lote.'

By hillsides where branches were bare they both
journeyed;
They climbed over cliffs where the cold was cling-
ing.
The clouds hung aloft, but 't was lowering be-
neath them.
On the moor dripped the mist, on the mountains
melted;
Each hill had a hat, a mist-cloak right huge.
The brooks foamed and bubbled on hillsides about
them,
And brightly broke on their banks as they rushed
down.
Full wandering the way was they went through
the wood,
Until soon it was time for the sun to be spring-
ing.

Then they
Were on a hill full high;
White snow beside them lay.
The servant who rode nigh
Then bade his master stay.

"I have led you hither, my lord, at this time,
And not far are you now from that famous place
You have sought for, and asked so especially after.
Yet, sir, to you surely I'll say, since I know you,
A man in this world whom I love right well,
If you'd follow my judgment, the better you'd
fare.

You make haste to a place that is held full of peril;
One dwells, the worst in the world, in that waste,
For he's strong and stern, and takes pleasure in
striking.

No man on the earth can equal his might;
He is bigger in body than four of the best men
In Arthur's own household, Hestor or others.
And thus he brings it about at the chapel:
That place no one passes so proud in his arms
That he smites him not dead with a stroke of his
hand.

He's a man most immoderate, showing no mercy;
Be it chaplain or churl that rides by the chapel,
Monk or priest, any manner of man,
Him to slay seems as sweet as to still live him-
self.

So I say, as sure as you sit in your saddle
You're killed, should the knight so choose, if you
come here;
That take as the truth, though you twenty lives
had

To spend.
He's lived in this place long
In battles without end.
Against his strokes right strong
You cannot you defend.

"So let him alone, good Sir Gawain, and leave
By a different road, for God's sake, and ride
To some other country where Christ may reward
you.
And homeward again I will hie me, and promise

To swear by the Lord and all his good saints
(So help me the oaths on God's halidom sworn)
That I'll guard well your secret, and give out no
story
You hastened to flee any hero I've heard of."
"Thank you," said Gawain, and grudgingly added,
"Good fortune go with you for wishing me well.
And truly I think you'd not tell; yet though
never

So surely you hid it, if hence I should hasten,
Fearful, to fly in the fashion you tell of,
A coward I'd prove, and could not be pardoned.
The chapel I'll find whatsoever befalls;
And talk with that wight the way that I want to,
Let weal or woe follow as fate may wish.

Though the knave,
Hard to subdue and fell,
Should stand there with a stave,
Yet still the Lord knows well
His servants how to save."

Quoth the man, "By Mary, you've said now
this much:
That you wish to bring down your own doom on
your head.
Since you'd lose your life, I will stay you no
longer.

Put your helm on your head, take your spear in
your hand,
And ride down this road by the side of that rock
Till it brings you down to the dale's rugged bot-
tom;

Then look at the glade on the left hand a fittle:
You'll see in the valley that self-same chapel,
And near it the great-limbed knight who is guard-
ing it.

Gawain the noble, farewell now, in God's name!
I would not go with thee for all the world's
wealth,
Nor in fellowship ride one more foot through
the forest."

The man in the trees there then turns his bridle,
As hard as he can hits his horse with his
heels,
And across the fields gallops, there leaving Sir
Gawain

Alone.
"By God," the knight said, "now
I'll neither weep nor groan.
Unto God's will I bow,
And make myself his own."

He strikes spurs into Gringolet, starts on the
path;
By a bank at the side of a small wood he pushes
in,
Rides down the rugged slope right to the dale.
Then about him he looks, and the land seems
wild,
And nowhere he sees any sign of a shelter,
But slopes on each side of him, high and steep,

And rocks, gnarled and rough, and stones right
rugged.

The clouds there seemed to him scraped by the
crag.

Then he halted and held back his horse at that
time,

And spied on all sides in search of the chapel;
Such nowhere he saw, but soon, what seemed
strange,

In the midst of a glade a mound, as it might be,
A smooth, swelling knoll by the side of the water,
The falls of a rivulet running close by;
In its banks the brook bubbled as though it were
boiling.

