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**Учебное пособие
по истории английской литературы
Reading Medieval English Literature**

Учебное пособие

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Пособие содержит материалы для самостоятельной работы студентов при подготовке к практическим (семинарским) занятиям и промежуточному тестированию по истории английской литературы. Теоретический экскурс в историю английской литературы VI–XIII вв. дополняют положения, рассматриваемые в ходе лекционного курса. Пособие содержит избранные произведения данного периода в переводе на современный английский язык, которые сопровождаются предтекстовыми комментариями исторического и аналитического характера, а также вопросами для обсуждения.

Пособие предназначено для студентов, изучающих дисциплины: «История британской и американской литературы», «История литературы англоязычных стран».

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Chronological Table

Dates	History/Literature
Anglo-Saxon Period	
409-420	Romans leave Britain
449	Settlement of Jutes (Kent)
477	Settlement of Saxons (Sussex)
520	Badon Hill (?), King Arthur
527	Settlements of Angles (Anglia)
597	Augustine converts Ethelbert and Kent to Christianity
d. 680	Cædmon
673-735	Bede
	‘Beowulf’
c. 700	‘Lament of Deor’
	‘Fight at Finnsburgh’
787	First landing of the Danes
c. 725-800	Cynewulf
c. 735-804	Alcuin
827	Egbert of Wessex overlord of England
849-899	King Alfred
875-1154	‘Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’
c. 890	Alfred’s Translations
937	‘Battle of Brunanburh’
991	‘Battle of Maldon’
1016-1135	Canute
1066	Harold
1066	Battle of Hastings and Norman Conquest
Norman Period	
1066-1087	Reign of William the Conqueror
1086	Domesday Book completed
1096-1099	First Crusade
1104	Henry I invades Normandy
1136	Civil War between Stephen and Matilda
1166	The assize of Clarendon
1170	Murder of Thomas à Becket at Canterbury

1171	Henry II invades Ireland
1187	Richard Cœur-de-Lion becomes King
1212	Pope Innocent III. Deposes King John
1215	King John signs Magna Charta
1258	Provisions of Oxford
1264	Revolt of the barons under Simon de Montfort
1265	The first great English parliament
1307–1377	Edward II
1314	Scottish victories at Bannockburn
1327	Edward II deposed
1338	Hundred Years' War begins
c. 1340	Birth of Chaucer
1341	Parliament divided into two houses
1349	Black Death
1377–1399	Richard II
1381	Peasants' Revolt led by Wat Tyler and John Bull
1388	English defeated at Chevy Chase
1400	Death of Chaucer

GENERAL OUTLINE

THE ANGLO-SAXONS, as they were first called in King Alfred's reign to distinguish them from the continental Saxons, were a fairly homogeneous people belonging to a group of northern continental tribes. The Angles took their name from the Anglo-Saxon word "angul" or "ongul", a hook, and were so called either because they were a tribe of fishermen or because they lived on a hook-shaped shore; and the Saxons are so called from the "seax" or "sax," a short sword, the favorite weapon of this warlike tribe.

In their beliefs and in their lives these ancestors of the modern English were frankly and strenuously pagan. Their religion was largely anthropomorphic; their gods were originally personifications of the powers of nature, and looked upon the warriors in battle, and rewarded them for bravery. The names of the days of the week preserve for us some of these ancient gods. Woden, the giver of victory, remains in Wednesday; Tiw, originally the war-god,

in Tuesday; Thor, god of thunder, in Thursday; and Frige or Frigga, wife of Woden, gave her name to Friday. There was also the dread goddess Wyrd, or Fate, who presided over the destinies of men, "cruel and grim in hate," as she is described in *Beowulf*. After brave death in battle, the hero was welcomed in "Walheall" or Valhalla. The wilder regions of the earth were peopled by elves and giants; fire-dragons made a terror of the wilderness and devastated the habitations of men; and Nicors and sea-monsters haunted the fens and inhospitable shores.

It was across the stormy North Sea that these men had come, about the year 449, to the eastern coasts of a land that the Celts had held after the withdrawal of the Roman legions in 410. These "barbarians," as their southern neighbors called them, were of a roving spirit and restless. They pressed the outlying regions of the Roman Empire to the south, and they migrated westward to the British Isles. From Jutland came the Jutes, who settled chiefly in Kent; from Holstein came the Angles, who occupied the region north of the Thames (Norfolk and Suffolk); and from Schleswig, the Saxons, who settled the district around the Thames (Essex and Sussex), whence they gradually pushed westward (Wessex).

Upon the language and life of Celtic England the Romans had left little impress. By the sixth century the Anglo-Saxons had formed the main stock of the population, and supplied the language, social and ecclesiastical organization, laws, and literature which are the foundation of the later development of the English nation.

But this whole period is one of successive invasion and conquest. As the Anglo-Saxons had invaded the land of the Celts and had made it their own, so they in turn were subjected for centuries to incursions by sea-rovers from Denmark, the land of the Danes. It was in 787 that these invaders first landed on the English coasts and began a long series of devastating attacks. The land was harried and tribute was levied. By 850 practically all England was in their power except Wessex, where King Alfred (b. 849) ruled the land (871–901) and kept alive learning and religion. But after him Canute the Dane ruled (1016–1035), to give place to the last of the Saxon kings, Harold, who died in the battle of Hastings (1066)

before the force of a new invader, William the Conqueror. With the advent of the Normans the old order changes, and a new, powerful, and centralized régime begins.

During these unsettled centuries of English history, **English literature** had a precarious existence. As we might expect, we find much of Fate and fighting, of monsters, and of struggle, of heroic combat, in the literature as well as in the life of these old Anglo-Saxons. Their bravest men spent their lives battling with the phalanxes of the relentless North Sea or winning heroic honors against a foe as determined and as valiant as themselves. The most famous **epic** ‘Beowulf’ glories in struggle against great odds and does for old England what the ‘Iliad’ does for ancient Greece. ‘The Battle of Maldon’ and ‘The Battle of Brunanburh’ are also good examples of the strenuous sword play that was the zest of life to those men of heroic mold. For the ideal of Hero was ever before them. To be strong and brave of heart, and to do well in the sight of the people so that their brave deeds might be sung by scop and gleeman in the great hall, where the huge fire leaped and the mead flowed after the battle, was the ideal in the minds of all the Anglo-Saxon youth. Two other things they cherished, perhaps not less dearly: first, their homes and wives, for hearth to them was home; and second their deep-seated belief in Wyrd or Fate, and in their stern northern gods, and in the honor of a brave man. This was a heroic age, and the hero is not only the ideal of the young, but the type of the mature warrior. Beowulf himself is the best representative we have of the warrior, feared by his foes, and beloved of his own men, his “fond loving vassals,” for, as the unknown poet says,

“’Tis meet one praise his liege lord in words and love him in spirit.”

Loyalty to a leader is an outstanding characteristic of Anglo-Saxon life. In poetry it gives us Beowulf; in history, such names as Hengist and Horsa, Ella, Cedric, Arthur, Ida of Anglia, and Ethelbert of Kent. The warrior gave his strong arm and his “war-blade” in the service of his liege-lord, and in return received meat and drink, and gifts of treasure of wrought gold, and a blazing hearth in the great hall. Loyalty and bravery unto death are the ideals

of these warriors of old, and these phases of their life we find in their poetry running like a golden thread.

That the Anglo-Saxons were foes to be reckoned with and marauders of unquestioned valor is a fact attested to as early as the fifth century by Sidonius Apollinaris, a Roman patrician, senator, and bishop (c. 430–482). “When you see their rowers,” he writes to a friend, “you may make up your mind that every one of them is an arch pirate, with such wonderful equanimity do all of them at once command, obey, teach, and learn their business of brigandage.... To these men a shipwreck is a school of seamanship rather than a matter of dread. They know the dangers of the deep like men who are every day in contact with them. For since a storm throws off their guard those whom they wish to attack, while it hinders their own coming onset from being seen from afar, they gladly risk themselves in the midst of wrecks and sea-beaten rocks in the hope of making profit out of the very tempest.”

If we studied history alone, we might come to think that the Anglo-Saxon people were only a nation of fighters and of sea-rovers. When we study their literature, however, we find that they were also great tellers of tales and singers of rather sad songs; that, even as they conquered the sea with their “foamy-necked floaters,” so they themselves were compelled to acknowledge its mystery and its power. The Anglo-Saxon had a hard and continuous struggle with enemies who were constantly pushing him westward, and with a rigorous climate and a hostile sea. The uncertainty of life, the weariness of much wandering, and the perils of the deep are all reflected in his writings. There is the yearning uneasiness for action felt by all who know and love the sea in spite of its cruelty; there is the melancholy of those who are too well acquainted with the limitations of man in the face of nature. These echoes we hear with no uncertainty. When he sings, there is “the still sad music of humanity” in his **lyric poetry**. ‘Widsith,’ ‘The Wanderer,’ ‘Deor’s Lament,’ ‘The Seafarer,’ ‘The Fortunes of Men,’ all show the Anglo-Saxon mind in a reflective, controlled, and moral mood, chastened by strenuous experience and by the rude turmoil of life.

Whatever infiltration there had been of **Christianity** into Britain in Roman times had now become tenuous and had practically

disappeared. It remained for Rome to enter the islands of the north a second time, no longer now under the standards of the Roman legions, but under the sign of the cross. By two distinct routes this invasion of Christian missionaries made its way into England. In the south, Augustine and a band of Roman monks landed in 597, and, with headquarters at Canterbury, where the old Anglo-Saxon Church of St. Martin still stands, they carried their creed throughout the southern and central parts of the land. Previous to this, however, in the north, Irish monks, led by Aidan, had come from Iona and converted the rude north Anglians to a Celtic form of Christianity. Their most famous centres were Whitby and Jarrow. It was not until 664 that the Synod of Whitby assured the unity of the Christian Church in England by submitting to Roman control. The introduction of Christianity into England had an important influence upon the literature as well as upon the life of the people. One must not forget that it provided in the first place an ever-growing band of men who could read and write, and who had the ability, the leisure, and the desire to record the stories of old that the scop had improvised or the gleeman had recited. As these stories were written down, a small tincture of Christian ideas and beliefs was, perhaps not unnaturally, infused into the heathen mass, so that we find here and there touches of literary colour and flavour which we can distinctly trace to the Church. It was an easy transformation of the heathen Valhalla into the Christian heaven, and of gifts of earthly gold into the reward of a heavenly crown. The sadness and stern striving of the old Anglo-Saxon heathen world accorded well with the new seriousness of the Christian soul intent on a peace beyond the struggle and the turmoil of the earthly life: Christianity, then, found in England a fertile soil in which to grow.

But there is also another side to this new influence. The monks brought Anglo-Saxon civilization into contact with an older and richer culture, and this contact with Rome on its more spiritual side had a very stimulating effect upon English literature. The Church provided, at the same time, that sheltered leisure which has so often been a condition of literary composition. Four great names stand out, hazy in the far-distant historical perspective, yet landmarks in this pre-Chaucerian region: Cædmon and Cynewulf in poetry; and Bede and Alfred in prose.

In Northumbria in the seventh century there is the so-called Cædmonian cycle of 'Paraphrases' (Genesis, Exodus, and Daniel) probably of composite authorship, though attributed by Bede to Cædmon (d. c. 680), an uneducated monk of Whitby who late in life discovered his gift of spiritual song. He was possibly also the author of 'Christ and Satan.' Cynewulf (eighth century), endowed with the love of nature and the dramatic power of a true poet, wrote four poems: 'Christ,' 'Elene,' 'Juliana,' and 'The Fates of the Apostles.' To this period, but of unsettled authorship, belong 'The Dream of the Rood' and 'Andreas,' both based on biblical stories; 'Judith,' a fragment based on the Apocrypha; and 'The Phoenix,' noteworthy for its ideal tropical scenery and its love of nature, and significant as a first conscious effort at literary art.

As is usually the case in the development of literature, **prose** comes relatively later than poetry among the Anglo-Saxons or the English. It must not be forgotten that this was a great period of missionary effort, of teaching the people, of monastic life. It is a time when much prose which does not concern us was written by the monks, notably by Gildas and by Nennius. Of all of these Bede (673–735) stands out as the first great teacher, Alcuin (735–804) as the great writer, and King Alfred (849–899) as the great king, friend of learning, and protector of the people. Of Bede's many Latin works, his 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People' is the most important, and King Alfred, who is responsible for the translation of this 'History,' put also into English Gregory's 'Pastoral Care,' Boethius's 'Consolation of Philosophy,' and an epitome of universal history by Orosius. Alfred is also to be credited with revising the English legal code and with systematizing the old Anglo-Saxon 'Chronicle,' which now covers the years 60 B.C.–1154 A.D. and which is really the first English history in the vernacular. Most of this prose writing is simple, direct, earnest, vivid, and impressive.

WHEN the Romans left Britain never to return, they left it with a crude social life, with no central political power, with a heathen religion, and with no literature. When **the Normans** landed six centuries later on the same shore from which the Romans had departed, they found the Anglo-Saxons united under one leader to repel the invasion;

they found a civilized social life, a Christian people, and a national literature of no mean excellence.

Upon every phase of English national life the Norman régime had a deep and far-reaching influence. Government, church, social life, foreign relations, literature, and art—all these felt the effects of the new force, and the result was a new England in which the genius of the Anglo-Saxon and that of the Norman were fused.

Among the effects of the Norman Conquest of England was the closer relation with continental affairs, political and religious, that was bound to follow. The result was that England was drawn into wars involved by the changing dominions of the French kings and was brought into close commercial contact with the trading centres of the time. The history of this political and territorial adjustment which begins in the reign of William the Conqueror (1066–1087) extends through many centuries of war at home and abroad until the union of England and Scotland under James I (1603–1625); and the commercial relation of England with continental cities which started as a result of the Crusades carries us well into the Elizabethan period with its new geographical interests and its zeal for discovery.

Much of this struggle was in reality the result of the inevitable give-and-take, the mutual adjustment of two different races with their own social organization and their own ideals, placed in the unstable position of conqueror and conquered. But there was much in the national and social life of the day to show that English life and thought were emerging from a state of servitude to the past, and were developing into what is really modern English. The Normans and the Anglo-Saxons gradually became welded into one nation.

The machinery of **government** was one of the first phases of the national life to feel the new influence. The old, crude Anglo-Saxon sense of justice which conceived trial by combat or the ordeal of fire gave place to a loftier and more humane conception of the relationship of man to man. There was established a system of justice which involved the circuit court and the beginnings of the jury system. Parliament began its first long series of steps toward independence and toward adequate representation of the people of the land. The Magna Charta which the nobles wrested from King

John in 1215 and the deposition of Edward II and of Richard II for an undue and unjust use of their powers are sufficient illustrations of the growing strength of the people.

The English army, which at the beginning of this period suffers complete defeat at the hands of William the Conqueror, has an important and adventurous history during the next four or five hundred years and sees much service on the continent, where Calais for over two centuries remains an English foothold across the channel. But these wars have more significance in the history of politics than they have in the history of literature, where their chief influence is seen through the closer relationship of England to the rest of the continent and the facilitating of that literary interaction which is so important in the process of individual expression.

The era following the Norman conquest was not, at first, a promising one for **English literature**. The land was exhausted with the old military struggles; it was in a state of social transition; it had not yet accumulated that reserve of energy which is so necessary for the fostering of creative or reflective writing.

But even in the unrest and confusion of this time **three types** of literature stand out prominently: there was first the literature of the court and castle, consisting of a large body of medieval Romance which has been preserved and of the lays of the troubadours, those half-professional and half-bohemian poets of an age in which adventure and romance were the order of the day; there was, in the second place, the popular ballad of the common people—a simple poetry for a simple folk easily roused to lyric enthusiasm and easily pleased with simple and oft-recurring metrical devices of a somewhat primitive character; and there was lastly the religious drama of which the English Bible was the chief inspirer, the one book of greatest significance also in the development of a simple, direct, and effective English prose style.

It is rather a bleak age that we find in the literature of England between the time of the Norman Conquest and that early-blooming flower of English literature, 'The Canterbury Tales.' The language of the country is in a state approaching anarchy. There are first of all **three languages**: roughly speaking, French may be said to be the language of the court and of official circles; Latin, the accepted language of the

Church; and English, the speech of the common people. But even this last consisted of a large number of different dialects, some of them varying so completely in vocabulary and in pronunciation as to make them almost as incomprehensible, in other parts of the country, as a foreign language. Gradually, however, as time goes on we find that the differences begin to drop away. The old vowel endings become more uniform; the old Anglo-Saxon inflections begin to disappear; new uninflected words are introduced from the French; and, most important of all, the greatest writer of these early centuries—Chaucer—begins the process of standardization and really makes the English language by giving pre-eminence to the East Midland dialect which thus becomes the direct ancestor of our modern speech.

There is a fair amount of writing during this period which is literary in character but which, however, does not properly belong to the history of English literature, since it is written not in English but in **Latin**. Many a monastery or city church in those early days kept a sort of diary of national events, a chronicle of the time, and some of these are the original sources for our historical and social knowledge of the period. The critical faculty, however, was not strong in those days and the historic sense was not yet developed; as a consequence, we find legend and report creeping into these chronicles, so that many of them give us rather highly colored and romantic accounts of early heroes of whose existence we of to-day are not even sure.

Among these early writers, William of Malmesbury (c. 1095–c. 1142), Henry of Huntingdon (c. 1084–1155), and Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1100–c. 1154) are of importance for the accounts which they have given us of the old stories of King Arthur; and Richard Rolle (c. 1290–1349) for his sober exalted and religious writings. It is interesting to note how long Latin dominated educated thought in England. Bacon used this language for his philosophical writing, and considered English suitable only for the “dispersed meditations” of his leisure hours, and Milton wrote Latin with as great facility as he did English. In parliamentary oratory in the nineteenth century an apt quotation from the classics did not fall upon dull or uncritical ears. We must remember, too, that one way in which the English schoolboy learns to write English is by writing Latin.

Inextricably bound up with the uncertain politics and with the growing literature of the Middle Ages is the life of **the Church** of that period. The temporal power of the Pope, firmly established under Gregory the Great (590–604) and lasting until 1870; the willing co-operation, sometimes the forced assistance, of powerful monarchs; the spread of an intricate network of ecclesiastical establishments over the whole of Europe; the rearing of great Gothic cathedrals; the almost imperial power of Innocent III (1198–1216); the unscrupulous strangling of incipient heresy; and the inspiration to the most stupendous of all pilgrimages which have ever shifted the population of Europe—all these are important phases of the complex life of the Church of Rome in the Middle Ages.

This is also a great and eventful age in the history of the Church in England. The few missionary centres of Anglo-Saxon times become episcopal sees; monasteries become centres of economic as well as of religious life. The Friars carry education and spiritual consolation far and wide among the poor. Besides the seeds of religious piety, they occasionally sow the seeds of social revolt. The great Gothic cathedrals of England begin to rise all over the land: Rochester, about 1077; Durham, about 1093; Lincoln, from 1123–1147; Canterbury, in 1175; Winchester, about 1325; and Ely, about 1350. There is noticeable a closer relation with the continent in affairs of the Church, and the struggle of the English sovereigns with the temporal interests of the Vatican, which culminated in the break of Henry VIII, started as early as the reign of King John (1199–1216).

Important events in the history of the Church, both historically and for their influence, direct or indirect, upon the literature of England, were: the Crusades, started largely by Peter the Hermit, with the active approval of Pope Urban II., at the Council of Clermont, in 1095 and lasting until the fifteenth century; the activities of the Lollards, the followers of Wycliffe (c. 1324–1384), in attempting to reform abuses in the Church, and thereby bringing down persecution upon themselves; the schism in the reign of Henry VIII, and the confiscation of the monasteries; the translation of the Bible and the formation of the Book of Common Prayer. But this takes us a long step from the Norman Period, in which the seeds of these changes were obscurely but deeply and surely sown.

Though the Crusades were originally inspired by religious motives and were followed by thousands with the most devout and self-sacrificing zeal, they nevertheless tended as time went on to attract to their train men who were led by less idealistic desires and by the lower motive of mere love of adventure, selfish advancement, or personal gain. From the First Crusade of 1096, preached by Urban II, down to the Sixth Crusade in 1270, the sincere and the self-seeking suffered together over the length and breadth of Europe in these futile and disastrous expeditions, and it is perhaps fortunate for us that the details of the Children's Crusade (1212) are veiled by the passing of the years. The significant fact for us is that the Church had the power to set up this star in the East which throughout two centuries attracted to it the wise men and the simple of heart, strong warriors and weak children.

But it is in all departments of life, public or private, in the Middle Ages that the Church seems to be the determining factor. It dictated the policies of empires and it regulated the detailed routine of private life. It not only explained to a man what he must do to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but it also in no uncertain terms told him what he must not do on earth. It not only gave him a convenient creed to believe, but it taught him how to use his mind. When he thought, he thought according to the minute rules of scholastic logic, and when he was tempted to use his imagination this exuberant energy of his mind was carefully guided into the pleasing and quaint paths of **allegory**.

