

Translation Class Set Pieces, Week 2

SGGK, lines 232–300

They looked for a long time, to see the man, for each man marvelled what it could mean that a knight and a horse could be such a colour, as green as grass grows and even greener it seemed, glowing brighter than green enamel on gold. They all observed the man who stood there and cautiously drew nearer, wondering what on earth he would do. For they had seen many marvels, but never one like this before; so the people there judged it to be illusion and magic. Therefore many noble men were afraid to answer and all were astounded by his voice and sat still as stones in dead silence throughout the splendid hall, as if they had all fallen asleep, so slackened was their loud noise. I judge not all of it to have been through fear, but some for politeness; so they let him whom all should honour address that man.

Then, in front of the high dais, Arthur saw what was [lit.: that] happening and courteously greeted him, for he was never rude, and said, ‘Man, you are welcome in this place. I am called Arthur, the head of this household. Please dismount and stay [with us], I pray you, and we shall learn afterwards whatever it is you wish.’

‘No,’ said the man, ‘so help me God [He who dwells in heaven], my errand [mission] was not to remain any time in this dwelling; but your reputation, man, is held so highly and your castle and your men are considered the best, strongest to ride on horseback in armour, the bravest and worthiest among men, valiant to contend with in noble entertainments [sports], and courtesy is shown here, as I’ve heard tell, and that indeed has brought me here at this time. You may be certain by this branch that I bring/carry here that I come in peace and seek no hostility [peril]; for if I had come in martial company [array], in warlike fashion, I have a hauberk at home and a helmet too, a shield and a sharp, brightly shining spear, and other weapons to wield too, I know well; but because I do not wish for war, my clothing is softer. Yet, if you are as brave as men say, you will graciously grant me by right the game that I ask.’

Arthur answered and said, ‘Sir courteous knight, if you are seeking single combat you won’t fail to find a fight here.’

‘No, I’m not asking for combat, I tell you in good faith. These are just beardless children sitting at this table. If I were buckled in armour on a great horse [warhorse], there would be no man to match me here, their power is so weak. So I ask for a Christmas game in this court, for it is Yule and New Year, and there are many young men here. If anyone in this household thinks himself bold enough, valiant enough in his blood with a daredevil mind, to dare boldly strike a blow in exchange for another, I shall give him as a gift this splendid battleaxe, this very heavy axe, to wield as he wishes, and I shall withstand the first blow, unarmed as I am. If any man be so fierce to attempt what I say, step forward quickly to me and take up this weapon: I renounce it forever for him to keep as his own, and I shall withstand a blow from him, unflinching on this floor, provided that you will give me the right to deal him another [stroke] in my turn. And yet I’ll give him a year and a day’s respite. Now hurry and let’s see quickly if any in this place dare say anything.’