

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

Fitt 4.

II. 2118–39.

‘Therefore, good Sir Gawain, leave the man alone and go some other way from here, for God’s sake. (2120) Ride in some other country, may Christ give you speed, and I shall make my way back home, and promise you, moreover, that I shall swear to God and all his good saints (so help me God and the holy relic, and other oaths), that I shall faithfully conceal, and never recount that you ever hastened to flee the knight that I know.’ ‘Thank you,’ spoke Gawain, and with displeasure said: ‘It becomes you well, man, that you want my benefit, and I do believe that that you would faithfully conceal it. But no matter how faithfully you would conceal it, if I go on from here, (2130) and hasten to flee for fear, in the manner that you mentioned, I would be a cowardly knight, and I would not be excused. Instead, I will go to the chapel, whatever chance may bring me, and talk with that very knight in the way that pleases me, whether it brings delight or grief, whichever way my fate wants it. Even if he is a stern knight to deal with, standing there with a club, God can very well save his servants.’

II. 2331–2428.

The knight turned from him and rested on his axe, set the shaft on the ground and leaned on the sharp end, and looked at the man who was on the lawn, how the hero boldly stood there fearless, armed, without fear; it pleased his heart. Then he spoke cheerfully with powerful voice and with a ringing tone he said to the knight: ‘Bold man on this mound, don’t be so fierce. No-one here had unmannerly ill-used you, (2340) nor acted in any other way than it was agreed in the covenant in the King’s court. I promised you a stroke, now you have it; consider yourself fully satisfied. I release you from the remaining obligations. If I had been quicker, I know I might have delivered a harsher blow, one that would have harmed you. First I threatened you with a fake one and I cut you without a gash, I rightfully gave it to you for the agreement we made on the first night, and you kept the compact faithfully, and remained true to me; and you gave me all the winning as a good man should. (2350) I delivered you the other blow, knight, for the morning; you kissed my beautiful wife, and offered me the kisses. For these two I offered you only two mere blows without injury. True man returns truly, and then there’s no need to fear any danger. And you failed the third one there, and therefore take that tap.

‘Because it is my garment that you are wearing, that very woven girdle, my own wife offered it to you, I know it well. (2360) Now I know well your kisses and your other ways, and the wooing of my wife, I devised it myself. I sent her to try you, whom I truly think to be the most faultless man that ever walked on foot. As the pearl is worth more than a white pea, so is Gawain, in good faith, than other fair knights. But here you lacked a little, sir, and you missed loyalty; but that was not for any cunning business, neither for wooing, but because you loved your life – the less do I blame you [for that].’ The other strong man stood there in thought for a great while, (2370) he was so overcome with grief that he shuddered from within; all the blood from his breast rushed in his face, so that he shrank for shame from what the knight said. The first word that the man uttered afterwards [was]: ‘Be accursed, cowardliness and

covetousness! There is villainy and vice in you that virtue destroys.’ Then he grabbed the knot and loosened the fastening, threw the belt vehemently at the very knight: ‘Look, there’s the breaking of faith, may it fall foully! For fear of your blow cowardliness taught me (2380) to concede to covetousness, to forsake my nature, which is generosity and loyalty that belongs to knights. Now I am faulty and false, and I have always been afraid of treachery and untruthfulness – let sorrow and grief fall on both! I humbly confess to you, knight, my practices are all faulty. Let me know your will and I will be on my guard afterwards.’

Then the other man laughed and kindly said: (2390) ‘I consider the harm I suffered wholly compensated; you have confessed clearly, recognised your sins, and have received the penance from the edge of my sword. I consider you cleared of your fault, and purified to be as clean as if you had never sinned since the day that you had been born. And I give you, sir, the gold-hemmed girdle; since it is green as my gown, Sir Gawain, you may think of this contest when you make your way among worthy princes, and this is a pure token of what happened at the Green Chapel between chivalrous knights. (2400) And you should come back to my dwelling this New Year, and we shall pleasantly enjoy what remains of this splendid holiday.’ Then the lord firmly invited him and said, ‘I expect that we shall reconcile you with my wife, who was your keen enemy.’

‘But truly,’ said the knight and seized his helmet, and took it off courteously, and thanked the man: ‘I stayed long enough; I wish you happiness, and let him give it to you soon who spreads all honours! (2410) And commend me to that courteous one, your fair companion, both her and the other one, my honoured ladies, that they so cunningly beguiled their knight with their trick. But no wonder that a fool is mad, and through the wiles of women he is won for grief; for Adam was beguiled this way in the world, and Solomon with many women; and Samson too, Delilah dealt him his fate; and later David mingled with Bathsheba, and suffered many miseries. (2420) Now as they were afflicted by their desires, it would be a great advantage to love them, but not believe them, if a man could. For they were the noblest of old, whom good fortune supported most among those who lived under the sky; and all of them were deluded by women, with whom they dealt. Though I may be beguiled, I think I should be excused.