Never perhaps has any method of human thought been harder worked or put to such diverse uses. The simplest form in which we find allegory is in the parables of the Bible with their attendant interpretations. This method is one of the easiest devices for teaching, and the medieval Church was nothing if not didactic. But allegory can become an inconsiderate master if not kept in its place, and the Bible was not the only book which was illuminated or obscured by this method of interpretation, which was also applied to other aspects of Church teaching. Even the pagan writings of classical Greece and Rome, otherwise a region beset with danger for the good and loyal sons of the Church, became a safe and pleasant garden under the illuminating guidance of spiritual allegory. We shall at a later period find allegory the servant of moral virtue in Spenser's

‘Faerie Queene,’ of evangelical sectarianism in Bunyan’s ‘Pilgrim’s Progress,’ and of inconsiderate satire in Swift’s ‘Tale of a Tub,’ but upon the development of medieval literature, allegory as a method exercised an immediate and double influence.

In the first place it afforded a convenient and interesting device for poetical story-telling. Chaucer in his ‘House of Fame,’ for instance, and in his ‘Parlement of Fowles,’ either rises to the heights of personification or else disguises lofty persons behind the fine feathers of fine birds. As the infection spread to the poetry of Love, the complexity, the intricacy, and the artificiality of the method increased. At an earlier date Dante in his ‘Vita Nuova’ had inserted a running explanatory comment to avoid misinterpretation. Scarcely a European poet of this time escapes the temptation to gaze upon two worlds at once.

It was upon the **drama**, however, that allegory had perhaps an even stronger influence. In fact, it is hard to conceive how the English drama could have developed without the aid of allegory, symbolism, and personification. The medieval mind, when left to itself, thought concretely and it had to be taught picturesquely. The Church had early realized this. Its ceremonial, though elaborate, was symbolical. The mass was a sacrifice. The presence of God was a real fact. The crucifix and the stations of the Cross were startlingly realistic. At Christmas and Easter the services were filled with the spirit of sacred drama. The World, the Flesh, and the Devil were not concepts of philosophy, but were real beings, fighting against the powers of good for the soul of man, and were to be believed in with the same simplicity and the same intensity with which, as children, we believed in Santa Claus. Everyman had to go on a long journey. He was deserted by his old companions, Fellowship and Kindred and Riches, and by his five Senses; but Good Deeds, the patient nun, and Knowledge, staunch supporter, stay with him to the end. They are visible to the eye in human form. They are as real as he is. The whole course of life is dramatized. Thus the Church taught man to see the meaning of ideas, and to imagine concepts concretely, and it began to foster that sensitiveness, so essential in later Romanticism, to the things that lie deepest, to the vision of the old and the dream of the young as they

“flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.”

Of all the literature that has come down to us from the Middle Ages, it is not an exaggeration to say that it is **the romance** which holds for us the greatest charm. It is at this time that the imagination of the English begins to feel its power; and the Romance of the medieval period, though naïve in form and frequently lacking in consecutiveness, has nevertheless an attraction and a reality which still make a strong appeal to the modern reader. Whether with Tennyson, we find in these old imperfect tales a shadowy hero

“Touched by the adulterous finger of a time
That hover’d between war and wantonness,
And crownings and dethronements,”

or whether, with Keats, we gaze through

“Magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn,”

we find ourselves in a land that never changes, and from whose confines we always come unwillingly back to the humdrum routine of everyday life. The chief function of romance is to liberate the human spirit, to free it from the necessities of the moment, and to offer it an opportunity for that enlargement of one’s personality which is, after all, the fundamental justification of all art. Romance has existed everywhere and in every century, and it has always striven to find a suitable or permanent channel in which to express itself. In the fairy-tales and in the folk-lore of different races we find the imagination of the race making its first childish attempt to liberate itself from the domination of fact. When language becomes a more efficient servant for the expression of the inmost thoughts of man and for those yearnings which lie almost too deep for words, then we find, in Shakespeare for instance, that the subjective life of man objectifies or dramatizes itself in romance. This is one of the many ways in which this particular form of literature is produced. Another means of approach, fundamental in Wordsworth for example, is the idealization

of the ordinary, the magnifying of the minute or commonplace, until it becomes glorified by a light that never was on land or sea, so that the tawdry and the tinsel become gold, and Cinderella leaves the hearth and becomes a princess in a new reality. Some such view as this of the nature of romance is necessary if we are to see the perennial youth of the romantic spirit in English literature, flowering in the great romances of the Middle Ages, and breaking once more into a riotous though belated bloom at the end of the eighteenth century when Burns rediscovered the significance of a simple human life, and Wordsworth called men's attention once more to the sustaining and illuminating power of Nature.

The story-telling instinct is one of the fundamental energies of man. At every age we find story-tellers, and the stories that they tell sometimes grow out of the great deeds of antiquity which, like those of the Anglo-Saxon King Arthur, become in a later age "huge cloudy symbols of a high romance"; sometimes the makers of story look with an eye of hero-worship upon the great lord and lady of their own day and weave around these noble creatures a series of glorified incidents which give to the knight and damsel an immortality of which they did not dream, and which make them live for all time in the enchanted pages of the world's romance.

The greatest medieval story of the continent was the 'Romance of the Rose,' an allegorical poem of the thirteenth century, composed in part by that pleasant spirit, Guillaume de Lorris, and written in part by the satirical pen of Jean de Meung. Here we have all the stage-setting of the typical medieval romance: the brave knight and the fair lady, the garden and the quest, and over them all the pale light of allegory seeking to give a spiritual appearance to men and women and scenes which would otherwise be frankly real. The 'Romance of the Rose' was to a certain extent the model "par excellence" of the medieval story-teller.

It was not from allegory alone but also from history that Sir Thomas Malory (d. c.1470) drew his inspiration. Caxton printed Malory's book from copy which he asserts the medieval knight "dyd take oute of certeyn bookes of Frensshe and reduced it in to Englysshe." Malory had, indeed, an enormous fund of pseudo-historical fact,

legend, and monkish chronicle upon which to draw. These he boiled down to a fraction of their original size and retold in an English prose which is one of the fine and dignified examples from the pre-Shakespearian period. Malory himself was a gentleman of an ancient house and a soldier, and he was closely associated with that "father of courtesy," the Earl of Warwick. He had, then, plenty of opportunity for knowing at first hand, as well as from books, the subject which forms the theme of 'Le Morte d'Arthur.'

There is really no unity to this collection of tales, though Arthur stands out as its central figure. Malory succeeds in giving us a many-sided picture of chivalric life rather than any idea of historical continuity. He has a pictorial sense, and weaves out of the tangled threads of medieval life huge literary tapestries in which the dim figures of armored knights move through the deepening shadows of the forest, and in which fair ladies walk through the unfading and still fragrant gardens of olden times. His book is really a prose epic of chivalry in which men and women move, looking larger than human, through the mist of time. Here we may see depicted the mysterious birth of Arthur, the gray figure of the sage Merlin, the marriage of Arthur to the fair Guinevere, the war-like figure of the good knight Launcelot, strong of arm and strong of heart, and the other knights of the Table Round—Gareth, Galahad, and Tristram, and the traitor Mordred whose little soul finally brought ruin upon the realm.

Many a poet of a later age has found inspiration in the simple and picturesque tales of Malory: Spenser in his 'Faerie Queene' found there the source of the stories which he retold in Shakespeare's day; Milton for a long time contemplated using Arthur as the central figure of the great epic which he purposed writing; and Tennyson gave to the Victorian age a modern and smoother version of these same stories, set in verse which is as simple, as picturesque, and as flowing as the unaffected prose of Malory.

Other stories of Arthur and of his knights which Malory did not include in his collection are to be found in the so-called 'Mabinogion,' a group of Welsh romances of now unknown authorship, still preserved at Oxford in a fourteenth-century manuscript with the title of the 'Red Book of Hergest,' and well known in the translation by Lady Charlotte Guest.

SELECTED WORKS

Deor

Deor (or *The Lament of Deor*) is an Old English poem found in the late-10th-century collection *the Exeter Book*. The poem consists of the lament of the scop Deor, who lends his name to the poem, which was given no formal title; modern scholars do not actually believe Deor to be the author of this poem. The poem consists of 42 alliterative lines.

In the poem, Deor's lord has replaced him. Deor mentions various figures from Germanic mythology and reconciles his own troubles with the troubles these figures faced, ending each section with the refrain "that passed away, so may this." It is the only poem from the Anglo-Saxon era in which stanzas are used for artistic effect, and only one of two poems that has a refrain. "Deor" has six strophes (stanzas) of unequal length, and the refrain concludes each strophe. The subject matter and the unusual structure of the poem (which has more in common with Old Norse poetry than Old English poetry) indicate that it could have been written much earlier than the other poems in the book, or that it could actually be a translation of an older verse.

Scholars have found it difficult to place "Deor" in a specific genre. Some call it a lament, an elegy, or even a "begging poem," meaning that it was written by an itinerant begging poet without an official place in a court.

All of the characters in the poem are historical or mythical figures that readers would have likely been familiar with. In the first stanza, the narrator refers to Weyland, who is the Old Norse Goldsmith/God. Weyland was imprisoned by his enemy, King Nithhad, who forced him to do manual labor. The narrator refers to Weyland's physical restraints, which invokes the old Norse practice of hamstringing prisoners and binding their limbs with animal tendons. The story of Weyland is that he escaped from prison, killed Nithhad's sons, raped the king's daughter, Beadohild, and then escaped capture on metal wings that he forged. The second stanza follows this traditional narrative, as the narrator describes Beadohild's despair at being impregnated by the man

who killed her brothers. In the third stanza, the narrator describes how the powerful love between Geat and Maethild takes a physical toll on Geat. There is no available historical information on the origins of this tale. In the fourth stanza, the narrator mentions the rule of Theodric, who was King of the Ostrogoths from 471-526 CE. The poem implies that his reign was tumultuous, but there is little information available to support or deny this claim. In the fifth stanza, the narrator describes Ermanaric, a bellicose Gothic ruler who died in 376 CE.

In the last stanza, the poet employs the traditional Anglo-Saxon movement from personal description to a more general address. The narrator explains that no matter how terrible a man's sorrow might be it will pass, because God always changes things. The continuous flow of time (a favourite Anglo-Saxon topic) erases all pain (though not necessarily healing all wounds). The narrator also claims that although it can seem that God allows some to prosper and some to suffer, even those who are blessed will eventually see their good fortune fade. The narrator offers his own experience to illustrate that principle. Deor lost everything that was dear to him – his lord, his position – and now he is experiencing woe. However, he knows that his pain will pass.

Deor had a profound influence on J. R. R. Tolkien, the refrain in particular – which he himself translated as "Time has passed since then, this too can pass" – being a central theme of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Deor

Loose translation by Michael R. Burch

Weland endured the agony of exile.
That indomitable smith was wracked by grief.
He suffered countless sorrows;
indeed, sorrows were his only companions
in that frozen island dungeon
where Nithad fettered him,
so many strong-but-supple sinew-bands
binding the better man.

That passed away; this also may.

Beadohild mourned her brothers' deaths
but bemoaned even more her own sad state
once she discovered herself with child.
She knew nothing good could ever come of it.

That passed away; this also may.

We have heard that the Geat's moans for Matilda,
his lady, were limitless,
that his sorrowful love for her
robbed him of regretless sleep.

That passed away; this also may.

For thirty winters Theodric ruled
the Mæring stronghold with an iron hand;
many acknowledged this and moaned.

That passed away; this also may.

We have heard too of Ermanaric's wolfish ways,
of how he cruelly ruled the realm of the Goths.
That was a grim king! Many a warrior sat,
full of cares and maladies of the mind,
wishing constantly that his kingdom might be overthrown.

That passed away; this also may.

If a man sits long enough, sorrowful and anxious,
bereft of joy, his mind constantly darkening,
soon it seems to him that his troubles are endless.
Then he must consider that the wise Lord
often moves through the earth
granting some men honor, glory and fame,
but others only shame and hardship.
This I must say for myself:
that for awhile I was the Heodeninga's scop,
dear to my lord. My name was Deor.
For many winters I held a fine office,
faithfully serving a just lord. But now Heorrenda

a man skilful in songs, has received the estate
the protector of warriors promised me.
That passed away; this also may.

Questions:

1. What is the message of the poem? Do you agree with it?
2. The poem was not given any formal title. Would you entitle it in a different way?

The Wanderer

The Wanderer is an Old English poem preserved only in *the Exeter Book*. It counts 115 lines of alliterative verse. As is often the case in Anglo-Saxon verse, the author is unknown, and within the manuscript the poem is untitled. The inclusion of a number of Norse-influenced words, such as the compound *hrimceald* (ice-cold, from the Old Norse word *hrimkaldr*), and some unusual spelling forms, has encouraged some scholars to date the poem to the late 9th or early 10th century.

The metre of the poem is of four-stress lines, divided between the second and third stresses by a caesura. Like most Old English poetry, it is written in alliterative metre. It is considered an example of an Anglo-Saxon elegy.

The narrative follows the Wanderer, a former warrior whose lord has recently died. He remembers his devotion to his lord, the revelry of his hall, and his relationships with his kinsmen. He endeavored to find a new lord but was unsuccessful, and now he wanders alone, trying to gain wisdom from his melancholy thoughts. He describes his solitary journey through a wintry world as a stark contrast to the warmth and comfort of his lord's hall. He identifies with all lonely wanderers. In the second part of the poem, he starts contemplating more general themes about humanity. He ponders the impermanence of things while describing ruins and the destruction of other manmade artifacts. He uses his observations to pass to the characteristics that define a wise man. In his experience, a wise man should not possess anxiety, conceit, or irresoluteness. At the end of the poem,

The Wanderer explains that he has gained wisdom from the experience of living through many winters. Finally, he exhorts his readers to look to God for security on this journey of life.

Scholars disagree about the number of speakers represented in the poem, with some contending that there is only one and others believing that in the shift from personal tales to general advice, a new narrator has taken over the poem.

Besides, many scholars debate the relationship between Pagan and Christian themes in *The Wanderer*. The mention of God at the end of the poem suggests that it is a Christian poem, but this conclusion may be too simplistic.

The Wanderer

Translation by Michael Alexander

Who liveth alone longeth for mercy,
Maker's mercy. Though he must traverse
Tracts of sea, sick at heart,
- Trouble with oars ice-cold waters,
The ways of exile - Weirð is set fast.
Thus spoke such a 'grasshopper', old griefs in his mind,
Cold slaughters, the death of dear kinsmen:
'Alone am I driven each day before daybreak
To give my cares utterance.
None are there now among the living
To whom I dare declare me throughly,
Tell my heart's thought. Too truly I know
It is in a man no mean virtue
That he keep close his heart's chest,
Hold his thought-hoard, think as he may.
No weary mind may stand against Weirð
Nor may a wrecked will work new hope;
Wherefore, most often, those eager for fame
Bind the dark mood fast in their breasts.
So must I also curb my mind,
Cut off from country, from kind far distant,

By cares overworn, bind it in fetters;
This since, long ago, the ground's shroud
Enwrapped my gold-friend. Wretched I went thence,
Winter-wearied, over the waves' bound;
Dreary I sought hall of a gold-giver,
Where far or near I might find
Him who in meadhall might take heed of me,
Furnish comfort to a man friendless,
Win me with cheer.
He knows who makes trial
How harsh and bitter is care for companion
To him who hath few friends to shield him.
Track ever taketh him, never the torqued gold,
Not earthly glory, but cold heart's cave.
He minds him of hall-men, of treasure-giving,
How in his youth his gold-friend
Gave him to feast. Fallen all this joy.
He knows this who is forced to forgo his lord's,
His friend's counsels, to lack them for long:
Oft sorrow and sleep, banded together,
Come to bind the lone outcast;
He thinks in his heart then that he his lord
Claspeth and kisseth, and on knee layeth
Hand and head, as he had at otherwhiles
In days now gone, when he enjoyed the gift-stool.
Awakeneth after this friendless man,
Seeth before him fallow waves,
Seabirds bathing, broading out feathers,
Snow and hail swirl, hoar-frost falling.
Then all the heavier his heart's wounds,
Sore for his loved lord. Sorrow freshens.
Remembered kinsmen press through his mind;
He singeth out gladly, scanneth eagerly
Men from the same hearth. They swim away.
Sailors' ghosts bring not many
Known songs there. Care grows fresh

In him who shall send forth too often
Over locked waves his weary spirit.
Therefore I may not think, throughout this world,
Why cloud cometh not on my mind
When I think over all the life of earls,
How at a stroke they have given up hall,
Mood-proud thanes. So this middle earth
Each of all days aeth and falleth. '
Wherefore no man grows wise without he have
His share of winters. A wise man holds out;
He is not too hot-hearted, nor too hasty in speech,
Nor too weak a warrior, not wanting in fore-thought,
Nor too greedy of goods, nor too glad, nor too mild,
Nor ever too eager to boast, ere he knows all.
A man should forbear boastmaking
Until his fierce mind fully knows
Which way his spleen shall expend itself.
A wise man may grasp how ghastly it shall be
When all this world's wealth standeth waste,
Even as now, in many places, over the earth
Walls stand, wind-beaten,
Hung with hoar-frost; ruined habitations.
The wine-halls crumble; their wielders lie
Bereft of bliss, the band all fallen
Proud by the wall. War took off some,
Carried them on their course hence; one a bird bore
Over the high sea; one the hoar wolf
Dealt to death; one his drear-checked
Earl stretched in an earthen trench.
The Maker of men hath so marred this dwelling
That human laughter is not heard about it
And idle stand these old giant-works.
A man who on these walls wisely looked
Who sounded deeply this dark life
Would think back to the blood spilt here,
Weigh it in his wit. His word would be this:

'Where is that horse now? Where are those men? Where is the hoard-sharer?

Where is the house of the feast? Where is the hall 's uproar?

Alas, bright cup! Alas, burnished fighter!

Alas, proud prince! How that time has passed,

Dark under night's helm, as though it never had been!

There stands in the stead of staunch thanes

A towering wall wrought with worm-shapes;

The earls are off-taken by the ash-spear's point,

- That thirsty weapon. Their Weird is glorious.

Storms break on the stone hillside,

The ground bound by driving sleet,

Winter's wrath. Then wanness cometh,

Night's shade spreadeth, sendeth from north

The rough hail to harry mankind.

In the earth-realm all is crossed;

Weird's will changeth the world.

Wealth is lent us, friends are lent us,

Man is lent, kin is lent;

All this earth's frame shall stand empty. '

So spoke the sage in his heart; he sat apart in thought.

Good is he who keeps faith: nor should care too fast

Be out of a man's breast before he first know the cure:

A warrior fights on bravely. Well is it for him who seeks forgiveness,

The Heavenly Father's solace, in whom all our fastness stands.

Questions:

1. The poem we know as "The Wanderer" doesn't actually have a title in the manuscript in which it appears. What would you call the poem if you were the editor who had to give it a name?

2. "The Wanderer" is voiced by three different speakers, each one introducing the next. Why write the poem in this way, rather than just making it the words of one speaker? How does this narrative strategy change our understanding of the poem?

3. The second speaker in "The Wanderer" says that it's wisest for a person to keep sad thoughts to himself. If that's the case, then what's the point of writing this poem at all?

The Seafarer

The Seafarer is an Old English poem giving a first-person account of a man alone on the sea. The poem consists of 124 lines, and is only recorded in *the Exeter Book*. Scholars often view it as a companion piece to "The Wanderer."

The poem is told from the point of view of an old seafarer, who is reminiscing and evaluating his life as he has lived it. The seafarer describes the desolate hardships of life on the wintry sea. He describes the anxious feelings, cold-wetness, and solitude of the sea voyage in contrast to life on land where men are surrounded by kinsmen, free from dangers, and full on food and wine. The climate on land then begins to resemble that of the wintry sea, and the speaker shifts his tone from the dreariness of the winter voyage and begins to describe his yearning for the sea. Time passes through the seasons from winter to spring and to summer.

Then the speaker again shifts, this time not in tone, but in subject matter. The sea is no longer explicitly mentioned; instead the speaker preaches about steering a steadfast path to heaven. He asserts that earthly happiness will not endure, that men must oppose the devil with brave deeds, and that earthly wealth cannot travel to the afterlife nor can it benefit the soul after a man's death.

The poem ends with a series of gnomic statements about God, eternity, and self-control. The poem then ends with the single word "Amen".

The Seafarer has an alliterative rhyme scheme. Unlike *The Wanderer*, it is slightly easier for modern readers to understand, because there are fewer vague passages that require interpretation. There appears to be only one narrator, an *anhaga*, meaning "solitary figure", who describes his own journeys at sea and then transitions into a discussion of the ephemerality of life on Earth. Most scholars categorize the poem as an elegy, but some view it as a lament because of the narrator's suffering, some consider it a verse homily because

of the preachy tone, and some define it as a wisdom poem due to the narrator's admonition for his readers to trust in the Lord. Some critics believe that the sea journey described in the first half of the poem is actually an allegory, especially because of the poet's use of idiom to express homiletic ideas.