The knight urged on Gringolet, came to the glade,
There leaped down lightly and tied to the limb
Of a tree, right rugged, the reins of his noble
steed,

Went to the mound, and walked all about it,
Debating what manner of thing it might be:
On the end and on each side an opening; every-
where

Over it grass was growing in patches,
All hollow inside, it seemed an old cave
Or a crag's old cleft: which, he could not decide.

Said the knight,
"Is this the chapel here?
Alas, dear Lord! here might
The fiend, when midnight's near,
His matin prayers recite.

"Of a truth," said Gawain, "the glade here is
gloomy;

The Green Chapel's ugly, with herbs over-
grown.

It greatly becomes here that hero, green-clad,
To perform in the devil's own fashion his wor-
ship.

I feel in my five senses this is the fiend
Who has made me come to this meeting to kill
me.

Destruction fall on this church of ill-fortune!
The cursedest chapel that ever I came to!"
With helm on his head and lance in his hand
He went right to the rock of that rugged abode.
From that high hill he heard, from a hard rock
over

The stream, on the hillside, a sound wondrous
loud.

Lo! it clattered on cliffs fit to cleave them, as
though

A scythe on a grindstone some one were grinding.
It whirled, lo! and whizzed like a water-mill's
wheel;

Lo! it ground and it grated, grievous to hear.
"By God, this thing, as I think," then said Gawain,
"Is done now for me, since my due turn to meet it
Is near.

God's will be done! 'Ah woe!'
No whit doth aid me here.
Though I my life forego
No sound shall make me fear."

Chaucer, who died in 1400, began his Canterbury Tales about 1387, by which time he had acquired an unequalled mastery of comic narrative poetry. (He wrote in the London dialect of Middle English, which is more readily understandable to the modern reader than the Midland dialect of Sir Gawain.) In the General Prologue to the Tales he described, among other characters,

In th'olde dayes of the Kyng Arthour,
Of which that Britons speken greet honour,
Al was this land fulfild of fairye.
The elf queene with hir joly compaignye
Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede.
This was the olde opynyoun, as I rede;
I speke of many hundred yeres ago.
But now kan no man se none elves mo,
For now the grete charitee and prayeres
Of lymytours and othere holy freres,
That serchen every lond and every streem,
As thikke as motes in the sonne beem,
Blessynge halles, chambres, kichenes, boures,
Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures,
Thropes, bernes, shipnes, dayeryes —
This maketh that ther been no fairyes.
For, ther-as wont to walken was an elf,
Ther walketh now the lymytour hymself
In undermeles and in morwenynges,
And seith his matyns and his holy thynges
As he gooth in his lymytacioun.
Wommen may go sauflly up and doun
In every bussh or under every tree.
Ther is noon oother incubus but he,
And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.
And so bifel that this kyng Arthour
Hadde in his hous a lusty bacheler
That on a day cam ridyng fro ryver;
And happed that, allone as he was born,
He say a mayde walkyng hym biforn
Of which mayde anon, maugree hir hed,
By verray force he rafte hir maydenhed;
For which oppressioun was swich clamour
And swich pursuyte unto the kyng Arthour
That dampned was this knyght for to be deed
By cours of lawe and sholde han lost his heed —
Paraventure swich was the statut tho —
But that the queene and othere ladyes mo
So longe preyden the kyng of grace
Til he his lyf hym graunted in the place
And yaf hym to the queene, al at hir wille,
To chese whether she wolde hym save or spille.
The queene thanked the kyng with al hir myght,
And after this thus spak she to the knyght
Whan that she saugh hir tyme upon a day:
"Thow standest yet," quod she, "in swich array
That of thy lyf yet hastow no suretee.
I graunte thee lyf if thou kanst tellen me
What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren.
Be war, and keep thy nekke boon from iren.
And if thou kanst nat tellen it me anon,
Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon.
A twelf monthe and a day to seche and lere
An answer suffisant in this matere.
And suretee wol I han er that thou pace,
Thy body for to yelden in this place."
Wo was this knyght, and sorwefully he siketh,
But what! He may nat doon al as hym liketh.
And atte laste he chees hym for to wende
And come agayn right at the yeres ende
With swich answer as God wolde hym purveye,
And taketh his leve and wendeth forth his weye.
He seketh every hous and every place
Where-as he hopeth for to fynde grace
To lerne what thyng wommen loven moost,
But he ne koude arryven in no coost
Where-as he myghte fynde in this matere
Two creatures acordyng in feere.
Somme seyden wommen loven best riches,
Somme seyde honour, somme seyde jolynesse,
Somme riche array, somme seyden lust a-bedde,
And ofte tyme to be wydwe and wedde.
Somme seyde that oure herte is moost esed
Whan that we been y-flattered and y-pled.
He gooth ful ny the sothe, I wol nat lye.
A man shal wynne us best with flaterye;
And with attendaunce and with bisynesse

