

Translation exercises – Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
2013/14

Fitt 1.
II. 232–300

(232) They looked for a long time at the knight to see, because each of them wondered what it may mean that a knight and a horse should have such colour as to have grown green as grass, and even greener, as it seemed, glowing brighter than green enamel on gold. All that stood there studied him, and approached him with all the wonder in the world as to what he would do. For they had seen many strange things, but nothing like that previously; (240) for that reason the people there judged it to be an illusion or magic. Therefore many noble men were afraid to answer, and all were astonished at his voice, and sat stone-still in dead silence around the splendid room; as if they had all fallen asleep, so still was their noise suddenly. I think, not all of them did so out of fear, but some out of courtesy – only to let him, to whom all owe reverence, speak to the man.

(250) Then Arthur [stood] in front of the high dais that the marvellous event obliged, and courteously honoured him, because he was never rude, and said, ‘Knight, welcome indeed to this place. I, the lord of this dwelling, am called Arthur. Dismount your horse courteously and stay, I pray you, and whatever you want, we shall get to know later.’ ‘No, so help me him who sits up high [ie. God]’, says the knight, ‘it wasn’t my errand to dwell in this dwelling for any longer time. But because your renown, my lord, is raised so high, and your castle and your knights are held to be the best, (260) and the firmest to ride their horses in armour, the most valiant and the worthiest among all the peoples of the world, valiant to compete with in diverse noble entertainments, and courtesy here is well known, as I have heard to say – and this is indeed what brought me here now. You may be assured by this branch I carry here that I come in peace and I have no hostile intention; for had I journeyed far in fighting manner [with the aim to fight], I have a hauberk at home, as well as a helmet, a shield and a sharp spear shining bright, (270) and other weapons to wield too, I know well; but since I want no war, my clothes are gentler. But if you are as bold as everybody says, you will grant me graciously the game that I ask for by right.’ Arthur did reply, and said, ‘Sir courteous knight, [even] if you desire battle without armour, here you will not fail to [get your] fight.’

‘No, I seek no fight, I am telling you in truth. (280) Those on these benches around are only beardless children. If I were fastened with weapons, on a high steed, there would be no man here to match me, they are so weak in their powers. Therefore I am asking for a Christmas game in this court, because it is Yuletide and New Year, and there are many valiant here. If there is anyone in this house who holds himself bold enough, to be so brave in his blood, and have such brain in his head, that he would dare to courageously blow a blow for another, I would give him this fine battle axe as a gift, this very heavy axe, for him to handle it as he pleases. (290) And I shall stand the first blow as bare as I sit. If any man is so fierce as to tempt/attempt what I say, then let him leap to me quickly, and seize this weapon, I renounce it for ever, he can keep it as his own; and I shall stand his blow unflinchingly on this floor, if he adjudges me the right to deal him another, in return, and give him respite in twelve months and a day. Now hurry, let’s see quickly if any one here dares to say anything.’