Literary critics who see "The Seafarer" as an allegory claim that the "exile" is actually Adam and his descendants, who were cast out of the Garden of Eden. In the Bible, the Christian pilgrims who journey to the "City of God" are exiles. Therefore, the allegorical interpretation draws a parallel between a pilgrim's quest and the Seafarer's spiritual journey and voluntary exile. Pilgrims and other voluntary exiles are common in Anglo-Saxon literature as early as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in 891. Similarly, the titular Seafarer could be undertaking his journey to ensure his entrance into heaven.

The poem moves from the particular to the general, from the known to the unknown, and from the temporal to the eternal. The Seafarer speaks of the land-dwellers in contrast to himself, and by doing so demonstrates that he is wiser and more experienced in dealing with hardship. This opening section allows the narrator to essentially establish his credibility in offering advice to his readers. The Seafarer describes how he has cast off all earthly pleasures and now mistrusts them. He prefers spiritual joy to material wealth, and looks down upon land-dwellers as ignorant and naive. It is highly likely that the Seafarer was, at one time, a land-dweller himself. Therefore, he could very well be referring to himself when he describes the way a man can be deprived of, then willingly abandon the land-joys, especially the companionship of lord and fellows.

The Seafarer has been translated many times by numerous scholars, poets, and other writers, with the first English translation by Benjamin Thorpe in 1842. Between 1842 and 2000 over 60 different versions, in eight languages, have been recorded. American expatriate poet Ezra Pound produced a well-known interpretation of *The Seafarer*, and his version varies from the original in theme and content. It all but eliminates the religious element of the poem, and addresses only the first 99 lines. However, Pound mimics the style of the original through the extensive use of alliteration.

The Seafarer
by Ezra Pound
(From the early Anglo-Saxon text)

May I for my own self song's truth reckon,
Journey's jargon, how I in harsh days
Hardship endured oft.
Bitter breast-cares have I abided,
Known on my keel many a care's hold,
And dire sea-surge, and there I oft spent
Narrow nightwatch nigh the ship's head
While she tossed close to cliffs. Coldly afflicted,
My feet were by frost benumbed.
Chill its chains are; chafing sighs
Hew my heart round and hunger begot
Mere-weary mood. Lest man know not
That he on dry land loveliest liveth,
List how I, care-wretched, on ice-cold sea,
Weathered the winter, wretched outcast
Deprived of my kinsmen;
Hung with hard ice-flakes, where hail-scur flew,
There I heard naught save the harsh sea
And ice-cold wave, at whiles the swan cries,
Did for my games the gannet's clamour,
Sea-fowls, loudness was for me laughter,
The mews' singing all my mead-drink.
Storms, on the stone-cliffs beaten, fell on the stern
In icy feathers; full oft the eagle screamed
With spray on his pinion.
Not any protector
May make merry man faring needy.
This he little believes, who aye in winsome life
Abides 'mid burghers some heavy business,
Wealthy and wine-flushed, how I weary oft
Must bide above brine.
Neareth nightshade, snoweth from north,

Frost froze the land, hail fell on earth then
Corn of the coldest. Nathless there knocketh now
The heart's thought that I on high streams
The salt-wavy tumult traverse alone.
Moaneth always my mind's lust
That I fare forth, that I afar hence
Seek out a foreign fastness.
For this there's no mood-lofty man over earth's midst,
Not though he be given his good, but will have in his youth greed;
Nor his deed to the daring, nor his king to the faithful
But shall have his sorrow for sea-fare
Whatever his lord will.
He hath not heart for harping, nor in ring-having
Nor winsomeness to wife, nor world's delight
Nor any whit else save the wave's slash,
Yet longing comes upon him to fare forth on the water.
Bosque taketh blossom, cometh beauty of berries,
Fields to fairness, land fares brisker,
All this admonisheth man eager of mood,
The heart turns to travel so that he then thinks
On flood-ways to be far departing.
Cuckoo calleth with gloomy crying,
He singeth summerward, bodeth sorrow,
The bitter heart's blood. Burgher knows not --
He the prosperous man -- what some perform
Where wandering them widest draweth.
So that but now my heart burst from my breast-lock,
My mood 'mid the mere-flood,
Over the whale's acre, would wander wide.
On earth's shelter cometh oft to me,
Eager and ready, the crying lone-flyer,
Whets for the whale-path the heart irresistibly,
O'er tracks of ocean; seeing that anyhow
My lord deems to me this dead life
On loan and on land, I believe not
That any earth-weal eternal standeth

Save there be somewhat calamitous
That, ere a man's tide go, turn it to twain.
Disease or oldness or sword-hate
Beats out the breath from doom-gripped body.
And for this, every earl whatever, for those speaking after --
Laud of the living, boasteth some last word,
That he will work ere he pass onward,
Frame on the fair earth 'gainst foes his malice,
Daring ado, ...
So that all men shall honour him after
And his laud beyond them remain 'mid the English,
Aye, for ever, a lasting life's-blast,
Delight mid the doughty.
Days little durable,
And all arrogance of earthen riches,
There come now no kings nor Cæsars
Nor gold-giving lords like those gone.
Howe'er in mirth most magnified,
Whoe'er lived in life most lordliest,
Drear all this excellence, delights undurable!
Waneth the watch, but the world holdeth.
Tomb hideth trouble. The blade is layed low.
Earthly glory ageth and seareth.
No man at all going the earth's gait,
But age fares against him, his face paleth,
Grey-haired he groaneth, knows gone companions,
Lordly men are to earth o'ergiven,
Nor may he then the flesh-cover, whose life ceaseth,
Nor eat the sweet nor feel the sorry,
Nor stir hand nor think in mid heart,
And though he strew the grave with gold,
His born brothers, their buried bodies
Be an unlikely treasure hoard.

Questions:

1. Check out other translations of "The Seafarer". Which one do you like best? Why?
2. The poem we know as "The Seafarer" doesn't actually have a title in its manuscript. Its title was given to it by later editors of the poem. What do you think of this title? What would you name this poem if you were the editor in charge?
3. Why is the speaker in "The Seafarer" so restless and unhappy? Why is he forced to travel "the paths of exile"?
4. A lot of people think "The Seafarer" is an extended metaphor about the spiritual journey of the Christian soul. Do you agree with this interpretation? Why or why not?
5. Who are the "kings and Caesars" the speaker mentions in lines 81-85, and why is he so in awe of them?
6. What kind of life do you think this speaker wants a person to live? What, exactly, is he telling us to do?
7. Which modern genre of music would make a good soundtrack for "The Seafarer"?

The Wife's Lament

The Wife's Lament or *The Wife's Complaint* is an Old English poem of 53 lines found in *the Exeter Book*. It is generally treated as an elegy in the manner of the German *frauenlied*, or woman's song. The poem has been relatively well-preserved. Thematically, the poem is primarily concerned with the evocation of the grief of the female speaker and with the representation of her state of despair. The tribulations she suffers leading to her state of lamentation, however, are cryptically described and have been subject to a wide array of interpretations.

One version is that the woman is a peace-weaver who is living with a hostile tribe. She had to sever ties with her family and travel to a new land, where she feels isolated. She evidently misses her husband, but it is unclear whether he reciprocates her feelings. Because of the intimate tone of the poem, some scholars claim that both husband and wife still love each other and their despair is mutual. The linguistic structure

supports this claim, since the Wife's use of Old English dual pronouns makes the lament feel private and sincere. Another interpretation is that the lord imprisoned his wife in an oak tree after being pressured to do so by his kinsmen. Some scholars believe that the Wife's description of an underground cell signifies that she is deceased and is speaking from the grave.

The poem is also seen as an allegory: the Wife represents the Church, specifically, as the Bride of Christ, and she is lamenting her exile from Jesus Christ, her Lord and Savior. It is also considered to be a riddle poem. A riddle poem contains a lesson told in cultural context which would be understandable or relates to the reader, and was a very popular genre of poetry of the time period. Gnomonic wisdom is also a characteristic of a *riddle poem*, and is present in the poem's closing sentiment (lines 52-53). Also, it cannot be ignored that contained within *the Exeter Book* are 92 other riddle poems.

The Wife's Lament

loose translation by Michael R. Burch

I draw these dark words from deep wells of wild grief,
dredged up from my heart, regretful & sad.
I recount wrenching wanderings I've suffered since birth,
both ancient and recent, that drove me mad.
I have reaped, from my exile-paths, only pain
here on earth.

First, my Lord forsook his kinfolk — left,
crossed the seas' wide expanse, deserted our tribe.
Since then, I've known only misery:
wrenching dawn-griefs, despair in wild tides ...
Where, oh where can he be?

Then I, too, left — a lonely, lordless refugee,
full of unaccountable desires!
But the man's kinsmen schemed to estrange us,
divide us, keep us apart.

Divorced from hope, unable to embrace him,
how my helpless heart
broke! ...

Then my Lord spoke:
"Take up residence here."
I had few acquaintances in this alien land, none close.
I was penniless, friendless;
Christ, I felt lost!

Eventually
I believed I'd met a well-matched man — one meant for me,
but unfortunately
 he
was ill-starred, unkind,
with a devious mind,
full of nefarious intentions,
plotting some crime!

Before God we
vowed never to part, not till kingdom come, never!
But now that's all changed, forever —
our marriage is done, severed.

So now I must hear, far and near,
early and late,
contempt for my mate.

Then naysayers bade me, "Go, seek repentance in the sacred grove, beneath the great oak trees, in some root-entangled grotto, alone."

Now in this ancient earth-hall I huddle, hurt and oppressed —
the dales are dark, the hills wild & immense,
and this cruel-briared enclosure — an arid abode!

How the injustice assails me—my lord's absence!
Elsewhere on earth lovers share the same bed

while I pass through life, half dead,
in this dark abscess where I wilt in the heat, unable to rest
or forget the tribulations of my life's hard lot.

A young woman must always be
stern, hard-of-heart, unmoved, full of belief,
enduring breast-cares, suppressing her own feelings.
She must always appear cheerful,
even in a tumult of grief.

Now, like a criminal exiled to a distant land,
groaning beneath insurmountable cliffs,
my weary-minded lover, drenched by wild storms
and caught in the clutches of anguish, moans and mourns,
reminded constantly of our former happiness.

Woe be it to them who abide in longing!

Questions:

1. Do you think the poem was written by a man or a woman? How can you tell?

2. What's the deal with the husband's kinsmen, and why are they so darn mean?

3. Why is this cave chosen as her place of exile? Who do you think sent her there?

4. What is the purpose of the final eleven lines? Is it gnomic? A riddle? A curse? Why do you think so?

5. Do you think "The Wife's Lament" fits into a larger, lost narrative? Why or why not?

6. Is the poem a riddle? If so, what might the answer be?

Cædmon's Hymn

Cædmon's *Hymn* is a short Old English poem originally composed by Cædmon, an illiterate cow-herder who was able to sing in honour of God the Creator, using words that he had never heard before. It was composed between 658 and 680 and is the oldest recorded Old English poem, being composed within living memory of the Christianization of Anglo-Saxon England.

The Hymn is one of the oldest surviving samples of Germanic alliterative verse. As was common with poetry of the period, the nine lines of *the Hymn* are divided into eighteen half-lines by a medial caesura (pause or break in the middle of the line); the four principal stresses of each line are in turn divided evenly, allotting each half line with two stresses. It is generally acknowledged that the text can be separated into two rhetorical sections (although some scholars believe it could be divided into three), based on theme, syntax and pacing; the first being lines one to four and the second being lines five to nine.

Cædmon utilized a form of Anglo-Saxon poetry traditionally used for the veneration of kings and princes, and altered the conventions in a way that would cause it to refer to God instead of a monarch. For instance, the phrase *rices weard* (keeper of the kingdom) was changed to *heofonrices weard* (keeper of the kingdom of heaven). The poem grabs the reader from its opening word 'Nu', meaning 'Now', making the poem feel immediate. From there it proceeds to celebrate all of creation in a mere nine lines. It closes, powerfully, with the word 'ælmihstig', 'Almighty', in praise of God.

The Hymn is Cædmon's sole surviving composition. It was designed to be sung from memory and was later preserved in written form by others, surviving today in at least 19 verified manuscript copies. The poem has passed down from a Latin translation by Bede in his Ecclesiastical History of the English People. Bede's point, in his story about Cædmon, is that poetry is transformational, mystical and God-given. The Hymn forms a prominent landmark and reference point for the study of Old English prosody, for the early influence which Christianity had on the poems and songs of the Anglo-Saxon people after their conversion.

From the Old English translation of *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, book IV chapter xxiv:

In this abbess's monastery was a certain brother particularly glorified and honoured with a divine gift, in that he fittingly was accustomed to make songs, which pertained to religion and virtue, so that whatever thus he he learned of divine letters from scholars, those things he after a moderate space of time he brought forth, in poetic language adorned with the greatest sweetness and inspiration and well-made in the English language. And by his poem-songs the spirits of many men were kindled to distain of the world and to service of a heavenly life. And likewise, many others after him among the English people endeavoured to compose pious songs, but none however in like manner to him could do so because he had learned not at all from men nor through man that he songcraft learned, but he was divinely aided and through God's gift received the art of poetry. And he therefore he never could make any sort of lying or idle songs, but just those alone which pertained to piety, and those which were fitting for his pious tongue to sing. The man was established in worldly life until the time when he was of advanced age, and he had never learned any songs. And consequently, often at a drinking gathering, when there was deemed to be occasion of joy, that they all must in turn sing with a harp, when he saw the harp nearing him, he then arose for shame from that feast and went home to his house. Then he did this on a certain occasion, that he left the banquet-hall and he was going out to the animal stables, which herd had been assigned to him that night. When he there at a suitable time set his limbs at rest and fell asleep, then some man stood by him in his dream and hailed and greeted him and addressed him by his name: 'Caedmon, sing me something.' Then he answered and said: 'I do not know how to sing and for that reason I went out from this feast and went hither, because I did not know how to sing at all.' Again he said, he who was speaking with him: 'Nevertheless, you must sing.' Then he said: 'What must I sing?' Said he: 'Sing to me of the first Creation.' When he received this answer, then he began immediately to sing in praise of God the Creator verses and words which he had never heard, whose order is this:

Nu sculon herigean heofonrices weard,
meotodes meahte and his modgeþanc,
weorc wuldorfæder, swa he wundra gehwæs,
ece drihten, or onstealde.

He ærest sceop eorðan bearnum
heofon to hrofe, halig scyppend;
þa middangeard moncynnes weard,
ece drihten, æfter teode
firum foldan, frea ælmihtig.

(West Saxon Version)

Modern English translation

Now [we] must honour the guardian of heaven,
the might of the architect, and his purpose,
the work of the father of glory
as he, the eternal lord, established the beginning of wonders;
he first created for the children of men
heaven as a roof, the holy creator.
Then the guardian of mankind,
the eternal lord, afterwards appointed the middle earth,
the lands for men, the Lord almighty.

Questions:

1. Does the miraculous backstory provided by Bede make Caedmon's Hymn more or less impressive? Why do you think so?

2. What's the effect of cramming so much (formation of the universe) into so little (nine lines)?

3. If the speaker spoke as an "I" instead of a "we," how would the hymn's tone change?

4. Do "mind-plans" sound more important than "thoughts"? Why or why not?

5. What if Caedmon had written fifty poems and they all had survived? Do you think this poem would still be studied?

6. Is Bede telling it straight regarding the angel? Or is he pulling a massive one over on thirteen centuries of BritLit scholars?

Beowulf

Beowulf is the oldest surviving long story in Old English and is universally acknowledged as one of the most important works of Old English literature. It is an epic consisting of 3,182 alliterative lines. The date of composition is a matter of contention among scholars; the manuscript is dated between 975 and 1025. The author was an anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet, referred to by scholars as the "*Beowulf* author".

The story is set in Scandinavia. The protagonist Beowulf, a hero of the Geats, comes to the aid of Hrothgar, king of the Danes, whose great hall, Heorot, is plagued by the monster Grendel. Beowulf kills Grendel with his bare hands and Grendel's mother with a giant's sword that he found in her lair. Later in his life, Beowulf becomes king of the Geats, and finds his realm terrorized by a dragon, some of whose treasure had been stolen from his hoard in a burial mound. He attacks the dragon with the help of his *thegns* or servants, but they do not succeed. Beowulf decides to follow the dragon to its lair at Earnanæs, but only his young Swedish relative Wiglaf, whose name means "remnant of valour", dares to join him. Beowulf finally slays the dragon, but is mortally wounded in the struggle. He is cremated and a burial mound by the sea is erected in his honour.

The full story survives in the manuscript known as the Nowell Codex dated to the late 10th or early 11th century. It has no title in the original manuscript, but has become known by the name of the story's protagonist. In 1731, the manuscript was badly damaged by a fire that swept through Ashburnham House in London that had a collection of medieval manuscripts assembled by Sir Robert Bruce Cotton. The Nowell Codex is currently housed in the British Library.

The events in the poem take place over most of the sixth century, after the Anglo-Saxons had started migrating to England and before the beginning of the seventh century, a time when the Anglo-Saxons were either newly arrived or were still in close contact with their Germanic kinsmen in Northern Germany and southern Scandinavia. The poem may have been brought to England by people of Geatish origins. The poem deals with legends, was composed for entertainment, and does not separate between fictional elements and historic events, such as the raid by King Hygelac into Frisia. Though Beowulf himself

is not mentioned in any other Anglo-Saxon manuscript, scholars generally agree that many of the other figures referred to in *Beowulf* also appear in Scandinavian sources.

In Denmark, recent archaeological excavations at Lejre, where Scandinavian tradition located the seat of the Scyldings, i.e., Heorot, have revealed that a hall was built in the mid-6th century, exactly the time period of *Beowulf*. Three halls, each about 50 metres (160 ft) long, were found during the excavation.

Beowulf is considered an epic poem in that the main character is a hero who travels great distances to prove his strength at impossible odds against supernatural demons and beasts. The poem also begins *in medias res* or simply, "in the middle of things," which is a characteristic of the epics of antiquity. Although the poem begins with Beowulf's arrival, Grendel's attacks have been an ongoing event. An elaborate history of characters and their lineages is spoken of, as well as their interactions with each other, debts owed and repaid, and deeds of valour. The warriors form a kind of brotherhood linked by loyalty to their lord. What is unique about *Beowulf* is that the poem actually begins and ends with a funeral. At the beginning of the poem, the king, hero, Shield Shiefson dies (26–45) and there is a huge funeral for him. At the end of the poem when Beowulf dies, there is also a massive funeral for Beowulf (3140–3170).

The Anglo-Saxon poet, typically, used alliterative verse, a form of verse in which the first half of the line (the a-verse) is linked to the second half (the b-verse) through similarity in initial sound. In addition, the two halves are divided by a caesura: "Oft Scyld Scefing \\\sceaþena þreatum" (l. 4). This verse form maps stressed and unstressed syllables onto abstract entities known as metrical positions. There is no fixed number of beats per line: the first one cited has three (Oft SCYLD SCEFING, with ictus on the suffix -ING) whereas the second has two (SCEAþena ÞREATum).

Kennings are also a significant technique in *Beowulf*. They are evocative poetic descriptions of everyday things, often created to fill the alliterative requirements of the metre. For example, a poet might call the sea the "swan-road" or the "whale-road"; a king might be called a "ring-giver." There are many kennings in *Beowulf*, and the device is

typical of much of classic poetry in Old English, which is heavily formulaic.

In historical terms, the poem's characters would have been Norse pagans (the historical events of the poem took place before the Christianisation of Scandinavia), yet the poem was recorded by Christian Anglo-Saxons who had mostly converted from their native Anglo-Saxon paganism around the 7th century – both Anglo-Saxon paganism and Norse paganism share a common origin as both are forms of Germanic paganism. *Beowulf* thus depicts a Germanic warrior society, in which the relationship between the lord of the region and those who served under him was of paramount importance.

The dating of *Beowulf* has attracted considerable scholarly attention. The poem has been dated to between the 8th and the early 11th centuries. Thus, J. R. R. Tolkien believed that the poem retains too genuine a memory of Anglo-Saxon paganism to have been composed more than a few generations after the completion of the Christianisation of England around AD 700. Opinion differs as to whether the composition of the poem is nearly contemporary with its transcription, whether it was first written in the 8th century, or if a proto-version of the poem was perhaps composed at an even earlier time and orally transmitted for many years, then transcribed in its present form at a later date. The manuscript is sometimes seen as the transcription of a performance, though likely taken at more than one sitting.