filled with fairy magic
meadow
belief
more
10 friars begging within a limit
search
sun
bedrooms
high
Villages barns stables
brings it about
where accustomed
afternoons
20 walks
impregnating demon
do them nothing worse than
from hawking
it happened
30 saw immediately despite her resistance
took away maidenhood
such
condemned
was to have
Perchance then
Except more
begged for
40 gave
choose destroy
saw
said
you have
most
Beware bone iron
right away
give go
seek learn
have before go
to surrender
Woeful sighs
do it please
chose to go
60 such provide
Where
region
Where he could
agreeing together
riches
widow wed (again)
satisfied
are
near truth
diligence

the Wife of Bath, five times a widow, and an expert in love. On the road to Canterbury she unfolds, in an expansive prologue not included here, to the company of pilgrims her method of handling husbands and then narrates in her own subjective manner the tale which is recited here complete.

Text with explanatory glosses: Charles W. Dunn, A Chaucer Reader (Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1952), Wife's Tale, lines 1-408.

Been we y-lymed, bothe moore and lesse.
And somme seyn that we loven best
For to be free and do right as us lest,
And that no man repreve us of oure vice
But seye that we be wise and no thyng nyce.
For trewely ther is noon of us alle,
If any wight wol clawe us on the galle,
That we nyl kike for he seith us sooth.
Assay, and he shal fynde it that so dooth,
For, be we nevere so vicious withinne,
We wol be holden wise and clene of synne.
And somme seyn that greet delit han we
For to be holden stable and eek secrete,
And in o purpos stedefastly to dwelle,
And nat biwreye thyng that men us telle;
But that tale is nat worth a rake-stele.
Pardee, we wommen konne no thyng hele.
Witness on Mida, wol ye heere the tale.
Ovyde, amanges othere thynges smale,
Seyde Mida hadde under his longe heres
Growyng upon his heed two asses eres.
The whiche vice he hidde as he best myghte
Ful sotilly from every mannes sighte
That, save his wyf, ther wiste of it namo.
He loved hire moost and trusted hire also.
He preyed hire that to no creature
She sholde tellen of his disfigure.
She swoor hym, "Nay." For al this world to
wynne,
She nolde do that vileynye or synne
To make hir housbonde han so foul a name.
She nolde nat telle it for hir owene shame.
But, natheles, hir thoughte that she dyde
That she so longe sholde a conseil hyde.
Hir thoughte it swal so soore aboute hir herte,
That nedely som word hir moste asterte;
And, sith she dorste telle it to no man,
Doun to a marys faste by she ran.
Til she cam there, hir herte was afyre.
And, as a bitore bombleth in the myre,
She leyde hir mouth unto the water doun.
"Biwreye me nat, thow water, with thy soun,"
Quod she. "To thee I telle it and namo."
Myn housbonde hath longe asses crys two!
Now is myn herte al hool. Now is it oute.
I myghte no lenger kepe it, out of doute.
Heere may ye see, though we a tyme abyde,
Yet out it moot. We kan no conseil hyde.
The remenant of the tale if ye wol heere,
Redeth Ovyde, and ther ye may it leere.
This knyght of which my tale is specially,
Whan that he say he myghte nat come ther-by —
This is to seye, what wommen loven moost —
Withinne his brest ful sorweful was the goost;
But hom he gooth. He myghte nat sojourne.
The day was come that homward moste he torne;
And in his wey it happed hym to ryde,
In al this care, under a forest syde,
Wher-as he say upon a daunce go
Of ladyes foure-and-twenty and yet mo,
Toward the whiche daunce he drow ful yerne
In hope that som wisdom sholde he lerne.
But certeynly, er he cam fully there,
Vanysshed was this daunce, he nyste where.
No creature saugh he that bar lyf,
Save on the grene he say sittyng a wyf.
A fouler wight ther may no man devyse.
Agayn the knyght this olde wyf gan ryse
And seyde, "Sire knyght, heer forth ne lyth no
wey.
Tel me what that ye seken, by your fey.
Par aventure, it may the better be.
Thise olde folk konne muchel thyng," quod she.
"My leve moder," quod this knyght, "certeyn
I nam but deed but if that I kan seyn
What thyng it is that wommen moost desire.
Koude ye me wisse, I wolde wel quyte youre
snared high low
say
80 just as we please
reprove
in no way foolish
no one
person scratch sore spot
because truth
Try
considered pure
say have
90 also secretive
one
betray
rake-handle
Certainly conceal
Midas
Ovid
hair
ears
defect
100 skillfully
except for knew no other
gain
wouldn't
have
nevertheless it seemed to
died
swelled
necessarily escape from
since dared
marsh nearby
bittern drones swamp
Betray sound
Said no other
120 ears
whole
could conceal
wait
must secret
learn
saw discover it
spirit
stay
must turn
he happened
Where saw
drew eagerly
before
knew not
saw bore
Except that
person imagine
Towards arose
here lies
faith
Perchance
know many a
dear mother said
am but dead unless
150 inform reward