Over 300 translations and adaptations are available, in poetry and prose. *Beowulf* has been translated into at least 23 other languages. In 1805, the historian Sharon Turner was the first to translate selected verses into modern English. In 1815, Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin published the first complete edition in Latin. In 1909, Francis Barton Gummere's full translation in "English imitative meter" was published, and was used as the text of Gareth Hinds's graphic novel based on *Beowulf* in 2007. Seamus Heaney's 1999 translation of the poem (referred to by Howell Chickering and many others as "Heaneywulf") was widely publicized. J. R. R. Tolkien's long-awaited translation (edited by his son, Christopher) was published in 2014 as *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary*. This also includes Tolkien's own retelling of the story of *Beowulf* in his tale, *Sellic Spell*.

Beowulf (excerpt)

Translated by Frances B. Grummere

First battle: Grendel

...Beowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow:—
“This was my thought, when my thanes and I
bent to the ocean and entered our boat,
that I would work the will of your people
fully, or fighting fall in death,
in fiend’s gripe fast. I am firm to do
an earl’s brave deed, or end the days
of this life of mine in the mead-hall here.”
Well these words to the woman seemed,
Beowulf’s battle-boast. — Bright with gold
the stately dame by her spouse sat down.
Again, as erst, began in hall
warriors’ wassail and words of power,
the proud-band’s revel, till presently
the son of Healfdene hastened to seek
rest for the night; he knew there waited
fight for the fiend in that festal hall,
when the sheen of the sun they saw no more,
and dusk of night sank darkling nigh,
and shadowy shapes came striding on,
wan under welkin. The warriors rose.
Man to man, he made harangue,
Hrothgar to Beowulf, bade him hail,
let him wield the wine hall: a word he added:—
“Never to any man erst I trusted,
since I could heave up hand and shield,
this noble Dane-Hall, till now to thee.
Have now and hold this house unpeered;
remember thy glory; thy might declare;
watch for the foe! No wish shall fail thee
if thou bidest the battle with bold-won life.”
THEN Hrothgar went with his hero-train,

defence-of-Scyldings, forth from hall;
fain would the war-lord Wealhtheow seek,
couch of his queen. The King-of-Glory
against this Grendel a guard had set,
so heroes heard, a hall-defender,
who warded the monarch and watched for the monster.
In truth, the Geats' prince gladly trusted
his mettle, his might, the mercy of God!
Cast off then his corselet of iron,
helmet from head; to his henchman gave, —
choicest of weapons, — the well-chased sword,
bidding him guard the gear of battle.
Spake then his Vaunt the valiant man,
Beowulf Geat, ere the bed be sought:—
“Of force in fight no feebler I count me,
in grim war-deeds, than Grendel deems him.
Not with the sword, then, to sleep of death
his life will I give, though it lie in my power.
No skill is his to strike against me,
my shield to hew though he hardy be,
bold in battle; we both, this night,
shall spurn the sword, if he seek me here,
unweaponed, for war. Let wisest God,
sacred Lord, on which side soever
doom decree as he deemeth right.”
Reclined then the chieftain, and cheek-pillows held
the head of the earl, while all about him
seamen hardy on hall-beds sank.
None of them thought that thence their steps
to the folk and fastness that fostered them,
to the land they loved, would lead them back!
Full well they wist that on warriors many
battle-death seized, in the banquet-hall,
of Danish clan. But comfort and help,
war-weal weaving, to Weder folk
the Master gave, that, by might of one,

over their enemy all prevailed,
by single strength. In sooth 'tis told
that highest God o'er human kind
hath wielded ever! — Thro' wan night striding,
came the walker-in-shadow. Warriors slept
whose hest was to guard the gabled hall, —
all save one. 'Twas widely known
that against God's will the ghostly ravager
him could not hurl to haunts of darkness;
wakeful, ready, with warrior's wrath,
bold he bided the battle's issue.
THEN from the moorland, by misty crags,
with God's wrath laden, Grendel came.
The monster was minded of mankind now
sundry to seize in the stately house.
Under welkin he walked, till the wine-palace there,
gold-hall of men, he gladly discerned,
flashing with fretwork. Not first time, this,
that he the home of Hrothgar sought, —
yet ne'er in his life-day, late or early,
such hardy heroes, such hall-thanes, found!
To the house the warrior walked apace,
parted from peace; the portal opened,
though with forged bolts fast, when his fists had struck it,
and baleful he burst in his blatant rage,
the house's mouth. All hastily, then,
o'er fair-paved floor the fiend trod on,
ireful he strode; there streamed from his eyes
fearful flashes, like flame to see.
He spied in hall the hero-band,
kin and clansmen clustered asleep,
hardy liegemen. Then laughed his heart;
for the monster was minded, ere morn should dawn,
savage, to sever the soul of each,
life from body, since lusty banquet
waited his will! But Wyrð forbade him

to seize any more of men on earth
after that evening. Eagerly watched
Hygelac's kinsman his cursed foe,
how he would fare in fell attack.
Not that the monster was minded to pause!
Straightway he seized a sleeping warrior
for the first, and tore him fiercely asunder,
the bone-frame bit, drank blood in streams,
swallowed him piecemeal: swiftly thus
the lifeless corse was clear devoured,
e'en feet and hands. Then farther he hied;
for the hardy hero with hand he grasped,
felt for the foe with fiendish claw,
for the hero reclining, — who clutched it boldly,
prompt to answer, propped on his arm.
Soon then saw that shepherd-of-evils
that never he met in this middle-world,
in the ways of earth, another wight
with heavier hand-gripe; at heart he feared,
sorrowed in soul, — none the sooner escaped!
Fain would he flee, his fastness seek,
the den of devils: no doings now
such as oft he had done in days of old!
Then bethought him the hardy Hygelac-thane
of his boast at evening: up he bounded,
grasped firm his foe, whose fingers cracked.
The fiend made off, but the earl close followed.
The monster meant — if he might at all —
to fling himself free, and far away
fly to the fens, — knew his fingers' power
in the gripe of the grim one. Gruesome march
to Heorot this monster of harm had made!
Din filled the room; the Danes were bereft,
castle-dwellers and clansmen all,
earls, of their ale. Angry were both
those savage hall-guards: the house resounded.

Wonder it was the wine-hall firm
in the strain of their struggle stood, to earth
the fair house fell not; too fast it was
within and without by its iron bands
craftily clamped; though there crashed from sill
many a mead-bench — men have told me —
gay with gold, where the grim foes wrestled.
So well had weened the wisest Scyldings
that not ever at all might any man
that bone-decked, brave house break asunder,
crush by craft, — unless clasp of fire
in smoke engulfed it. — Again uprose
din redoubled. Danes of the North
with fear and frenzy were filled, each one,
who from the wall that wailing heard,
God's foe sounding his grisly song,
cry of the conquered, clamorous pain
from captive of hell. Too closely held him
he who of men in might was strongest
in that same day of this our life.
NOT in any wise would the earls'-defence
suffer that slaughterous stranger to live,
useless deeming his days and years
to men on earth. Now many an earl
of Beowulf brandished blade ancestral,
fain the life of their lord to shield,
their praised prince, if power were theirs;
never they knew, — as they neared the foe,
hardy-hearted heroes of war,
aiming their swords on every side
the accursed to kill, — no keenest blade,
no farest of falchions fashioned on earth,
could harm or hurt that hideous fiend!
He was safe, by his spells, from sword of battle,
from edge of iron. Yet his end and parting
on that same day of this our life

woful should be, and his wandering soul
far off flit to the fiends' domain.
Soon he found, who in former days,
harmful in heart and hated of God,
on many a man such murder wrought,
that the frame of his body failed him now.
For him the keen-souled kinsman of Hygelac
held in hand; hateful alive
was each to other. The outlaw dire
took mortal hurt; a mighty wound
showed on his shoulder, and sinews cracked,
and the bone-frame burst. To Beowulf now
the glory was given, and Grendel thence
death-sick his den in the dark moor sought,
noisome abode: he knew too well
that here was the last of life, an end
of his days on earth. — To all the Danes
by that bloody battle the boon had come.
From ravage had rescued the roving stranger
Hrothgar's hall; the hardy and wise one
had purged it anew. His night-work pleased him,
his deed and its honor. To Eastern Danes
had the valiant Geat his vaunt made good,
all their sorrow and ills assuaged,
their bale of battle borne so long,
and all the dole they erst endured
pain a-plenty. — 'Twas proof of this,
when the hardy-in-fight a hand laid down,
arm and shoulder, — all, indeed,
of Grendel's gripe, — 'neath the gabled roof'
MANY at morning, as men have told me,
warriors gathered the gift-hall round,
folk-leaders faring from far and near,
o'er wide-stretched ways, the wonder to view,
trace of the traitor. Not troublous seemed
the enemy's end to any man

who saw by the gait of the graceless foe
how the weary-hearted, away from thence,
baffled in battle and banned, his steps
death-marked dragged to the devils' mere.
Bloody the billows were boiling there,
turbid the tide of tumbling waves
horribly seething, with sword-blood hot,
by that doomed one dyed, who in den of the moor
laid forlorn his life adown,
his heathen soul,-and hell received it.
Home then rode the hoary clansmen
from that merry journey, and many a youth,
on horses white, the hardy warriors,
back from the mere. Then Beowulf's glory
eager they echoed, and all averred
that from sea to sea, or south or north,
there was no other in earth's domain,
under vault of heaven, more valiant found,
of warriors none more worthy to rule!
(On their lord beloved they laid no slight,
gracious Hrothgar: a good king he!)
From time to time, the tried-in-battle
their gray steeds set to gallop amain,
and ran a race when the road seemed fair.
From time to time, a thane of the king,
who had made many vaunts, and was mindful of verses,
stored with sagas and songs of old,
bound word to word in well-knit rime,
welded his lay; this warrior soon
of Beowulf's quest right cleverly sang,
and artfully added an excellent tale,
in well-ranged words, of the warlike deeds
he had heard in saga of Sigemund.
Strange the story: he said it all, —
the Waelsing's wanderings wide, his struggles,
which never were told to tribes of men,

the feuds and the frauds, save to Fitela only,
when of these doings he deigned to speak,
uncle to nephew; as ever the twain
stood side by side in stress of war,
and multitude of the monster kind
they had felled with their swords. Of Sigemund grew,
when he passed from life, no little praise;
for the doughty-in-combat a dragon killed
that herded the hoard: under hoary rock
the atheling dared the deed alone
fearful quest, nor was Fitela there.
Yet so it befell, his falchion pierced
that wondrous worm, — on the wall it struck,
best blade; the dragon died in its blood.
Thus had the dread-one by daring achieved
over the ring-hoard to rule at will,
himself to pleasure; a sea-boat he loaded,
and bore on its bosom the beaming gold,
son of Waels; the worm was consumed.
He had of all heroes the highest renown
among races of men, this refuge-of-warriors,
for deeds of daring that decked his name
since the hand and heart of Heremod
grew slack in battle. He, swiftly banished
to mingle with monsters at mercy of foes,
to death was betrayed; for torrents of sorrow
had lamed him too long; a load of care
to earls and athelings all he proved.
Oft indeed, in earlier days,
for the warrior's wayfaring wise men mourned,
who had hoped of him help from harm and bale,
and had thought their sovran's son would thrive,
follow his father, his folk protect,
the hoard and the stronghold, heroes' land,
home of Scyldings. — But here, thanes said,
the kinsman of Hygelac kinder seemed

to all: the other was urged to crime!
And afresh to the race, the fallow roads
by swift steeds measured! The morning sun
was climbing higher. Clansmen hastened
to the high-built hall, those hardy-minded,
the wonder to witness. Warden of treasure,
crowned with glory, the king himself,
with stately band from the bride-bower strode;
and with him the queen and her crowd of maidens
measured the path to the mead-house fair.

Questions:

1. What is it that makes Beowulf a true hero? How do Beowulf's deeds, words, and beliefs come together to create the "perfect" medieval warrior?

2. Why are boasting and storytelling so important in the medieval warrior culture of *Beowulf*? What function do they serve in the epic?

3. How much control do the characters in *Beowulf* have over their fates? Are skilled warriors any more likely to succeed than cowards? Who does the narrator remind us is calling all the shots?

4. What role do women play in *Beowulf*? Consider Queen Wealhtheow, Queen Hygd, and the various unnamed daughters of kings. How do women function in medieval Scandinavian society to reinforce alliances and solve blood-feuds?

5. Why does Beowulf have to die at the end of the epic? How would the epic be different if it ended with Beowulf alive, triumphant, and still king of the Geats?

6. After reading *Beowulf*, what sense do you have of the relationships that existed between different early medieval tribes, such as the Danes, the Geats, the Swedes, the Franks, and the Frisians? Don't worry about the petty details of historical politics and dates; just think about the culture and the way these groups interact. Is life pretty calm and consistent, or full of unexpected catastrophes? On what does the safety of each tribe depend? Why are some tribes in constant conflict with each other? How can blood-feuds be solved — or can they?

7. Several times in *Beowulf*, we hear the same story narrated twice, often because something happens, and then we get to hear one character explain what just happened to someone else. For example, at the end of the epic, Wiglaf witnesses Beowulf's fight with the dragon and death, and then he describes it to the other Geats. Why do you think the author chose to repeat parts of the story in this way? What effect does it have on you as a reader?

8. One important poetic device in Old English is the "kenning," a compound word in which one thing is described by a fanciful two-word metaphor. For example, the sea is described as a "whale-road", a king is described as a "ring-giver", and a murderer is described as a "corpse-maker". What effect do these kennings have on you as a reader? How do they add to the poetic atmosphere of the epic? Give examples of other kennings.

The Battle of Brunanburh

The Battle of Brunanburh is an Old English poem preserved in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a historical record of events in Anglo-Saxon England which was kept from the late ninth to the mid-twelfth century. Most historians of England maintain that the Battle of Brunanburh in 937 was a decisive event in the creation of England. The battle pitted Æthelstan, the English king of Wessex and Mercia, supported by some Norse mercenaries, against a temporary coalition of Scandinavians, Cumbrians (the Strathclyde British) and Scots. The victory that the English achieved 'led to' the England we know today, at least geographically, and hence Æthelstan is often called the first 'King of England'.

The poem celebrates the victory of Æthelstan and Edmund I in style and language like those of traditional Old English battle poetry. The poem is notable because of those traditional elements and has been praised for its authentic tone, but it is also remarkable for its fiercely nationalistic tone, which documents the development of a unified England ruled by the House of Wessex.

The poem is 73 lines long. The text begins by praising King Æthelstan and his brother Edmund I for their victory. It mentions

the fall of "Scots and seafarers" in a battle that lasted an entire day, while "the battlefield flowed / with dark blood." "Norse seafarer[s]" and "weary Scot[s]" were killed by "West Saxons [who] / pursued those hateful people", killing them from behind with their swords; neither did "the Mercians...stint / hard handplay". "Five young kings" are killed in battle along with "seven / of Anlaf's earls". Amlaíb mac Gofraid ("Anlaf") flees by boat, and Constantine flees to the north, leaving "his son / savaged by weapons on that field of slaughter, / a mere boy in battle." The poem concludes by comparing the battle to those fought in earlier stages of English history:

Never, before this,
were more men in this island slain
by the sword's edge--as books and aged sages
confirm--since Angles and Saxons sailed here
from the east, sought the Britons over the wide seas,
since those warsmiths hammered the Welsh,
and earls, eager for glory, overran the land.

The poem comes late in the Old English period and is clear and convincing testimony to the vitality of the Old English battle-epic tradition. Some passages from *Beowulf* and *Brunanburh* present the similar diction and imagery. Accompanying the combatants are the usual "beasts of battle" found in other Old English poems — the wolf, the raven, and the eagle. The Battle of Brunanburh, however, seems to include a fourth animal, the *gūphafoc*, or "war-hawk," in line 64. However, editors and scholars of the poem have suggested that *graedigne gūphafoc*, "greedy war-hawk", is actually a kenning for the *hasu-padan*, / *earn æftan hwit*, the "dusky coated, white-tailed eagle" of lines 62b-63a.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson translated (or "modernized") the poem in 1880, publishing it as part of his *Ballads and Other Poems* (and his son Hallam Tennyson published a prose translation of the poem). In contrast to many other translations of poetry, Tennyson's is still praised as "a faithful, sensitive, even eloquent recreation of its source." The Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges wrote a short poem, "Brunanburh 937 AD," a translation of which was published in *The New Yorker*. In a 1968 lecture at Harvard University, Borges

praised Tennyson's translation, stating that in some locutions Tennyson sounds "more Saxon than the original."

The Battle of Brunanburh
Translated by Alfred Lord Tennyson

ATHELSTAN King,
Lord among Earls,
Bracelet-bestower and
Baron of Barons,
He with his brother,
Edmund Atheling,
Gaining a lifelong
Glory in battle,
Slew with the sword-edge
There by Brunanburh,
Broke the shield-wall,
Hew'd the lindenwood,
Hack'd the battleshield,
Sons of Edward with hammer'd brands.
Theirs was a greatness
Got from their Grandsires —
Theirs that so often in
Strife with their enemies
Struck for their hoards and their hearths and their homes.
Bow'd the spoiler,
Bent the Scotsman,
Fell the shipcrews
Doom'd to the death.
All the field with blood of the fighters
Flow'd, from when first the great
Sun-star of morningtide,
Lamp of the Lord God
Lord everlasting,
Glode over earth till the glorious creature
Sank to his setting.

There lay many a man
Marr'd by the javelin,
Men of the Northland
Shot over shield.
There was the Scotsman
Weary of war.
We the West-Saxons,
Long as the daylight
Lasted, in companies
Troubled the track of the host that we hated,
Grimly with swords that were sharp from the grindstone,
Fiercely we hack'd at the flyers before us.
Mighty the Mercian,
Hard was his hand-play,
Sparing not any of
Those that with Anlaf,
Warriors over the
Weltering waters
Borne in the bark's-bosom,
Drew to this island:
Doom'd to the death.
Five young kings put asleep by the sword-stroke,
Seven strong Earls of the army of Anlaf
Fell on the war-field, numberless numbers,
Shipmen and Scotsmen.
Then the Norse leader.
Dire was his need of it,
Few were his following,
Fled to his warship
Fleeted his vessel to sea with the king in it.
Saving his life on the fallow flood.
Also the crafty one,
Constantinus,
Crept to his North again,
Hoar-headed hero!
Slender warrant had

He to be proud of
The welcome of war-knives —
He that was reft of his
Folk and his friends that had
Fallen in conflict,
Leaving his son too
Lost in the carnage,
Mangled to morsels,
A youngster in war!
Slender reason had
He to be glad of
The clash of the war-glaive —
Traitor and trickster
And spurner of treaties —
He nor had Anlaf
With armies so broken
A reason for bragging
That they had the better
In perils of battle
On places of slaughter —
The struggle of standards,
The rush of the javelins,
The crash of the charges,
The wielding of weapons —
The play that they play'd with
The children of Edward.
Then with their nail'd prows
Parted the Norsemen, a
Blood-redden'd relic of
Javelins over
The jarring breaker, the deep-sea billow,
Shaping their way toward Dyflen again,
Shamed in their souls.
Also the brethren,
King and Atheling,
Each in his glory,

Went to his own in his own West-Saxonland,
Glad of the war.
Many a carcass they left to be carrion,
Many a livid one, many a fallow-skin —
Left for the white-tail'd eagle to tear it, and
Left for the horny-nibb'd raven to rend it, and
Gave to the garbaging war-hawk to gorge it, and
That gray beast, the wolf of the weald.
Never had huger
Slaughter of heroes
Slain by the sword-edge —
Such as old writers
Have writ of in histories —
Hapt in this isle, since
Up from the East hither
Saxon and Angle from
Over the broad billow
Broke into Britain with
Haughty war-workers who
Harried the Welshman, when
Earls that were lured by the
Hunger of glory gat
Hold of the land.

Questions:

Compare *The Battle of Brunanburh* with *Beowulf*. What do the two epics have in common? What is different?

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (Middle English: *Sir Gawayn and þe Grene Knyȝt*) is a late 14th-century Middle English chivalric romance. The poem exists in only one original manuscript, as the last of four poems in the MS. Cotton Nero A x. dating no later than 1400. The three poems preceding it are Pearl, Purity, and Patience, and all four are generally considered to have been written by the same anonymous poet, judging from similarities in style, dialect, and theme. The poet is often referred to as the 'Pearl' poet or 'Gawain' poet. The poems are also illustrated with crude drawings; in the case of Gawain, the illustrations show the various characters of the poem but are not necessarily in keeping with the poem's description of the characters. We have no further evidence of when or where the manuscript was written, although most scholars believe that the dialect indicates an origin in the northwest Midlands of England.