hyre.”
 “Plight” me thy trouthe,° here in myn hand,°”
 quod she,
 “The nexte thyng that I requere° thee,
 Thow shalt it do, if it lye in thy myght,
 And I wol telle it yow er° it be nyght.”
 “Have here my trouthe,” quod the knyght, “I
 graunte.”
 “Thanne,” quod she, “I dar me wel avaunte,°
 Thy lyf is sauf,° for I wole stonde ther-by,°
 Upon my lyf, the queene wol seye as I. 160
 Lat see which is the proudeste of hem alle
 That wereth on a coverchief° or a calle°
 That dar seye ‘Nay’ of that° I shal thee teche.
 Lat us go forth withouten lenger speche.”
 Tho rowned° she a pistel° in his ere
 And bad hym to be glad and have no fere.
 When they be comen to the court, this knyght
 Seyde he hadde holde° his day as he had hight,
 And redy was his answer, as he sayde.
 Ful many a noble wyf, and many a mayde, 170
 And many a widwe,° for that° they ben wise,
 The queene herself sitting as justise,
 Assembled been,° his answer for to here.
 And afterward this knyght was bode° appere.
 To every wight comanded was silence,
 And that the knyght sholde telle in audience
 What thyng that worldly wommen loven best.
 This knyght ne stood nat stille as dooth a best°
 But to his questioun anon° answerde
 With manly voys that° al the court it herde. 180
 “My lige lady, generally,” quod° he,
 “Wommen desiren to have sovereyntee
 As wel over hir housbonde as hir love
 And for to been in maistrie° hym above.
 This is youre mooste° desir, thogh ye me kille.
 Dooth as yow list.° I am here at youre wille.”
 In al the court ne was ther wyf, ne mayde,
 Ne wydwe that contraried that° he sayde
 But seyden he was worthy han° his lyf.
 And with that word up sturte° that olde wyf 190
 Which that° the knyght say° sitting on the grene.
 “Mercy,” quod she, “my sovereyn lady queene,
 Er that° youre court departe, do me right.
 I taughte this answer unto the knyght,
 For which he plighte° me his trouthe° there,
 The firste thyng I wolde hym requere,
 He wolde it do, if it laye in his myght.
 Bifore the court thanne preye I thee, sire knyght,”
 Quod she, “that thow me take unto° thy wyf.
 For wel thow woost° that I have kept° thy lyf. 200
 If I seye fals, sey ‘Nay,’ upon thy fey.”
 This knyght answerde, “Allas and weylawey,°
 I woot° right wel that swich was my biheste.
 For Goddes love, as chees° a newe requeste!
 Taak al my good,° and lat my body go.”
 “Nay, thanne,” quod she. “I shrewe° us bothe
 two.
 For, thogh that I be foul, old, and poore,
 I nolde,° for al the metal ne for oore°
 That under erthe is grave° or lith° above,
 But if thy wyf I were and eek° thy love.” 210
 “My love!” quod he. “Nay, my dampnacioun°!
 Allas that any of my nacioun°
 Sholde evere so foule° disparaged be!”
 But al for noght! Th’ende is this that he
 Constreyned was, he nedes moste° hir wedde,
 And taketh his olde wyf, and goth to bedde.
 Now wolden som men seye, par aventure,°
 That for my negligence I do no cure°
 To tellen yow the joye and al th’array
 That at the feste was that ilke° day;
 To which thyng shortly answer I shal. 220
 I seye, ther nas° no joye ne° feste at al.
 Ther nas but hevynesse° and mucche sorwe,
 For pryvely° he wedded hire on morwe,°
 And al day after hidde hym° as an owle,
 So wo was hym,° his wyf looked so foule.
 Greet was the wo the knyght hadde in his thought
 When he was with his wyf a-bedde° y-brought.
 He walweth,° and he turneth to and fro.
 His olde wyf lay smylyng evere mo° 230
 And seyde, “O deere housbonde, *benedicite*°!
 Fareth° every knyght thus with his wyf as ye?
 Is this the lawe of kyng Arthures hous?
 Is every knyght of his thus daungerous°?
 I am youre owene love and youre wyf.
 I am she which that° saved hath youre lyf.
 And certes° yet ne dide I yow nevere unright.
 Why fare ye thus with me this firste nyght?
 Ye faren° lyk a man hadde° lost his wit.
 What is my gilt? For Goddes love, tel it, 240