The poem describes how Sir Gawain, a knight of King Arthur's Round Table, accepts a challenge from a large "Green Knight" who challenges any knight to strike him with his axe if he will take a return blow in a year and a day. Gawain accepts and beheads him with his blow, at which the Green Knight stands up, picks up his head and reminds Gawain of the appointed time. In his struggles to keep his bargain, Gawain demonstrates chivalry and loyalty until his honour is called into question by a test involving Lady Bertilak, the lady of the Green Knight's castle.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is typical of Middle English alliterative poems in that it is written in alliterative long lines, following the basic metrical principles of Old English verse. It consists of 2,530 lines and 101 stanzas. Each long line consists of two half-lines, each half with two stressed syllables and a varying number of unstressed syllables. Most importantly, the two half lines are connected by alliteration. For example, the poem begins: "Sithen the sege and the assaut was sesed at Troye" (line 1), with the "s" sound recurring five times within the single long line. The long lines do not rhyme with each other. However, they are organized in stanzas of fifteen to twenty-five lines, and each stanza concludes with a construction known as a "bob and wheel." This term refers to a group of five short

lines, which do rhyme, to the pattern of ababa. If you are not reading Gawain in the original Middle English, the poetic structure may not be maintained in the translation. Some modern English translations keep the rhyme and meter strictly; others are only prose translations.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is one of the best known Arthurian stories, with its plot combining two types of folklore motifs, the beheading game and the exchange of winnings. It draws on Welsh, Irish, and English stories, as well as the French chivalric tradition. It is an important example of a chivalric romance, which typically involves a hero who goes on a quest which tests his prowess, and it remains popular to this day in modern English renderings from J. R. R. Tolkien, Simon Armitage, and others, as well as through film and stage adaptations. The focus is not on love and sentiment (as the term "romance" implies today), but on adventure.

At the heart of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is the test of Gawain's adherence to the code of chivalry. The typical temptation fable of medieval literature presents a series of tribulations assembled as tests or "proofs" of moral virtue. The stories often describe several individuals' failures after which the main character is tested. Success in the proofs will often bring immunity or good fortune. In addition to the laws of chivalry, Gawain must respect another set of laws concerning courtly love, which results in a conflict between honour and knightly duties.

Throughout *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, as many critics observe, there is direct confrontation between the civilisation of Camelot and the chaotic, lawless order of nature. The green horse and rider that first invade Arthur's peaceful halls are iconic representations of nature's disturbance. Nature invades and disrupts order in the major events of the narrative, both symbolically and through the inner nature of humanity. In this view, Gawain is part of a wider conflict between nature and chivalry, an examination of the ability of man's order to overcome the chaos of nature.

The poem is also in many ways deeply Christian, with frequent references to the fall of Adam and Eve and to Jesus Christ. Scholars have debated the depth of the Christian elements within the poem by looking at it in the context of the age in which it was written. For example, some critics compare *Sir Gawain* to the other three poems of the *Gawain*

manuscript. Each has a heavily Christian theme, causing scholars to interpret *Gawain* similarly. For example, throughout the poem, Gawain encounters numerous trials testing his devotion and faith in Christianity. When Gawain sets out on his journey to find the Green Chapel, he finds himself lost, and only after praying to the Virgin Mary does he find his way. As he continues his journey, Gawain once again faces anguish regarding his inevitable encounter with the Green Knight. Instead of praying to Mary, as before, Gawain places his faith in the girdle given to him by Bertilak's wife. From the Christian perspective, this leads to disastrous and embarrassing consequences for Gawain as he is forced to reevaluate his faith when the Green Knight points out his betrayal. Gawain is presented as a devout but humanly imperfect Christian who wins a test of arms, resists temptation by a lord's wife, but succumbs to an offer of invulnerability.

The blend of sophisticated atmosphere, psychological depth, and vivid language produces an effect superior to that found in any other work of the time.

Though the surviving manuscript dates from the fourteenth century, the first published version of the poem did not appear until as late as 1839, when Sir Frederic Madden of the British Museum recognized the poem as worth reading. Madden's scholarly, Middle English edition of the poem was followed in 1898 by the first of many Modern English translation – a prose version by literary scholar Jessie L. Weston.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Translated by Jessie Weston

After the siege and the assault of Troy, when that burg was destroyed and burnt to ashes, and the traitor tried for his treason, the noble Æneas and his kin sailed forth to become princes and patrons of well-nigh all the Western Isles. Thus Romulus built Rome (and gave to the city his own name, which it bears even to this day); and Ticius turned him to Tuscany; and Langobard raised him up dwellings in Lombardy; and Felix Brutus sailed far over the French flood, and founded the kingdom of Britain, wherein have been war and waste and wonder, and bliss and bale, oftentimes since.

And in that kingdom of Britain have been wrought more gallant deeds than in any other; but of all British kings Arthur was the most valiant, as I have heard tell, therefore will I set forth a wondrous adventure that fell out in his time. And if ye will listen to me, but for a little while, I will tell it even as it stands in story stiff and strong, fixed in the letter, as it hath long been known in the land.

King Arthur lay at Camelot upon a Christmas-tide, with many a gallant lord and lovely lady, and all the noble brotherhood of the Round Table. There they held rich revels with gay talk and jest; one while they would ride forth to joust and tourney, and again back to the court to make carols; for there was the feast holden fifteen days with all the mirth that men could devise, song and glee, glorious to hear, in the daytime, and dancing at night. Halls and chambers were crowded with noble guests, the bravest of knights and the loveliest of ladies, and Arthur himself was the comeliest king that ever held a court. For all this fair folk were in their youth, the fairest and most fortunate under heaven, and the king himself of such fame that it were hard now to name so valiant a hero.

Now the New Year had but newly come in, and on that day a double portion was served on the high table to all the noble guests, and thither came the king with all his knights, when the service in the chapel had been sung to an end. And they greeted each other for the New Year, and gave rich gifts, the one to the other (and they that received them were not wroth, that may ye well believe!), and the maidens laughed and made mirth till it was time to get them to meat. Then they washed and sat them down to the feast in fitting rank and order, and Guinevere the queen, gaily clad, sat on the high daïs. Silken was her seat, with a fair canopy over her head, of rich tapestries of Tars, embroidered, and studded with costly gems; fair she was to look upon, with her shining grey eyes, a fairer woman might no man boast himself of having seen.

But Arthur would not eat till all were served, so full of joy and gladness was he, even as a child; he liked not either to lie long, or to sit long at meat, so worked upon him his young blood and his wild brain. And another custom he had also, that came of his nobility, that he would never eat upon an high day till he had been advised of some

knightly deed, or some strange and marvellous tale, of his ancestors, or of arms, or of other ventures. Or till some stranger knight should seek of him leave to joust with one of the Round Table, that they might set their lives in jeopardy, one against another, as fortune might favour them. Such was the king's custom when he sat in hall at each high feast with his noble knights, therefore on that New Year tide, he abode, fair of face, on the throne, and made much mirth withal.

Thus the king sat before the high tables, and spake of many things; and there good Sir Gawain was seated by Guinevere the queen, and on her other side sat Agravain, *à la dure main*; both were the king's sister's sons and full gallant knights. And at the end of the table was Bishop Bawdewyn, and Ywain, King Urien's son, sat at the other side alone. These were worthily served on the daïs, and at the lower tables sat many valiant knights. Then they bare the first course with the blast of trumpets and waving of banners, with the sound of drums and pipes, of song and lute, that many a heart was uplifted at the melody. Many were the dainties, and rare the meats, so great was the plenty they might scarce find room on the board to set on the dishes. Each helped himself as he liked best, and to each two were twelve dishes, with great plenty of beer and wine.

Now I will say no more of the service, but that ye may know there was no lack, for there drew near a venture that the folk might well have left their labour to gaze upon. As the sound of the music ceased, and the first course had been fitly served, there came in at the hall door one terrible to behold, of stature greater than any on earth; from neck to loin so strong and thickly made, and with limbs so long and so great that he seemed even as a giant. And yet he was but a man, only the mightiest that might mount a steed; broad of chest and shoulders and slender of waist, and all his features of like fashion; but men marvelled much at his colour, for he rode even as a knight, yet was green all over.

For he was clad all in green, with a straight coat, and a mantle above; all decked and lined with fur was the cloth and the hood that was thrown back from his locks and lay on his shoulders. Hose had he of the same green, and spurs of bright gold with silken fastenings richly worked; and all his vesture was verily green. Around his waist

and his saddle were bands with fair stones set upon silken work, 'twere too long to tell of all the trifles that were embroidered thereon—birds and insects in gay gauds of green and gold. All the trappings of his steed were of metal of like enamel, even the stirrups that he stood in stained of the same, and stirrups and saddle-bow alike gleamed and shone with green stones. Even the steed on which he rode was of the same hue, a green horse, great and strong, and hard to hold, with broidered bridle, meet for the rider.

The knight was thus gaily dressed in green, his hair falling around his shoulders; on his breast hung a beard, as thick and green as a bush, and the beard and the hair of his head were clipped all round above his elbows. The lower part of his sleeves were fastened with clasps in the same wise as a king's mantle. The horse's mane was crisp and plaited with many a knot folded in with gold thread about the fair green, here a twist of the hair, here another of gold. The tail was twined in like manner, and both were bound about with a band of bright green set with many a precious stone; then they were tied aloft in a cunning knot, whereon rang many bells of burnished gold. Such a steed might no other ride, nor had such ever been looked upon in that hall ere that time; and all who saw that knight spake and said that a man might scarce abide his stroke.

The knight bore no helm nor hauberk, neither gorget nor breast-plate, neither shaft nor buckler to smite nor to shield, but in one hand he had a holly-bough, that is greenest when the groves are bare, and in his other an axe, huge and uncomely, a cruel weapon in fashion, if one would picture it. The head was an ell-yard long, the metal all of green steel and gold, the blade burnished bright, with a broad edge, as well shapen to shear as a sharp razor. The steel was set into a strong staff, all bound round with iron, even to the end, and engraved with green in cunning work. A lace was twined about it, that looped at the head, and all adown the handle it was clasped with tassels on buttons of bright green richly broidered.

The knight rideth through the entrance of the hall, driving straight to the high daïs, and greeted no man, but looked ever upwards; and the first words he spake were, "Where is the ruler of this folk? I would gladly look upon that hero, and have speech with him." He cast

his eyes on the knights, and mustered them up and down, striving ever to see who of them was of most renown.

Then was there great gazing to behold that chief, for each man marvelled what it might mean that a knight and his steed should have even such a hue as the green grass; and that seemed even greener than green enamel on bright gold. All looked on him as he stood, and drew near unto him wondering greatly what he might be; for many marvels had they seen, but none such as this, and phantasm and faërie did the folk deem it. Therefore were the gallant knights slow to answer, and gazed astounded, and sat stone still in a deep silence through that goodly hall, as if a slumber were fallen upon them. I deem it was not all for doubt, but some for courtesy that they might give ear unto his errand.

Then Arthur beheld this adventurer before his high daïs, and knightly he greeted him, for fearful was he never. "Sir," he said, "thou art welcome to this place—lord of this hall am I, and men call me Arthur. Light thee down, and tarry awhile, and what thy will is, that shall we learn after."

"Nay," quoth the stranger, "so help me He that sitteth on high, 'twas not mine errand to tarry any while in this dwelling; but the praise of this thy folk and thy city is lifted up on high, and thy warriors are holden for the best and the most valiant of those who ride mail-clad to the fight. The wisest and the worthiest of this world are they, and well proven in all knightly sports. And here, as I have heard tell, is fairest courtesy, therefore have I come hither as at this time. Ye may be sure by the branch that I bear here that I come in peace, seeking no strife. For had I willed to journey in warlike guise I have at home both hauberk and helm, shield and shining spear, and other weapons to mine hand, but since I seek no war my raiment is that of peace. But if thou be as bold as all men tell thou wilt freely grant me the boon I ask."

And Arthur answered, "Sir Knight, if thou cravest battle here thou shalt not fail for lack of a foe."

And the knight answered, "Nay, I ask no fight, in faith here on the benches are but beardless children, were I clad in armour on my steed there is no man here might match me. Therefore I ask in this court but a Christmas jest, for that it is Yule-tide, and New Year, and there are here many fain for sport. If any one in this hall holds

himself so hardy, so bold both of blood and brain, as to dare strike me one stroke for another, I will give him as a gift this axe, which is heavy enough, in sooth, to handle as he may list, and I will abide the first blow, unarmed as I sit. If any knight be so bold as to prove my words let him come swiftly to me here, and take this weapon, I quit claim to it, he may keep it as his own, and I will abide his stroke, firm on the floor. Then shalt thou give me the right to deal him another, the respite of a year and a day shall he have. Now haste, and let see whether any here dare say aught."

Now if the knights had been astounded at the first, yet stiller were they all, high and low, when they had heard his words. The knight on his steed straightened himself in the saddle, and rolled his eyes fiercely round the hall, red they gleamed under his green and bushy brows. He frowned and twisted his beard, waiting to see who should rise, and when none answered he cried aloud in mockery, "What, is this Arthur's hall, and these the knights whose renown hath run through many realms? Where are now your pride and your conquests, your wrath, and anger, and mighty words? Now are the praise and the renown of the Round Table overthrown by one man's speech, since all keep silence for dread ere ever they have seen a blow!"

With that he laughed so loudly that the blood rushed to the king's fair face for very shame; he waxed wroth, as did all his knights, and sprang to his feet, and drew near to the stranger and said, "Now by heaven foolish is thy asking, and thy folly shall find its fitting answer. I know no man aghast at thy great words. Give me here thine axe and I shall grant thee the boon thou hast asked." Lightly he sprang to him and caught at his hand, and the knight, fierce of aspect, lighted down from his charger.

Then Arthur took the axe and gripped the haft, and swung it round, ready to strike. And the knight stood before him, taller by the head than any in the hall; he stood, and stroked his beard, and drew down his coat, no more dismayed for the king's threats than if one had brought him a drink of wine.

Then Gawain, who sat by the queen, leaned forward to the king and spake, "I beseech ye, my lord, let this venture be mine. Would ye but bid me rise from this seat, and stand by your side, so that my liege

lady thought it not ill, then would I come to your counsel before this goodly court. For I think it not seemly when such challenges be made in your hall that ye yourself should undertake it, while there are many bold knights who sit beside ye, none are there, methinks, of readier will under heaven, or more valiant in open field. I am the weakest, I wot, and the feeblest of wit, and it will be the less loss of my life if ye seek sooth. For save that ye are mine uncle naught is there in me to praise, no virtue is there in my body save your blood, and since this challenge is such folly that it beseems ye not to take it, and I have asked it from ye first, let it fall to me, and if I bear myself ungallantly then let all this court blame me."

Then they all spake with one voice that the king should leave this venture and grant it to Gawain.

Then Arthur commanded the knight to rise, and he rose up quickly and knelt down before the king, and caught hold of the weapon; and the king loosed his hold of it, and lifted up his hand, and gave him his blessing, and bade him be strong both of heart and hand. "Keep thee well, nephew," quoth Arthur, "that thou give him but the one blow, and if thou redest him rightly I trow thou shalt well abide the stroke he may give thee after."

Gawain stepped to the stranger, axe in hand, and he, never fearing, awaited his coming. Then the Green Knight spake to Sir Gawain, "Make we our covenant ere we go further. First, I ask thee, knight, what is thy name? Tell me truly, that I may know thee."

"In faith," quoth the good knight, "Gawain am I, who give thee this buffet, let what may come of it; and at this time twelvemonth will I take another at thine hand with whatsoever weapon thou wilt, and none other."

Then the other answered again, "Sir Gawain, so may I thrive as I am fain to take this buffet at thine hand," and he quoth further, "Sir Gawain, it liketh me well that I shall take at thy fist that which I have asked here, and thou hast readily and truly rehearsed all the covenant that I asked of the king, save that thou shalt swear me, by thy troth, to seek me thyself wherever thou hopest that I may be found, and win thee such reward as thou dealest me to-day, before this folk."

"Where shall I seek thee?" quoth Gawain. "Where is thy place? By Him that made me, I wot never where thou dwellest, nor know I thee,

knight, thy court, nor thy name. But teach me truly all that pertaineth thereto, and tell me thy name, and I shall use all my wit to win my way thither, and that I swear thee for sooth, and by my sure troth."

"That is enough in the New Year, it needs no more," quoth the Green Knight to the gallant Gawain, "if I tell thee truly when I have taken the blow, and thou hast smitten me; then will I teach thee of my house and home, and mine own name, then mayest thou ask thy road and keep covenant. And if I waste no words then farest thou the better, for thou canst dwell in thy land, and seek no further. But take now thy toll, and let see how thy strikest."

"Gladly will I," quoth Gawain, handling his axe.

Then the Green Knight swiftly made him ready, he bowed down his head, and laid his long locks on the crown that his bare neck might be seen. Gawain gripped his axe and raised it on high, the left foot he set forward on the floor, and let the blow fall lightly on the bare neck. The sharp edge of the blade sundered the bones, smote through the neck, and clave it in two, so that the edge of the steel bit on the ground, and the fair head fell to the earth that many struck it with their feet as it rolled forth. The blood spurted forth, and glistened on the green raiment, but the knight neither faltered nor fell; he started forward with out-stretched hand, and caught the head, and lifted it up; then he turned to his steed, and took hold of the bride, set his foot in the stirrup, and mounted. His head he held by the hair, in his hand. Then he seated himself in his saddle as if naught ailed him, and he were not headless. He turned his steed about, the grim corpse bleeding freely the while, and they who looked upon him doubted them much for the covenant.

For he held up the head in his hand, and turned the face towards them that sat on the high daïs, and it lifted up the eyelids and looked upon them and spake as ye shall hear. "Look, Gawain, that thou art ready to go as thou hast promised, and seek leally till thou find me, even as thou hast sworn in this hall in the hearing of these knights. Come thou, I charge thee, to the Green Chapel, such a stroke as thou hast dealt thou hast deserved, and it shall be promptly paid thee on New Year's morn. Many men know me as the knight of the Green Chapel, and if thou askest, thou shalt not fail to find me. Therefore it behoves thee to come, or to yield thee as recreant."

With that he turned his bridle, and galloped out at the hall door, his head in his hands, so that the sparks flew from beneath his horse's hoofs. Whither he went none knew, no more than they wist whence he had come; and the king and Gawain they gazed and laughed, for in sooth this had proved a greater marvel than any they had known aforetime.

Though Arthur the king was astonished at his heart, yet he let no sign of it be seen, but spake in courteous wise to the fair queen: "Dear lady, be not dismayed, such craft is well suited to Christmas-tide when we seek jesting, laughter and song, and fair carols of knights and ladies. But now I may well get me to meat, for I have seen a marvel I may not forget." Then he looked on Sir Gawain, and said gaily, "Now, fair nephew, hang up thine axe, since it has hewn enough," and they hung it on the dossal above the daïs, where all men might look on it for a marvel, and by its true token tell of the wonder. Then the twain sat them down together, the king and the good knight, and men served them with a double portion, as was the share of the noblest, with all manner of meat and of minstrelsy. And they spent that day in gladness, but Sir Gawain must well bethink him of the heavy venture to which he had set his hand.

This beginning of adventures had Arthur at the New Year; for he yearned to hear gallant tales, though his words were few when he sat at the feast. But now had they stern work on hand. Gawain was glad to begin the jest in the hall, but ye need have no marvel if the end be heavy. For though a man be merry in mind when he has well drunk, yet a year runs full swiftly, and the beginning but rarely matches the end.

For Yule was now over-past, and the year after, each season in its turn following the other. For after Christmas comes crabbed Lent, that will have fish for flesh and simpler cheer. But then the weather of the world chides with winter; the cold withdraws itself, the clouds uplift, and the rain falls in warm showers on the fair plains. Then the flowers come forth, meadows and grove are clad in green, the birds make ready to build, and sing sweetly for solace of the soft summer that follows thereafter. The blossoms bud and blow in the hedgerows rich and rank, and noble notes enough are heard in the fair woods.

After the season of summer, with the soft winds, when zephyr breathes lightly on seeds and herbs, joyous indeed is the growth that waxes thereout when the dew drips from the leaves beneath the blissful glance of the bright sun. But then comes harvest and hardens the grain, warning it to wax ripe ere the winter. The drought drives the dust on high, flying over the face of the land; the angry wind of the welkin wrestles with the sun; the leaves fall from the trees and light upon the ground, and all brown are the groves that but now were green, and ripe is the fruit that once was flower. So the year passes into many yesterdays, and winter comes again, as it needs no sage to tell us.

When the Michaelmas moon was come in with warnings of winter, Sir Gawain bethought him full oft of his perilous journey. Yet till All Hallows Day he lingered with Arthur, and on that day they made a great feast for the hero's sake, with much revel and richness of the Round Table. Courteous knights and comely ladies, all were in sorrow for the love of that knight, and though they spake no word of it, many were joyless for his sake.

And after meat, sadly Sir Gawain turned to his uncle, and spake of his journey, and said, "Liege lord of my life, leave from you I crave. Ye know well how the matter stands without more words, to-morrow am I bound to set forth in search of the Green Knight."