Give promise by hand-
 shake
 require of
 before
 consent
 dare well boast
 safe guarantee
 has on a kerchief
 that which
 Then whispered lesson
 kept promised
 widow because
 are
 ordered to
 beat
 immediately
 so that
 said
 mastery
 greatest
 it pleases
 contradicted what
 to have
 sprang
 Whom saw
 Before
 gave promise
 to be
 know protected
 faith
 woe
 know
 choose (as chess)
 substance
 curse
 wouldn't wish (anything else)
 ore
 buried lies
 also
 ruination
 birth
 foully
 needs must
 perhaps
 take no care
 same
 was nor
 was nothing but gloom
 privately the morrow
 himself
 woeful was he
 to bed
 flounders
 all the while
 blessings
 Behaves
 unyielding
 who
 certainly
 act (who) had

And it shal ben amended, it I may.°”
 “Amended!” quod this knyght. “Allas, nay,
 nay.
 It wol nat ben amended nevere mo.°
 Thow art so loothly, and so old also,
 And ther-to comen of° so lowe a kynde°
 That litel wonder is° thogh I walwe and wynde.°
 So wolde God, myn herte wolde breste°!”
 “Is this,” quod she, “the cause of youre unreste?”
 “Ye, certeynly,” quod he. “No wonder is.”
 “Now sire,” quod she, “I koude amende al this,
 If that me liste,° er° it were dayes thre, 251
 So wel ye myghte bere yow unto me.
 “But, for° ye speken of swich gentillesse°
 As is descended out of old richesse,°
 That therfore sholden ye be gentil men,
 Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen.
 Looke who that° is moost vertuous alway,
 Pryvee° and apert,° and moost entendeth ay°
 To do the gentil dedes that he kan;
 Taak hym for the gretteste gentil man. 260
 Crist wol,° we clayme of hym oure gentillesse,
 Nat of oure eldres for hir° old richesse,
 For, thogh they yeve° us al hir heritage
 For which we clayme to been of heigh parage,°
 Yet may° they nat biquethe, for no thyng,
 To noon of us hir° vertuous lyvynge
 That made hem gentil men y-called be
 And bad° us folwen° hem in swich degree.
 “Wel kan the wise poete of Florence
 That highte Dant° speken in this sentence.° 270
 Lo, in swich maner° rym is Dantes tale°:
 ‘Ful selde° up riseth by his braunches smale
 Prowesse° of man, for God of his prowesse
 Wol° that of hym we clayme oure gentillesse.’
 For of oure eldres may we nothyng clayme
 But temporel thyng that man may hurte and
 mayme.
 “Eek° every wight woot° this as wel as I,
 If gentillesse were planted naturelly°
 Unto° a certeyn lynage down the lynce,
 Pryvee° and apert,° thanne wolde they nevere fyne°
 To doon of gentillesse the faire office; 281
 They myghte° do no vileynye or vice.
 “Taak fyr, and bere° it in the derkeste° hous
 Bitwix this and the mount Kaukasous,°
 And lat men shette° the dores and go thenne,°
 Yet wol the fyr as faire lye° and brenne°
 As° twenty thousand men myghte it biholde.
 His office° naturel ay° wol it holde,°
 Up° peril of my lyf, til that it dye.
 “Here may ye se wel how that genterye° 290
 Is nat annexed to possessioun,
 Sith° folk ne doon hir operacioun°
 Alwey as dooth the fyr, lo, in his kynde.°
 For, God it woot,° men may wel often fynde
 A lordes sone do shame and vileynye.
 And he that wol han prys of° his gentrye,
 For° he was born of a gentil hous
 And hadde his eldres noble and vertuous,
 And nyl° hymselfen do no gentil dedis°
 Ne folwen° his gentil auncestre that deed° is, 300
 He nys° nat gentil, be he duc or erl,
 For vileyns synful dedes make a cherl.
 For gentillesse nys but renomee°
 Of thyn auncestres for hir hye° bountee,
 Which is a straunge° thyng for thy persone.
 Thy gentillesse cometh fro God allone.
 Thanne comth oure verray° gentillesse of grace;
 It was no thyng biquethe° us with oure place.
 “Thenketh how noble, as seith Valerius,°
 Was thilke° Tullius Hostilius 310
 That out of poverte roos to heigh noblesse.
 Redeth Senek,° and redeth eek Boece.°
 Ther shul ye seen° expres that no drede° is
 That he is gentil that dooth gentil dedis.
 And therefore, leve° housbonde, I thus conclude,
 Al° were it that myne auncestres were rude,
 Yet may the hye God, and so hope I,
 Graunte me grace to lyven vertuously.
 Thanne am I gentil, whan that I bigynne
 To lyven vertuously and weyve° synne. 320
 “And ther-as° ye of poverte me repreve,°
 The hye God, on whom that we bileve,
 In wilful° poverte chees° to lyve his lyf.
 And certes° every man, mayden, or wyf
 May understonde that Jesus, hevene° Kyng,
 Ne wolde nat chese° a vicious lyvynge.
 Glad° poverte is an honeste thyng, certeyn;
 This wol Senek and othere clerkes° seyn.
 Who so that halt hym payd of° his poverte,
 I holde hym riche, al° hadde he nat a sherte. 330

can
 ever after
 descended from nature
 it is twist
 burst
 it pleased before
 since such gentility
 wealth
 Whoever (Looks who that)
 In private in public
 strives always
 desires (that)
 their
 give
 lineage
 can
 their
 required to follow
 is called Dante opinion
 sort of saying
 seldom
 Excellence
 Wishes
 Also knows
 implanted by nature
 Within
 Inwardly outwardly cease
 could
 bring darkest
 Caucasus
 shut thence
 blaze burn
 As if
 Its function ever retain
 On
 gentility
 Since don't behave
 its nature
 knows
 have esteem for
 Because
 will (not) deeds
 follow dead
 is (not)
 is only renown
 their high
 alien
 true
 in no way bequeathed to
 Valerius Maximus
 that same
 Seneca Boethius
 see doubt
 dear
 Even if
 shun
 whereas reproach
 willing chose
 certainly
 heaven's
 choose
 Willing
 scholars
 considers himself rewarded by
 even if

He that coveiteth is a poure wight,
For he wolde han that° is nat in his myght;
But he that noght hath ne° coveiteth to have
Is riche, although ye holde° hym but a knave.