Then came together all the noblest knights, Ywain and Erec, and many another. Sir Dodinel le Sauvage, the Duke of Clarence, Launcelot and Lionel, and Lucan the Good, Sir Bors and Sir Bedivere, valiant knights both, and many another hero, with Sir Mador de la Porte, and they all drew near, heavy at heart, to take counsel with Sir Gawain. Much sorrow and weeping was there in the hall to think that so worthy a knight as Gawain should wend his way to seek a deadly blow, and should no more wield his sword in fight. But the knight made ever good cheer, and said, "Nay, wherefore should I shrink? What may a man do but prove his fate?"

He dwelt there all that day, and on the morn he arose and asked betimes for his armour; and they brought it unto him on this wise: first, a rich carpet was stretched on the floor (and brightly did the gold gear glitter upon it), then the knight stepped on to it, and handled the steel; clad he was in a doublet of silk, with a close hood, lined fairly

throughout. Then they set the steel shoes upon his feet, and wrapped his legs with greaves, with polished knee-caps, fastened with knots of gold. Then they cased his thighs in cuisses closed with thongs, and brought him the byrny of bright steel rings sewn upon a fair stuff. Well burnished braces they set on each arm with good elbow-pieces, and gloves of mail, and all the goodly gear that should shield him in his need. And they cast over all a rich surcoat, and set the golden spurs on his heels, and girt him with a trusty sword fastened with a silken bawdrick. When he was thus clad his harness was costly, for the least loop or latchet gleamed with gold. So armed as he was he hearkened Mass and made his offering at the high altar. Then he came to the king, and the knights of his court, and courteously took leave of lords and ladies, and they kissed him, and commended him to Christ.

With that was Gringalet ready, girt with a saddle that gleamed gaily with many golden fringes, enriched and decked anew for the venture. The bridle was all barred about with bright gold buttons, and all the covertures and trappings of the steed, the crupper and the rich skirts, accorded with the saddle; spread fair with the rich red gold that glittered and gleamed in the rays of the sun.

Then the knight called for his helmet, which was well lined throughout, and set it high on his head, and hasped it behind. He wore a light kerchief over the vintail, that was broidered and studded with fair gems on a broad silken ribbon, with birds of gay colour, and many a turtle and true-lover's knot interlaced thickly, even as many a maiden had wrought diligently for seven winter long. But the circlet which crowned his helmet was yet more precious, being adorned with a device in diamonds. Then they brought him his shield, which was of bright red, with the pentangle painted thereon in gleaming gold. And why that noble prince bare the pentangle I am minded to tell you, though my tale tarry thereby. It is a sign that Solomon set ere-while, as betokening truth; for it is a figure with five points and each line overlaps the other, and nowhere hath it beginning or end, so that in English it is called "the endless knot." And therefore was it well suiting to this knight and to his arms, since Gawain was faithful in five and five-fold, for pure was he as gold, void of all villainy and endowed with all virtues. Therefore he bare the pentangle on shield and surcoat as truest of heroes and gentlest of knights.

For first he was faultless in his five senses; and his five fingers never failed him; and all his trust upon earth was in the five wounds that Christ bare on the cross, as the Creed tells. And wherever this knight found himself in stress of battle he deemed well that he drew his strength from the five joys which the Queen of Heaven had of her Child. And for this cause did he bear an image of Our Lady on the one half of his shield, that whenever he looked upon it he might not lack for aid. And the fifth five that the hero used were frankness and fellowship above all, purity and courtesy that never failed him, and compassion that surpasses all; and in these five virtues was that hero wrapped and clothed. And all these, five-fold, were linked one in the other, so that they had no end, and were fixed on five points that never failed, neither at any side were they joined or sundered, nor could ye find beginning or end. And therefore on his shield was the knot shapen, red-gold upon red, which is the pure pentangle. Now was Sir Gawain ready, and he took his lance in hand, and bade them all Farewell, he deemed it had been for ever.

Then he smote the steed with his spurs, and sprang on his way, so that sparks flew from the stones after him. All that saw him were grieved at heart, and said one to the other, "By Christ, 'tis great pity that one of such noble life should be lost! I'faith, 'twere not easy to find his equal upon earth. The king had done better to have wrought more warily. Yonder knight should have been made a duke; a gallant leader of men is he, and such a fate had beseemed him better than to be hewn in pieces at the will of an elfish man, for mere pride. Who ever knew a king to take such counsel as to risk his knights on a Christmas jest?" Many were the tears that flowed from their eyes when that goodly knight rode from the hall. He made no delaying, but went his way swiftly, and rode many a wild road, as I heard say in the book.

So rode Sir Gawain through the realm of Logres, on an errand that he held for no jest. Often he lay companionless at night, and must lack the fare that he liked. No comrade had he save his steed, and none save God with whom to take counsel. At length he drew nigh to North Wales, and left the isles of Anglesey on his left hand, crossing over the fords by the foreland over at Holyhead, till he came into the wilderness of Wirral, where but few dwell who love God and man

of true heart. And ever he asked, as he fared, of all whom he met, if they had heard any tidings of a Green Knight in the country thereabout, or of a Green Chapel? And all answered him, Nay, never in their lives had they seen any man of such a hue. And the knight wended his way by many a strange road and many a rugged path, and the fashion of his countenance changed full often ere he saw the Green Chapel.

Many a cliff did he climb in that unknown land, where afar from his friends he rode as a stranger. Never did he come to a stream or a ford but he found a foe before him, and that one so marvellous, so foul and fell, that it behoved him to fight. So many wonders did that knight behold, that it were too long to tell the tenth part of them. Sometimes he fought with dragons and wolves; sometimes with wild men that dwelt in the rocks; another while with bulls, and bears, and wild boars, or with giants of the high moorland that drew near to him. Had he not been a doughty knight, enduring, and of well-proved valour, and a servant of God, doubtless he had been slain, for he was oft in danger of death. Yet he cared not so much for the strife, what he deemed worse was when the cold clear water was shed from the clouds, and froze ere it fell on the fallow ground. More nights than enough he slept in his harness on the bare rocks, near slain with the sleet, while the stream leapt bubbling from the crest of the hills, and hung in hard icicles over his head.

Thus in peril and pain, and many a hardship, the knight rode alone till Christmas Eve, and in that tide he made his prayer to the Blessed Virgin that she would guide his steps and lead him to some dwelling. On that morning he rode by a hill, and came into a thick forest, wild and drear; on each side were high hills, and thick woods below them of great hoar oaks, a hundred together, of hazel and hawthorn with their trailing boughs intertwined, and rough ragged moss spreading everywhere. On the bare twigs the birds chirped piteously, for pain of the cold. The knight upon Gringalet rode lonely beneath them, through marsh and mire, much troubled at heart lest he should fail to see the service of the Lord, who on that self-same night was born of a maiden for the cure of our grief; and therefore he said, sighing, "I beseech Thee, Lord, and Mary Thy gentle Mother, for some shelter where I may hear Mass, and Thy mattins at morn. This I ask meekly,

and thereto I pray my Paternoster, Ave, and Credo." Thus he rode praying, and lamenting his misdeeds, and he crossed himself, and said, "May the Cross of Christ speed me."

Now that knight had crossed himself but thrice ere he was aware in the wood of a dwelling within a moat, above a lawn, on a mound surrounded by many mighty trees that stood round the moat. 'Twas the fairest castle that ever a knight owned; built in a meadow with a park all about it, and a spiked palisade, closely driven, that enclosed the trees for more than two miles. The knight was ware of the hold from the side, as it shone through the oaks. Then he lifted off his helmet, and thanked Christ and S. Julian that they had courteously granted his prayer, and hearkened to his cry. "Now," quoth the knight, "I beseech ye, grant me fair hostel." Then he pricked Gringalet with his golden spurs, and rode gaily towards the great gate, and came swiftly to the bridge end.

The bridge was drawn up and the gates close shut; the walls were strong and thick, so that they might fear no tempest. The knight on his charger abode on the bank of the deep double ditch that surrounded the castle. The walls were set deep in the water, and rose aloft to a wondrous height; they were of hard hewn stone up to the corbels, which were adorned beneath the battlements with fair carvings, and turrets set in between with many a loophole; a better barbican Sir Gawain had never looked upon. And within he beheld the high hall, with its tower and many windows with carven cornices, and chalk-white chimneys on the turreted roofs that shone fair in the sun. And everywhere, thickly scattered on the castle battlements, were pinnacles, so many that it seemed as if it were all wrought out of paper, so white was it.

The knight on his steed deemed it fair enough, if he might come to be sheltered within it to lodge there while that the Holy-day lasted. He called aloud, and soon there came a porter of kindly countenance, who stood on the wall and greeted this knight and asked his errand.

"Good sir," quoth Gawain, "wilt thou go mine errand to the high lord of the castle, and crave for me lodging?"

"Yea, by S. Peter," quoth the porter. "In sooth I trow that ye be welcome to dwell here so long as it may like ye."

Then he went, and came again swiftly, and many folk with him to receive the knight. They let down the great drawbridge, and came

forth and knelt on their knees on the cold earth to give him worthy welcome. They held wide open the great gates, and courteously he bid them rise, and rode over the bridge. Then men came to him and held his stirrup while he dismounted, and took and stabled his steed. There came down knights and squires to bring the guest with joy to the hall. When he raised his helmet there were many to take it from his hand, fain to serve him, and they took from him sword and shield.

Sir Gawain gave good greeting to the noble and the mighty men who came to do him honour. Clad in his shining armour they led him to the hall, where a great fire burnt brightly on the floor; and the lord of the household came forth from his chamber to meet the hero fitly. He spake to the knight, and said: "Ye are welcome to do here as it likes ye. All that is here is your own to have at your will and disposal."

"Gramercy!" quote Gawain, "may Christ requite ye."

As friends that were fain each embraced the other; and Gawain looked on the knight who greeted him so kindly, and thought 'twas a bold warrior that owned that burg.

Of mighty stature he was, and of high age; broad and flowing was his beard, and of a bright hue. He was stalwart of limb, and strong in his stride, his face fiery red, and his speech free: in sooth he seemed one well fitted to be a leader of valiant men.

Then the lord led Sir Gawain to a chamber, and commanded folk to wait upon him, and at his bidding there came men enough who brought the guest to a fair bower. The bedding was noble, with curtains of pure silk wrought with gold, and wondrous coverings of fair cloth all embroidered. The curtains ran on ropes with rings of red gold, and the walls were hung with carpets of Orient, and the same spread on the floor. There with mirthful speeches they took from the guest his byrny and all his shining armour, and brought him rich robes of the choicest in its stead. They were long and flowing, and became him well, and when he was clad in them all who looked on the hero thought that surely God had never made a fairer knight: he seemed as if he might be a prince without peer in the field where men strive in battle.

Then before the hearth-place, whereon the fire burned, they made ready a chair for Gawain, hung about with cloth and fair cushions; and there they cast around him a mantle of brown samite, richly

embroidered and furred within with costly skins of ermine, with a hood of the same, and he seated himself in that rich seat, and warmed himself at the fire, and was cheered at heart. And while he sat thus the serving men set up a table on trestles, and covered it with a fair white cloth, and set thereon salt-cellar, and napkin, and silver spoons; and the knight washed at his will, and set him down to meat.

The folk served him courteously with many dishes seasoned of the best, a double portion. All kinds of fish were there, some baked in bread, some broiled on the embers, some sodden, some stewed and savoured with spices, with all sorts of cunning devices to his taste. And often he called it a feast, when they spake gaily to him all together, and said, "Now take ye this penance, and it shall be for your amendment." Much mirth thereof did Sir Gawain make.

Then they questioned that prince courteously of whence he came; and he told them that he was of the court of Arthur, who is the rich royal King of the Round Table, and that it was Gawain himself who was within their walls, and would keep Christmas with them, as the chance had fallen out. And when the lord of the castle heard those tidings he laughed aloud for gladness, and all men in that keep were joyful that they should be in the company of him to whom belonged all fame, and valour, and courtesy, and whose honour was praised above that of all men on earth. Each said softly to his fellow, "Now shall we see courteous bearing, and the manner of speech befitting courts. What charm lieth in gentle speech shall we learn without asking, since here we have welcomed the fine father of courtesy. God has surely shewn us His grace since He sends us such a guest as Gawain! When men shall sit and sing, blithe for Christ's birth, this knight shall bring us to the knowledge of fair manners, and it may be that hearing him we may learn the cunning speech of love."

By the time the knight had risen from dinner it was near nightfall. Then chaplains took their way to the chapel, and rang loudly, even as they should, for the solemn evensong of the high feast. Thither went the lord, and the lady also, and entered with her maidens into a comely closet, and thither also went Gawain. Then the lord took him by the sleeve and led him to a seat, and called him by his name, and told him he was of all men in the world the most welcome.

And Sir Gawain thanked him truly, and each kissed the other, and they sat gravely together throughout the service.

Then was the lady fain to look upon that knight; and she came forth from her closet with many fair maidens. The fairest of ladies was she in face, and figure, and colouring, fairer even than Guinevere, so the knight thought. She came through the chancel to greet the hero, another lady held her by the left hand, older than she, and seemingly of high estate, with many nobles about her. But unlike to look upon were those ladies, for if the younger were fair, the elder was yellow. Rich red were the cheeks of the one, rough and wrinkled those of the other; the kerchiefs of the one were broidered with many glistening pearls, her throat and neck bare, and whiter than the snow that lies on the hills; the neck of the other was swathed in a gorget, with a white wimple over her black chin. Her forehead was wrapped in silk with many folds, worked with knots, so that naught of her was seen save her black brows, her eyes, her nose and her lips, and those were bleared, and ill to look upon. A worshipful lady in sooth one might call her! In figure was she short and broad, and thickly made—far fairer to behold was she whom she led by the hand.

When Gawain beheld that fair lady, who looked at him graciously, with leave of the lord he went towards them, and, bowing low, he greeted the elder, but the younger and fairer he took lightly in his arms, and kissed her courteously, and greeted her in knightly wise. Then she hailed him as friend, and he quickly prayed to be counted as her servant, if she so willed. Then they took him between them, and talking, led him to the chamber, to the hearth, and bade them bring spices, and they brought them in plenty with the good wine that was wont to be drunk at such seasons. Then the lord sprang to his feet and bade them make merry, and took off his hood, and hung it on a spear, and bade him win the worship thereof who should make most mirth that Christmas-tide. "And I shall try, by my faith, to fool it with the best, by the help of my friends, ere I lose my raiment." Thus with gay words the lord made trial to gladden Gawain with jests that night, till it was time to bid them light the tapers, and Sir Gawain took leave of them and gat him to rest.

In the morn when all men call to mind how Christ our Lord was born on earth to die for us, there is joy, for His sake, in all dwellings

of the world; and so was there here on that day. For high feast was held, with many dainties and cunningly cooked messes. On the daïs sat gallant men, clad in their best. The ancient dame sat on the high seat, with the lord of the castle beside her. Gawain and the fair lady sat together, even in the midst of the board, when the feast was served; and so throughout all the hall each sat in his degree, and was served in order. There was meat, there was mirth, there was much joy, so that to tell thereof would take me too long, though peradventure I might strive to declare it. But Gawain and that fair lady had much joy of each other's company through her sweet words and courteous converse. And there was music made before each prince, trumpets and drums, and merry piping; each man hearkened his minstrel, and they too hearkened theirs.

So they held high feast that day and the next, and the third day thereafter, and the joy on S. John's Day was fair to hearken, for 'twas theclast of the feast and the guests would depart in the grey of the morning. Therefore they awoke early, and drank wine, and danced fair carols, and at last, when it was late, each man took his leave to wend early on his way. Gawain would bid his host farewell, but the lord took him by the hand, and led him to his own chamber beside the hearth, and there he thanked him for the favour he had shown him in honouring his dwelling at that high season, and gladdening his castle with his fair countenance. "I wis, sir, that while I live I shall be held the worthier that Gawain has been my guest at God's own feast."

"Gramercy, sir," quoth Gawain, "in good faith, all the honour is yours, may the High King give it you, and I am but at your will to work your behest, inasmuch as I am beholden to you in great and small by rights."

Then the lord did his best to persuade the knight to tarry with him, but Gawain answered that he might in no wise do so. Then the host asked him courteously what stern behest had driven him at the holy season from the king's court, to fare all alone, ere yet the feast was ended?

"Forsooth," quoth the knight, "ye say but the truth: 'tis a high quest and a pressing that hath brought me afield, for I am summoned myself to a certain place, and I know not whither in the world I may wend

to find it; so help me Christ, I would give all the kingdom of Logres an I might find it by New Year's morn. Therefore, sir, I make request of you that ye tell me truly if ye ever heard word of the Green Chapel, where it may be found, and the Green Knight that keeps it. For I am pledged by solemn compact sworn between us to meet that knight at the New Year if so I were on life; and of that same New Year it wants but little—I'faith, I would look on that hero more joyfully than on any other fair sight! Therefore, by your will, it behoves me to leave you, for I have but barely three days, and I would as fain fall dead as fail of mine errand."

Then the lord quoth, laughing, "Now must ye needs stay, for I will show you your goal, the Green Chapel, ere your term be at an end, have ye no fear! But ye can take your ease, friend, in your bed, till the fourth day, and go forth on the first of the year and come to that place at mid-morn to do as ye will. Dwell here till New Year's Day, and then rise and set forth, and ye shall be set in the way; 'tis not two miles hence."

Then was Gawain glad, and he laughed gaily. "Now I thank you for this above all else. Now my quest is achieved I will dwell here at your will, and otherwise do as ye shall ask."

Then the lord took him, and set him beside him, and bade the ladies be fetched for their greater pleasure, tho' between themselves they had solace. The lord, for gladness, made merry jest, even as one who wist not what to do for joy; and he cried aloud to the knight, "Ye have promised to do the thing I bid ye: will ye hold to this behest, here, at once?"

"Yea, forsooth," said that true knight, "while I abide in your burg I am bound by your behest."

"Ye have travelled from far," said the host, "and since then ye have waked with me, ye are not well refreshed by rest and sleep, as I know. Ye shall therefore abide in your chamber, and lie at your ease tomorrow at Mass-tide, and go to meat when ye will with my wife, who shall sit with you, and comfort you with her company till I return; and I shall rise early and go forth to the chase." And Gawain agreed to all this courteously.

"Sir knight," quoth the host, "we shall make a covenant. Whatsoever I win in the wood shall be yours, and whatever may fall

to your share, that shall ye exchange for it. Let us swear, friend, to make this exchange, however our hap may be, for worse or for better."

"I grant ye your will," quoth Gawain the good; "if ye list so to do, it liketh me well."

"Bring hither the wine-cup, the bargain is made," so said the lord of that castle. They laughed each one, and drank of the wine, and made merry, these lords and ladies, as it pleased them. Then with gay talk and merry jest they arose, and stood, and spoke softly, and kissed courteously, and took leave of each other. With burning torches, and many a serving-man, was each led to his couch; yet ere they gat them to bed the old lord oft repeated their covenant, for he knew well how to make sport.

Full early, ere daylight, the folk rose up; the guests who would depart called their grooms, and they made them ready, and saddled the steeds, tightened up the girths, and trussed up their mails. The knights, all arrayed for riding, leapt up lightly, and took their bridles, and each rode his way as pleased him best.

The lord of the land was not the last. Ready for the chase, with many of his men, he ate a sop hastily when he had heard Mass, and then with blast of the bugle fared forth to the field. He and his nobles were to horse ere daylight glimmered upon the earth.

Then the huntsmen coupled their hounds, unclosed the kennel door, and called them out. They blew three blasts gaily on the bugles, the hounds bayed fiercely, and they that would go a-hunting checked and chastised them. A hundred hunters there were of the best, so I have heard tell. Then the trackers gat them to the trysting-place and uncoupled the hounds, and forest rang again with their gay blasts.

At the first sound of the hunt the game quaked for fear, and fled, trembling, along the vale. They betook them to the heights, but the liers in wait turned them back with loud cries; the harts they let pass them, and the stags with their spreading antlers, for the lord had forbidden that they should be slain, but the hinds and the does they turned back, and drave down into the valleys. Then might ye see much shooting of arrows. As the deer fled under the boughs a broad whistling shaft smote and wounded each sorely, so that, wounded and bleeding, they

fell dying on the banks. The hounds followed swiftly on their tracks, and hunters, blowing the horn, sped after them with ringing shouts as if the cliffs burst asunder. What game escaped those that shot was run down at the outer ring. Thus were they driven on the hills, and harassed at the waters, so well did the men know their work, and the greyhounds were so great and swift that they ran them down as fast as the hunters could slay them. Thus the lord passed the day in mirth and joyfulness, even to nightfall.