"Verray° poverté, it syngeth proprely.
Juvenal seith of poverté myrily°:

"The poure man, whan he gooth by the weye,
Biform° the theves he may synge and pleye."

Poverté is hateful good and, as I gesse,
A ful greet bryngere out of bisynesse,

A greet amendere eek° of sapience,
To hym that taketh° it in pacience.

Poverté is this, although it seme alenge,
Possessioun that no wight wol chalenge.

Poverté ful often, whan a man is lowe,
Maketh° his God and eek hymself to knowe.

Poverté a spectacle° is, as thynketh° me,
Thurgh which he may his verray° freendes se.

And therfore, sire, syn that° I noght yow greve,
Of my poverté namoore ye me repreve.

"Now, sire, of elde° ye repreve me;
And certes,° sire, thogh noon auctoritee°

Were in no book, ye gentils of honour
Seyn° that men sholde an old wight doon favour

And clepe° hym fader, for youre gentillesse;
And auctours° shal I fynden,° as I gesse.

"Now, ther° ye seye that I am foul and old,
Thanne drede yow noght to been a cokewold,°

For filthe and elde, also mote I thee,
Been grete wardeyns upon chastitee.

But, natheles,° syn° I knowe youre delit,
I shal fulfille youre worldly appetit.

"Chees° now," quod she, "oon of thise thynges
tweye°:

To han me foul and old til that I deye,
And be to yow a trewe, humble wyf,

And nevere yow displese in al my lyf;
Or elles° ye wol han me yong and fair-

And take youre aventure° of the repair°
That shal be to youre hous by cause of me,

Or in som oother place, may wel be.

what
nor
consider
True
merrily

In front of

340 care
improver also wisdom
receives
miserable

Causes (him)

eye-glass it seems to
true

since harm

reproach

350 old age
certainly authoritative
decision

Say

call

authors find (as authorities)

whereas

husband of an unfaithful wife
as I may prosper

nevertheless since

Choose

two

else

chance resort

370

Now chees yourselfen wheither that° yow liketh.°"

This knyght avyseth hym° and soore siketh,°
But atte laste he seyde in this manere:

"My lady, and my love and wyf so deere,

I putte me in youre wise governaunce.

Cheseth° yourself which may be moost plesaunce°
And moost honour to yow and me also.

I do no fors the wheither° of the two,

For as yow liketh,° it suffiseth me."

"Thanne have I gete° of yow maistrye," quod
she,

"Syn I may chese and governe as me lest°?"

"Ye, certes, wyf," quod he. "I holde it best."

"Kys me," quod she. "We be no lenger wrothe,

For, by my trouthe,° I wol be to yow bothe —

This is to seyn, ye,° bothe fair and good.

I pray to God that I mote sterven wood°

But° I to yow be also° good and trewe

As evere was wyf syn that° the world was newe.

And but I be to-morn as fair to sene°

As any lady, emperice, or queene

That is bitwix the est and eek the west,

Do with my lyf and deth right as yow lest°.

Cast up the curtyn. Looke how that it is."

And whan the knyght sey° verrailly al this,

That she so fair was and so yong ther-to,

For joye he hente° hire in his armes two.

His herte bathed in a bath of blisse,

A thousand tyme a rewe he gan hir kisse,

And she obeyed hym in every thyng

That myghte do hym plesance° or likyng.

And thus they lyve unto hir° lyves ende

In parfit joye, and Jesu Crist us sende

Housbondes meke, yonge, and fresch a-bedde,

And grace t'overbyde hem° that we wedde.

And eek I praye Jesu shorte hir° lyves

That night wol be governed by hir wyves;

And olde and angry nygardes of dispence,°

God sende hem soone verray pestilence.

whichever pleases

ponders sighs

Choose pleasure

don't care which

it pleases

gotten

it pleases

faith

indeed

may die mad

Unless as

since

see

it pleases

saw

seized

in turn he kissed her

pleasure

their

to overrule them

shorten their

niggardly spenders

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