So the lord roamed the woods, and Gawain, that good night, lay ever a-bed, curtained about, under the costly coverlet, while the daylight gleamed on the walls. And as he lay half slumbering, he heard a little sound at the door, and he raised his head, and caught back a corner of the curtain, and waited to see what it might be. It was the lovely lady, the lord's wife; she shut the door softly behind her, and turned towards the bed; and Gawain was shamed, laid him down softly and made as if he slept. And she came lightly to the bedside, within the curtain, and sat herself down beside him, to wait till he wakened. The knight lay there awhile, and marvelled within himself what her coming might betoken; and he said to himself, "'Twere more seemly if I asked her what hath brought her hither." Then he made feint to waken, and turned towards her, and opened his eyes as one astonished, and crossed himself; and she looked on him laughing, with her cheeks red and white, lovely to behold, and small smiling lips.

"Good morrow, Sir Gawain," said that fair lady; "ye are but a careless sleeper, since one can enter thus. Now are ye taken unawares, and lest ye escape me I shall bind you in your bed; of that be ye assured!" Laughing, she spake these words.

"Good morrow, fair lady," quoth Gawain blithely. "I will do your will, as it likes me well. For I yield me readily, and pray your grace, and that is best, by my faith, since I needs must do so." Thus he jested again, laughing. "But an ye would, fair lady, grant me this grace that ye pray your prisoner to rise. I would get me from bed, and array me better, then could I talk with ye in more comfort."

"Nay, forsooth, fair sir," quoth the lady, "ye shall not rise, I will rede ye better. I shall keep ye here, since ye can do no other, and talk with my knight whom I have captured. For I know well that ye are

Sir Gawain, whom all the world worships, wheresoever ye may ride. Your honour and your courtesy are praised by lords and ladies, by all who live. Now ye are here and we are alone, my lord and his men are afield; the serving men in their beds, and my maidens also, and the door shut upon us. And since in this hour I have him that all men love, I shall use my time well with speech, while it lasts. Ye are welcome to my company, for it behoves me in sooth to be your servant."

"In good faith," quoth Gawain, "I think me that I am not him of whom ye speak, for unworthy am I of such service as ye here proffer. In sooth, I were glad if I might set myself by word or service to your pleasure; a pure joy would it be to me!"

"In good faith, Sir Gawain," quoth the gay lady, "the praise and the prowess that pleases all ladies I lack them not, nor hold them light; yet are there ladies enough who would liever now have the knight in their hold, as I have ye here, to dally with your courteous words, to bring them comfort and to ease their cares, than much of the treasure and the gold that are theirs. And now, through the grace of Him who upholds the heavens, I have wholly in my power that which they all desire!"

Thus the lady, fair to look upon, made him great cheer, and Sir Gawain, with modest words, answered her again: "Madam," he quoth, "may Mary requite ye, for in good faith I have found in ye a noble frankness. Much courtesy have other folk shown me, but the honour they have done me is naught to the worship of yourself, who knoweth but good."

"By Mary," quoth the lady, "I think otherwise; for were I worth all the women alive, and had I the wealth of the world in my hand, and might choose me a lord to my liking, then, for all that I have seen in ye, Sir Knight, of beauty and courtesy and blithe semblance, and for all that I have hearkened and hold for true, there should be no knight on earth to be chosen before ye!"

"Well I wot," quoth Sir Gawain, "that ye have chosen a better; but I am proud that ye should so prize me, and as your servant do I hold ye my sovereign, and your knight am I, and may Christ reward ye."

So they talked of many matters till mid-morn was past, and ever the lady made as though she loved him, and the knight turned her speech aside. For though she were the brightest of maidens, yet

had he forborne to shew her love for the danger that awaited him, and the blow that must be given without delay.

Then the lady prayed her leave from him, and he granted it readily. And she gave [the text reads "have"] him good-day, with laughing glance, but he must needs marvel at her words:

"Now He that speeds fair speech reward ye this disport; but that ye be Gawain my mind misdoubts me greatly."

"Wherefore?" quoth the knight quickly, fearing lest he had lacked in some courtesy.

And the lady spake: "So true a knight as Gawain is holden, and one so perfect in courtesy, would never have tarried so long with a lady but he would of his courtesy have craved a kiss at parting."

Then quoth Gawain, "I wot I will do even as it may please ye, and kiss at your commandment, as a true knight should who forbears to ask for fear of displeasure."

At that she came near and bent down and kissed the knight, and each commended the other to Christ, and she went forth from the chamber softly.

Then Sir Gawain arose and called his chamberlain and chose his garments, and when he was ready he gat him forth to Mass, and then went to meat, and made merry all day till the rising of the moon, and never had a knight fairer lodging than had he with those two noble ladies, the elder and the younger.

And even the lord of the land chased the hinds through holt and heath till eventide, and then with much blowing of bugles and baying of hounds they bore the game homeward; and by the time daylight was done all the folk had returned to that fair castle. And when the lord and Sir Gawain met together, then were they both well pleased. The lord commanded them all to assemble in the great hall, and the ladies to descend with their maidens, and there, before them all, he bade the men fetch in the spoil of the day's hunting, and he called unto Gawain, and counted the tale of the beasts, and showed them unto him, and said, "What think ye of this game, Sir Knight? Have I deserved of ye thanks for my woodcraft?"

"Yea, I wis," quoth the other, "here is the fairest spoil I have seen this seven year in the winter season."

"And all this do I give ye, Gawain," quoth the host, "for by accord of covenant ye may claim it as your own."

"That is sooth," quoth the other, "I grant you that same; and I have fairly won this within walls, and with as good will do I yield it to ye." With that he clasped his hands round the lord's neck and kissed him as courteously as he might. "Take ye here my spoils, no more have I won; ye should have it freely, though it were greater than this."

"'Tis good," said the host, "gramercy thereof. Yet were I fain to know where ye won this same favour, and if it were by your own wit?"

"Nay," answered Gawain, "that was not in the bond. Ask me no more: ye have taken what was yours by right, be content with that."

They laughed and jested together, and sat them down to supper, where they were served with many dainties; and after supper they sat by the hearth, and wine was served out to them; and oft in their jesting they promised to observe on the morrow the same covenant that they had made before, and whatever chance might betide to exchange their spoil, be it much or little, when they met at night. Thus they renewed their bargain before the whole court, and then the night-drink was served, and each courteously took leave of the other and gat him to bed.

By the time the cock had crowed thrice the lord of the castle had left his bed; Mass was sung and meat fitly served. The folk were forth to the wood ere the day broke, with hound and horn they rode over the plain, and uncoupled their dogs among the thorns. Soon they struck on the scent, and the hunt cheered on the hounds who were first to seize it, urging them with shouts. The others hastened to the cry, forty at once, and there rose such a clamour from the pack that the rocks rang again. The huntsmen spurred them on with shouting and blasts of the horn; and the hounds drew together to a thicket betwixt the water and a high crag in the cliff beneath the hillside. There where the rough rock fell ruggedly they, the huntsmen, fared to the finding, and cast about round the hill and the thicket behind them. The knights wist well what beast was within, and would drive him forth with the bloodhounds. And as they beat the bushes, suddenly over the beaters there rushed forth a wondrous great and fierce boar, long since had he left the herd to roam by himself. Grunting, he cast many to the ground, and fled forth at his best speed, without more

mischievous. The men hallooed loudly and cried, "Hay! Hay!" and blew the horns to urge on the hounds, and rode swiftly after the boar. Many a time did he turn to bay and tare the hounds, and they yelped, and howled shrilly. Then the men made ready their arrows and shot at him, but the points were turned on his thick hide, and the barbs would not bite upon him, for the shafts shivered in pieces, and the head but leapt again wherever it hit.

But when the boar felt the stroke of the arrows he waxed mad with rage, and turned on the hunters and tare many, so that, affrightened, they fled before him. But the lord on a swift steed pursued him, blowing his bugle; as a gallant knight he rode through the woodland chasing the boar till the sun grew low.

So did the hunters this day, while Sir Gawain lay in his bed lapped in rich gear; and the lady forgot not to salute him, for early was she at his side, to cheer his mood.

She came to the bedside and looked on the knight, and Gawain gave her fit greeting, and she greeted him again with ready words, and sat her by his side and laughed, and with a sweet look she spoke to him:

"Sir, if ye be Gawain, I think it a wonder that ye be so stern and cold, and care not for the courtesies of friendship, but if one teach ye to know them ye cast the lesson out of your mind. Ye have soon forgotten what I taught ye yesterday, by all the truest tokens that I knew!"

"What is that?" quoth the knight. "I trow I know not. If it be sooth that ye say, then is the blame mine own."

"But I taught ye of kissing, " quoth the fair lady. "Wherever a fair countenance is shown him, it behoves a courteous knight quickly to claim a kiss."

"Nay, my dear," said Sir Gawain, "cease that speech; that durst I not do lest I were denied, for if I were forbidden I wot I were wrong did I further entreat."

"I' faith," quoth the lady merrily, "ye may not be forbid, ye are strong enough to constrain by strength an ye will, were any so discourteous as to give ye denial."

"Yea, by Heaven," said Gawain, "ye speak well; but threats profit little in the land where I dwell, and so with a gift that is given

not of good will! I am at your commandment to kiss when ye like, to take or to leave as ye list."

Then the lady bent her down and kissed him courteously.

And as they spake together she said, "I would learn somewhat from ye, an ye would not be wroth, for young ye bare and fair, and so courteous and knightly as ye are known to be, the head of all chivalry, and versed in all wisdom of love and war--'tis ever told of true knights how they adventured their lives for their true love, and endured hardships for her favours, and avenged her with valour, and eased her sorrows, and brought joy to her bower; and ye are the fairest knight of your time, and your fame and your honour are everywhere, yet I have sat by ye here twice, and never a word have I heard of love! Ye who are so courteous and skilled in such love ought surely to teach one so young and unskilled some little craft of true love! Why are ye so unlearned who art otherwise so famous? Or is it that ye deemed me unworthy to hearken to your teaching? For shame, Sir Knight! I come hither alone and sit at your side to learn of ye some skill; teach me of your wit, while my lord is from home."

"In good faith," quoth Gawain, "great is my joy and my profit that so fair a lady as ye are should deign to come hither, and trouble ye with so poor a man, and make sport with your knight with kindly countenance, it pleaseth me much. But that I, in my turn, should take it upon me to tell of love and such like matters to ye who know more by half, or a hundred fold, of such craft than I do, or ever shall in all my lifetime, by my troth 'twere folly indeed! I will work your will to the best of my might as I am bounden, and evermore will I be your servant, so help me Christ!"

Then often with guile she questioned that knight that she might win him to woo her, but he defended himself so fairly that none might in any wise blame him, and naught but bliss and harmless jesting was there between them. They laughed and talked together till at last she kissed him, and craved her leave of him, and went her way.

Then the knight arose and went forth to Mass, and afterward dinner was served and he sat and spake with the ladies all day. But the lord of the castle rode ever over the land chasing the wild boar, that fled through the thickets, slaying the best of his hounds and breaking

their backs in sunder; till at last he was so weary he might run no longer, but made for a hole in a mound by a rock. He got the mound at his back and faced the hounds, whetting his white tusks and foaming at the mouth. The huntsmen stood aloof, fearing to draw nigh him; so many of them had been already wounded that they were loth to be torn with his tusks, so fierce he was and mad with rage. At length the lord himself came up, and saw the beast at bay, and the men standing aloof. Then quickly he sprang to the ground and drew out a bright blade, and waded through the stream to the boar.

When the beast was aware of the knight with weapon in hand, he set up his bristles and snorted loudly, and many feared for their lord lest he should be slain. Then the boar leapt upon the knight so that beast and man were one atop of the other in the water; but the boar had the worst of it, for the man had marked, even as he sprang, and set the point of his brand to the beast's chest, and drove it up to the hilt, so that the heart was split in twain, and the boar fell snarling, and was swept down by the water to where a hundred hounds seized on him, and the men drew him to shore for the dogs to slay.

Then was there loud blowing of horns and baying of hounds, the huntsmen smote off the boar's head, and hung the carcase by the four feet to a stout pole, and so went on their way homewards. The head they bore before the lord himself, who had slain the beast at the ford by force of his strong hand.

It seemed him o'er long ere he saw Sir Gawain in the hall, and he called, and the guest came to take that which fell to his share. And when he saw Gawain the lord laughed aloud, and bade them call the ladies and the household together, and he showed them the game, and told them the tale, how they hunted the wild boar through the woods, and of his length and breadth and height; and Sir Gawain commended his deeds and praised him for his valour, well proven, for so mighty a beast had he never seen before.

Then they handled the huge head, and the lord said aloud, "Now, Gawain, this game is your own by sure covenant, as ye right well know."

"'Tis sooth," quoth the knight, "and as truly will I give ye all I have gained." He took the host round the neck, and kissed him courteously

twice. "Now are we quits," he said, "this eventide, of all the covenants that we made since I came hither."

And the lord answered, "By S. Giles, ye are the best I know; ye will be rich in a short space if ye drive such bargains!"

Then they set up the tables on trestles, and covered them with fair cloths, and lit waxen tapers on the walls. The knights sat and were served in the hall, and much game and glee was there round the hearth, with many songs, both at supper and after; song of Christmas, and new carols, with all the mirth one may think of. And ever that lovely lady sat by the knight, and with still stolen looks made such feint of pleasing him, that Gawain marvelled much, and was wroth with himself, but he could not for his courtesy return her fair glances, but dealt with her cunningly, however she might strive to wrest the thing.

When they had tarried in the hall so long as it seemed them good, they turned to the inner chamber and the wide hearthplace, and there they drank wine, and the host proffered to renew the covenant for New Year's Eve; but the knight craved leave to depart on the morrow, for it was nigh to the term when he must fulfil his pledge. But the lord would withhold him from so doing, and prayed him to tarry, and said,

"As I am a true knight I swear my troth that ye shall come to the Green Chapel to achieve your task on New Year's morn, long before prime. Therefore abide ye in your bed, and I will hunt in this wood, and hold ye to the covenant to exchange with me against all the spoil I may bring hither. For twice have I tried ye, and found ye true, and the morrow shall be the third time and the best. Make we merry now while we may, and think on joy, for misfortune may take a man whensoever it wills."

Then Gawain granted his request, and they brought them drink, and they gat them with lights to bed.

Sir Gawain lay and slept softly, but the lord, who was keen on woodcraft, was afoot early. After Mass he and his men ate a morsel, and he asked for his steed; all the knights who should ride with him were already mounted before the hall gates.

'Twas a fair frosty morning, for the sun rose red in ruddy vapour, and the welkin was clear of clouds. The hunters scattered them by a forest side, and the rocks rang again with the blast of their

horns. Some came on the scent of a fox, and a hound gave tongue; the huntsmen shouted, and the pack followed in a crowd on the trail. The fox ran before them, and when they saw him they pursued him with noise and much shouting, and he wound and turned through many a thick grove, often cowering and hearkening in a hedge. At last by a little ditch he leapt out of a spinney, stole away slyly by a copse path, and so out of the wood and away from the hounds. But he went, ere he wist, to a chosen tryst, and three started forth on him at once, so he must needs double back, and betake him to the wood again.

Then was it joyful to hearken to the hounds; when all the pack had met together and had sight of their game they made as loud a din as if all the lofty cliffs had fallen clattering together. The huntsmen shouted and threatened, and followed close upon him so that he might scarce escape, but Reynard was wily, and he turned and doubled upon them, and led the lord and his men over the hills, now on the slopes, now in the vales, while the knight at home slept through the cold morning beneath his costly curtains.

But the fair lady of the castle rose betimes, and clad herself in a rich mantle that reached even to the ground, left her throat and her fair neck bare, and was bordered and lined with costly furs. On her head she wore no golden circlet, but a network of precious stones, that gleamed and shone through her tresses in clusters of twenty together. Thus she came into the chamber, closed the door after her, and set open a window, and called to him gaily, "Sir Knight, how may ye sleep? The morning is so fair."

Sir Gawain was deep in slumber, and in his dream he vexed him much for the destiny that should befall him on the morrow, when he should meet the knight at the Green Chapel, and abide his blow; but when the lady spake he heard her, and came to himself, and roused from his dream and answered swiftly. The lady came laughing, and kissed him courteously, and he welcomed her fittingly with a cheerful countenance. He saw her so glorious and gaily dressed, so faultless of features and complexion, that it warmed his heart to look upon her.

They spake to each other smiling, and all was bliss and good cheer between them. They exchanged fair words, and much happiness was therein, yet was there a gulf between them, and she might win no more

of her knight, for that gallant prince watched well his words—he would neither take her love, nor frankly refuse it. He cared for his courtesy, lest he be deemed churlish, and yet more for his honour lest he be traitor to his host. "God forbid," quoth he to himself, "that it should so befall." Thus with courteous words did he set aside all the special speeches that came from her lips.

Then spake the lady to the knight, "Ye deserve blame if ye hold not that lady who sits beside ye above all else in the world, if ye have not already a love whom ye hold dearer, and like better, and have sworn such firm faith to that lady that ye care not to loose it—and that am I now fain to believe. And now I pray ye straitly that ye tell me that in truth, and hide it not."

And the knight answered, "By S. John" (and he smiled as he spake) "no such love have I, nor do I think to have yet awhile."

"That is the worst word I may hear," quoth the lady, "but in sooth I have mine answer; kiss me now courteously, and I will go hence; I can but mourn as a maiden that loves much."

Sighing, she stooped down and kissed him, and then she rose up and spake as she stood, "Now, dear, at our parting do me this grace: give me some gift, if it were but thy glove, that I may bethink me of my knight, and lessen my mourning."

"Now, I wis," quoth the knight, "I would that I had here the most precious thing that I possess on earth that I might leave ye as love-token, great or small, for ye have deserved forsooth more reward than I might give ye. But it is not to your honour to have at this time a glove for reward as gift from Gawain, and I am here on a strange errand, and have no man with me, nor mails with goodly things—that mislikes me much, lady, at this time; but each man must fare as he is taken, if for sorrow and ill."

"Nay, knight highly honoured," quoth that lovesome lady, "though I have naught of yours, yet shall ye have somewhat of mine." With that she reached him a ring of red gold with a sparkling stone therein, that shone even as the sun (wit ye well, it was worth many marks); but the knight refused it, and spake readily,

"I will take no gift, lady, at this time. I have none to give, and none will I take."

She prayed him to take it, but he refused her prayer, and swore in sooth that he would not have it.

The lady was sorely vexed, and said, "If ye refuse my ring as too costly, that ye will not be so highly beholden to me, I will give you my girdle as a lesser gift." With that she loosened a lace that was fastened at her side, knit upon her kirtle under her mantle. It was wrought of green silk, and gold, only braided by the fingers, and that she offered to the knight, and besought him though it were of little worth that he would take it, and he said nay, he would touch neither gold nor gear ere God give him grace to achieve the adventure for which he had come hither. "And therefore, I pray ye, displease ye not, and ask me no longer, for I may not grant it. I am dearly beholden to ye for the favour ye have shown me, and ever, in heat and cold, will I be your true servant."

"Now," said the lady, "ye refuse this silk, for it is simple in itself, and so it seems, indeed; lo, it is small to look upon and less in cost, but whoso knew the virtue that is knit therein he would, peradventure, value it more highly. For whatever knight is girded with this green lace, while he bears it knotted about him there is no man under heaven can overcome him, for he may not be slain for any magic on earth."

Then Gawain bethought him, and it came into his heart that this were a jewel for the jeopardy that awaited him when he came to the Green Chapel to seek the return blow—could he so order it that he should escape unslain, 'twere a craft worth trying. Then he bare with her chiding, and let her say her say, and she pressed the girdle on him and prayed him to take it, and he granted her prayer, and she gave it him with good will, and besought him for her sake never to reveal it but to hide it loyally from her lord; and the knight agreed that never should any man know it, save they two alone. He thanked her often and heartily, and she kissed him for the third time.

Then she took her leave of him, and when she was gone Sir Gawain arose, and clad him in rich attire, and took the girdle, and knotted it round him, and hid it beneath his robes. Then he took his way to the chapel, and sought out a priest privily and prayed him to teach him better how his soul might be saved when he should go hence; and there he shrived him, and showed his misdeeds, both great and small, and besought mercy and craved absolution;

and the priest assoiled him, and set him as clean as if Doomsday had been on the morrow. And afterwards Sir Gawain made him merry with the ladies, with carols, and all kinds of joy, as never he did but that one day, even to nightfall; and all the men marvelled at him, and said that never since he came thither had he been so merry.

Meanwhile the lord of the castle was abroad chasing the fox; awhile he lost him, and as he rode through a spinny he heard the hounds near at hand, and Reynard came creeping through a thick grove, with all the pack at his heels. Then the lord drew out his shining brand, and cast it at the beast, and the fox swerved aside for the sharp edge, and would have doubled back, but a hound was on him ere he might turn, and right before the horse's feet they all fell on him, and worried him fiercely, snarling the while.

Then the lord leapt from his saddle, and caught the fox from the jaws, and held it aloft over his head, and hallooed loudly, and many brave hounds bayed as they beheld it; and the hunters hied them thither, blowing their horns; all that bare bugles blew them at once, and all the others shouted. 'Twas the merriest meeting that ever men heard, the clamour that was raised at the death of the fox. They rewarded the hounds, stroking them and rubbing their heads, and took Reynard and stripped him of his coat; then blowing their horns, they turned them homewards, for it was nigh nightfall.

The lord was gladsome at his return, and found a bright fire on the hearth, and the knight beside it, the good Sir Gawain, who was in joyous mood for the pleasure he had had with the ladies. He wore a robe of blue, that reached even to the ground, and a surcoat richly furred, that became him well. A hood like to the surcoat fell on his shoulders, and all alike were done about with fur. He met the host in the midst of the floor, and jesting, he greeted him, and said, "Now shall I be first to fulfil our covenant which we made together when there was no lack of wine." Then he embraced the knight, and kissed him thrice, as solemnly as he might.

"Of a sooth," quoth the other, "ye have good luck in the matter of this covenant, if ye made a good exchange!"

"Yea, it matters naught of the exchange," quoth Gawain, "since what I owe is swiftly paid."

"Marry," said the other, "mine is behind, for I have hunted all this day, and naught have I got but this foul fox-skin, and that is but poor payment for three such kisses as ye have here given me."

"Enough," quoth Sir Gawain, "I thank ye, by the Rood."

Then the lord told them of his hunting, and how the fox had been slain.

With mirth and minstrelsy, and dainties at their will, they made them as merry as a folk well might till 'twas time for them to sever, for at last they must needs betake them to their beds. Then the knight took his leave of the lord, and thanked him fairly.

"For the fair sojourn that I have had here at this high feast may the High King give ye honour. I give ye myself, as one of your servants, if ye so like; for I must needs, as you know, go hence with the morn, and ye will give me, as ye promised, a guide to show me the way to the Green Chapel, an God will suffer me on New Year's Day to deal the doom of my weird."

"By my faith," quoth the host, "all that ever I promised, that shall I keep with good will." Then he gave him a servant to set him in the way, and lead him by the downs, that he should have no need to ford the stream, and should fare by the shortest road through the groves; and Gawain thanked the lord for the honour done him. Then he would take leave of the ladies, and courteously he kissed them, and spake, praying them to receive his thanks, and they made like reply; then with many sighs they commended him to Christ, and he departed courteously from that folk. Each man that he met he thanked him for his service and his solace, and the pains he had been at to do his will; and each found it as hard to part from the knight as if he had ever dwelt with him.

Then they led him with torches to his chamber, and brought him to his bed to rest. That he slept soundly I may not say, for the morrow gave him much to think on. Let him rest awhile, for he was near that which he sought, and if ye will but listen to me I will tell ye how it fared with him thereafter.

Now the New Year drew nigh, and the night passed, and the day chased the darkness, as is God's will; but wild weather wakened therewith. The clouds cast the cold to the earth, with enough

of the north to slay them that lacked clothing. The snow drave smartly, and the whistling wind blew from the heights, and made great drifts in the valleys. The knight, lying in his bed, listened, for though his eyes were shut, he might sleep but little, and hearkened every cock that crew.

He arose ere the day broke, by the light of a lamp that burned in his chamber, and called to his chamberlain, bidding him bring his armour and saddle his steed. The other gat him up, and fetched his garments, and robed Sir Gawain.

First he clad him in his clothes to keep off the cold, and then in his harness, which was well and fairly kept. Both hauberk and plates were well burnished, the rings of the rich byrny freed from rust, and all as fresh as at first, so that the knight was fain to thank them. Then he did on each piece, and bade them bring his steed, while he put the fairest raiment on himself; his coat with its fair cognizance, adorned with precious stones upon velvet, with broidered seams, and all furred within with costly skins. And he left not the lace, the lady's gift, that Gawain forgot not, for his own good. When he had girded on his sword he wrapped the gift twice about him, swathed around his waist. The girdle of green silk set gaily and well upon the royal red cloth, rich to behold, but the knight ware it not for pride of the pendants, polished though they were with fair gold that gleamed brightly on the ends, but to save himself from sword and knife, when it behoved him to abide his hurt without question. With that the hero went forth, and thanked that kindly folk full often.

Then was Gringalet ready, that was great and strong, and had been well cared for and tended in every wise; in fair condition was that proud steed, and fit for a journey. Then Gawain went to him, and looked on his coat, and said by his sooth, "There is a folk in this place that thinketh on honour; much joy may they have, and the lord who maintains them, and may all good betide that lovely lady all her life long. Since they for charity cherish a guest, and hold honour in their hands, may He who holds the heaven on high requite them, and also ye all. And if I might live anywhere on earth, I would give ye full reward, readily, if so I might." Then he set foot in the stirrup and bestrode his steed, and his squire gave him his shield, which he

laid on his shoulder. Then he smote Gringalet with his golden spurs, and the steed pranced on the stones and would stand no longer.

By that his man was mounted, who bare his spear and lance, and Gawain quoth, "I commend this castle to Christ, may He give it ever good fortune." Then the drawbridge was let down, and the broad gates unbarred and opened on both sides; the knight crossed himself, and passed through the gateway, and praised the porter, who knelt before the prince, and gave him good-day, and commended him to God. Thus the knight went on his way with the one man who should guide him to that dread place where he should receive rueful payment.

The two went by hedges where the boughs were bare, and climbed the cliffs where the cold clings. Naught fell from the heavens, but 'twas ill beneath them; mist brooded over the moor and hung on the mountains; each hill had a cap, a great cloak, of mist. The streams foamed and bubbled between their banks, dashing sparkling on the shores where they shelved downwards. Rugged and dangerous was the way through the woods, till it was time for the sun-rising. Then were they on a high hill; the snow lay white beside them, and the man who rode with Gawain drew rein by his master.

"Sir," he said, "I have brought ye hither, and now ye are not far from the place that ye have sought so specially. But I will tell ye for sooth, since I know ye well, and ye are such a knight as I well love, would ye follow my counsel ye would fare the better. The place whither ye go is accounted full perilous, for he who liveth in that waste is the worst on earth, for he is strong and fierce, and loveth to deal mighty blows; taller is he than any man on earth, and greater of frame than any four in Arthur's court, or in any other. And this is his custom at the Green Chapel; there may no man pass by that place, however proud his arms, but he does him to death by force of his hand, for he is a discourteous knight, and shews no mercy. Be he churl or chaplain who rides by that chapel, monk or mass priest, or any man else, he thinks it as pleasant to slay them as to pass alive himself. Therefore, I tell ye, as sooth as ye sit in saddle, if ye come there and that knight know it, ye shall be slain, though ye had twenty lives; trow me that truly! He has dwelt here full long and seen many a combat; ye may not defend ye against his blows. Therefore, good Sir Gawain, let the man be, and get ye away some

other road; for God's sake seek ye another land, and there may Christ speed ye! And I will hie me home again, and I promise ye further that I will swear by God and the saints, or any other oath ye please, that I will keep counsel faithfully, and never let any wit the tale that ye fled for fear of any man."

"Gramercy," quoth Gawain, but ill-pleased. "Good fortune be his who wishes me good, and that thou wouldst keep faith with me I will believe; but didst thou keep it never so truly, an I passed here and fled for fear as thou sayest, then were I a coward knight, and might not be held guiltless. So I will to the chapel let chance what may, and talk with that man, even as I may list, whether for weal or for woe as fate may have it. Fierce though he may be in fight, yet God knoweth well how to save His servants."

"Well," quoth the other, "now that ye have said so much that ye will take your own harm on yourself, and ye be pleased to lose your life, I will neither let nor keep ye. Have here your helm and the spear in your hand, and ride down this same road beside the rock till ye come to the bottom of the valley, and there look a little to the left hand, and ye shall see in that vale the chapel, and the grim man who keeps it. Now fare ye well, noble Gawain; for all the gold on earth I would not go with ye nor bear ye fellowship one step further." With that the man turned his bridle into the wood, smote the horse with his spurs as hard as he could, and galloped off, leaving the knight alone.

Quoth Gawain, "I will neither greet nor groan, but commend myself to God, and yield me to His will."

Then the knight spurred Gringalet, and rode adown the path close in by a bank beside a grove. So he rode through the rough thicket, right into the dale, and there he halted, for it seemed him wild enough. No sign of a chapel could he see, but high and burnt banks on either side and rough rugged crags with great stones above. An ill-looking place he thought it.

Then he drew in his horse and looked around to seek the chapel, but he saw none and thought it strange. Then he saw as it were a mound on a level space of land by a bank beside the stream where it ran swiftly, the water bubbled within as if boiling. The knight turned his steed to the mound, and lighted down and tied the rein to the branch of a linden;

and he turned to the mound and walked round it, questioning with himself what it might be. It had a hole at the end and at either side, and was overgrown with clumps of grass, and it was hollow within as an old cave or the crevice of a crag; he knew not what it might be.

"Ah," quoth Gawain, "can this be the Green Chapel? Here might the devil say his mattins at midnight! Now I wis there is wizardry here. 'Tis an ugly oratory, all overgrown with grass, and 'twould well beseem that fellow in green to say his devotions on devil's wise. Now feel I in five wits, 'tis the foul fiend himself who hath set me this tryst, to destroy me here! This is a chapel of mischance: ill-luck betide it, 'tis the cursedest kirk that ever I came in!"

Helmet on head and lance in hand, he came up to the rough dwelling, when he heard over the high hill beyond the brook, as it were in a bank, a wondrous fierce noise, that rang in the cliff as if it would cleave asunder. 'Twas as if one ground a scythe on a grindstone, it whirred and whetted like water on a mill-wheel and rushed and rang, terrible to hear.

"By God," quoth Gawain, "I trow that gear is preparing for the knight who will meet me here. Alas! naught may help me, yet should my life be forfeit, I fear not a jot!" With that he called aloud. "Who waiteth in this place to give me tryst? Now is Gawain come hither: if any man will aught of him let him hasten hither now or never."

"Stay," quoth one on the bank above his head, "and ye shall speedily have that which I promised ye." Yet for a while the noise of whetting went on ere he appeared, and then he came forth from a cave in the crag with a fell weapon, a Danish axe newly dight, wherewith to deal the blow. An evil head it had, four feet large, no less, sharply ground, and bound to the handle by the lace that gleamed brightly. And the knight himself was all green as before, face and foot, locks and beard, but now he was afoot. When he came to the water he would not wade it, but sprang over with the pole of his axe, and strode boldly over the brent that was white with snow.

Sir Gawain went to meet him, but he made no low bow. The other said, "Now, fair sir, one may trust thee to keep tryst. Thou art welcome, Gawain, to my place. Thou hast timed thy coming as befits a true man.

Thou knowest the covenant set between us: at this time twelve months ago thou didst take that which fell to thee, and I at this New Year will readily requite thee. We are in this valley, verily alone, here are no knights to sever us, do what we will. Have off thy helm from thine head, and have here thy pay; make me no more talking than I did then when thou didst strike off my head with one blow."

"Nay," quoth Gawain, "by God that gave me life, I shall make no moan whatever befall me, but make thou ready for the blow and I shall stand still and say never a word to thee, do as thou wilt."

With that he bent his head and shewed his neck all bare, and made as if he had no fear, for he would not be thought a-dread.

Then the Green Knight made him ready, and grasped his grim weapon to smite Gawain. With all his force he bore it aloft with a mighty feint of slaying him: had it fallen as straight as he aimed he who was ever doughty of deed had been slain by the blow. But Gawain swerved aside as the axe came gliding down to slay him as he stood, and shrank a little with the shoulders, for the sharp iron. The other heaved up the blade and rebuked the prince with many proud words:

"Thou art not Gawain," he said, "who is held so valiant, that never feared he man by hill or vale, but thou shrinkest for fear ere thou feelest hurt. Such cowardice did I never hear of Gawain! Neither did I flinch from thy blow, or make strife in King Arthur's hall. My head fell to my feet, and yet I fled not; but thou didst wax faint of heart ere any harm befell. Wherefore must I be deemed the braver knight."

Quoth Gawain, "I shrank once, but so will I no more, though an my head fall on the stones I cannot replace it. But haste, Sir Knight, by thy faith, and bring me to the point, deal me my destiny, and do it out of hand, for I will stand thee a stroke and move no more till thine axe have hit me—my troth on it."

"Have at thee, then," quoth the other, and heaved aloft the axe with fierce mien, as if he were mad. He struck at him fiercely but wounded him not, withholding his hand ere it might strike him.

Gawain abode the stroke, and flinched in no limb, but stood still as a stone or the stump of a tree that is fast rooted in the rocky ground with a hundred roots.

Then spake gaily the man in green, "So now thou hast thine heart whole it behoves me to smite. Hold aside thy hood that Arthur gave thee, and keep thy neck thus bent lest it cover it again."

Then Gawain said angrily, "Why talk on thus? Thou dost threaten too long. I hope thy heart misgives thee."

"For sooth," quoth the other, "so fiercely thou speakest I will no longer let thine errand wait its reward." Then he braced himself to strike, frowning with lips and brow, 'twas no marvel that it pleased but ill him who hoped for no rescue. He lifted the axe lightly and let it fall with the edge of the blade on the bare neck. Though he struck swiftly it hurt him no more than on the one side where it severed the skin. The sharp blade cut into the flesh so that the blood ran over his shoulder to the ground. And when the knight saw the blood staining the snow, he sprang forth, swift-foot, more than a spear's length, seized his helmet and set it on his head, cast his shield over his shoulder, drew out his bright sword, and spake boldly (never since he was born was he half so blithe), "Stop, Sir Knight, bid me no more blows. I have stood a stroke here without flinching, and if thou give me another, I shall requite thee, and give thee as good again. By the covenant made betwixt us in Arthur's hall but one blow falls to me here. Halt, therefore."

Then the Green Knight drew off from him and leaned on his axe, setting the shaft on the ground, and looked on Gawain as he stood all armed and faced him fearlessly—at heart it pleased him well. Then he spake merrily in a loud voice, and said to the knight, "Bold sir, be not so fierce, no man here hath done thee wrong, nor will do, save by covenant, as we made at Arthur's court. I promised thee a blow and thou hast it—hold thyself well paid! I release thee of all other claims. If I had been so minded I might perchance have given thee a rougher buffet. First I menaced thee with a feigned one, and hurt thee not for the covenant that we made in the first night, and which thou didst hold truly. All the gain didst thou give me as a true man should. The other feint I proffered thee for the morrow: my fair wife kissed thee, and thou didst give me her kisses—for both those days I gave thee two blows without scathe—true man, true return. But the third time thou didst fail, and therefore hadst thou that blow. For 'tis my weed

thou wearest, that same woven girdle, my own wife wrought it, that do I wot for sooth. Now know I well thy kisses, and thy conversation, and the wooing of my wife, for 'twas mine own doing. I sent her to try thee, and in sooth I think thou art the most faultless knight that ever trode earth. As a pearl among white peas is of more worth than they, so is Gawain, i' faith, by other knights. But thou didst lack a little, Sir Knight, and wast wanting in loyalty, yet that was for no evil work, nor for wooing neither, but because thou lovedst thy life—therefore I blame thee the less."

Then the other stood a great while, still sorely angered and vexed within himself; all the blood flew to his face, and he shrank for shame as the Green Knight spake; and the first words he said were, "Cursed be ye, cowardice and covetousness, for in ye is the destruction of virtue." Then he loosed the girdle, and gave it to the knight. "Lo, take there the falsity, may foul befall it! For fear of thy blow cowardice bade me make friends with covetousness and forsake the customs of largess and loyalty, which befit all knights. Now am I faulty and false and have been afeared: from treachery and untruth come sorrow and care. I avow to thee, Sir Knight, that I have ill done; do then thy will. I shall be more wary hereafter."

Then the other laughed and said gaily, "I wot I am whole of the hurt I had, and thou hast made such free confession of thy misdeeds, and hast so borne the penance of mine axe edge, that I hold thee absolved from that sin, and purged as clean as if thou hadst never sinned since thou wast born. And this girdle that is wrought with gold and green, like my raiment, do I give thee, Sir Gawain, that thou mayest think upon this chance when thou goest forth among princes of renown, and keep this for a token of the adventure of the Green Chapel, as it chanced between chivalrous knights. And thou shalt come again with me to my dwelling and pass the rest of this feast in gladness." Then the lord laid hold of him, and said, "I wot we shall soon make peace with my wife, who was thy bitter enemy."

"Nay, forsooth," said Sir Gawain, and seized his helmet and took it off swiftly, and thanked the knight: "I have fared ill, may bliss betide thee, and may He who rules all things reward thee swiftly. Commend me to that courteous lady, thy fair wife, and to the other my honoured

ladies, who have beguiled their knight with skilful craft. But 'tis no marvel if one be made a fool and brought to sorrow by women's wiles, for so was Adam beguiled by one, and Solomon by many, and Samson all too soon, for Delilah dealt him his doom; and David thereafter was wedded with Bathsheba, which brought him much sorrow—if one might love a woman and believe her not, 'twere great gain! And since all they were beguiled by women, methinks 'tis the less blame to me that I was misled! But as for thy girdle, that will I take with good will, not for gain of the gold, nor for samite, nor silk, nor the costly pendants, neither for weal nor for worship, but in sign of my frailty. I shall look upon it when I ride in renown and remind myself of the fault and faintness of the flesh; and so when pride uplifts me for prowess of arms, the sight of this lace shall humble my heart. But one thing would I pray, if it displease thee not: since thou art lord of yonder land wherein I have dwelt, tell me what thy rightful name may be, and I will ask no more."

"That will I truly," quoth the other. "Bernlak de Hautdesert am I called in this land. Morgain le Fay dwelleth in mine house, and through knowledge of clerkly craft hath she taken many. For long time was she the mistress of Merlin, who knew well all you knights of the court. Morgain the goddess is she called therefore, and there is none so haughty but she can bring him low. She sent me in this guise to yon fair hall to test the truth of the renown that is spread abroad of the valour of the Round Table. She taught me this marvel to betray your wits, to vex Guinevere and fright her to death by the man who spake with his head in his hand at the high table. That is she who is at home, that ancient lady, she is even thine aunt, Arthur's half-sister, the daughter of the Duchess of Tintagel, who afterward married King Uther. Therefore I bid thee, knight, come to thine aunt, and make merry in thine house; my folk love thee, and I wish thee as well as any man on earth, by my faith, for thy true dealing."

But Sir Gawain said nay, he would in no wise do so; so they embraced and kissed, and commended each other to the Prince of Paradise, and parted right there, on the cold ground. Gawain on his steed rode swiftly to the king's hall, and the Green Knight got him whithersoever he would.

Sir Gawain who had thus won grace of his life, rode through wild ways on Gringaleit; oft he lodged in a house, and oft without, and many adventures did he have and came off victor full often, as at this time I cannot relate in tale. The hurt that he had in his neck was healed, he bare the shining girdle as a baldric bound by his side, and made fast with a knot 'neath his left arm, in token that he was taken in a fault—and thus he came in safety again to the court.

Then joy awakened in that dwelling when the king knew that the good Sir Gawain was come, for he deemed it gain. King Arthur kissed the knight, and the queen also, and many valiant knights sought to embrace him. They asked him how he had fared, and he told them all that had chanced to him—the adventure of the chapel, the fashion of the knight, the love of the lady—at last of the lace. He showed them the wound in the neck which he won for his disloyalty at the hand of the knight, the blood flew to his face for shame as he told the tale.

"Lo, lady," he quoth, and handled the lace, "this is the bond of the blame that I bear in my neck, this is the harm and the loss I have suffered, the cowardice and covetousness in which I was caught, the token of my covenant in which I was taken. And I must needs wear it so long as I live, for none may hide his harm, but undone it may not be, for if it hath clung to thee once, it may never be severed."

Then the king comforted the knight, and the court laughed loudly at the tale, and all made accord that the lords and the ladies who belonged to the Round Table, each hero among them, should wear bound about him a baldric of bright green for the sake of Sir Gawain. And to this was agreed all the honour of the Round Table, and he who ware it was honoured the more thereafter, as it is testified in the best book of romance. That in Arthur's days this adventure befell, the book of Brutus bears witness. For since that bold knight came hither first, and the siege and the assault were ceased at Troy, I wis

Many a venture herebefore
Hath fallen such as this:
May He that bare the crown of thorn
Bring us unto His bliss.

Amen.

Questions:

1. Why is "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" set during the Christmas season? What might this time represent?

2. Why does the poem wait until the end for the "big reveal" – that is, the fact that Sir Bertilak and the Green Knight are the same person? How would the poem be different if we knew this all along?

3. Do you buy the motives the Green Knight gives for Morgan le Fay's actions? Why or why not?

4. What do you think Lady Bertilak's motives are for agreeing to seduce Gawain?

5. Whose interpretation of the green girdle do you agree with – Gawain's or the rest of the court's? Why?

6. If you could choose an object to represent something important to you, as Gawain does, what would it be and why? How does the meaning of your object compare with the meaning of Gawain's?

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