

Translation Class Set Pieces, Week 5

SGGK, lines 2118–39

‘Therefore, good Sir Gawain, leave the man alone and go away by some other path [way], for God’s sake. Ride through some other land, where Christ may help you. And I shall hurry home again and I promise you further to swear by God and all his saints, so help me God and the holy relics and all other sacred oaths, that I shall loyally keep your secret and never reveal that you ever hastened to escape for any man I have known.’

‘Many thanks,’ said Gawain and with displeasure [reluctantly? CandA] he added, ‘May good fortune befall you, man, who wishes me well, and I certainly believe that you would conceal my secret loyally. But however faithfully you kept to it, if I passed here and hastened away to flee in fear, in the way that you suggest, I should be a coward knight and might not be excused. But I will go to the chapel, to take the chance that may befall me, and speak as I please with that same man, whether it bring good or sorrow, as fate decides it should. Though he be a grim fellow to deal with, and stand there with a cudgel, God can well manage to save his servants.’

SGGK, lines 2331–2428

The knight turned away from him and rested on his axe, set the shaft on the ground and leant on the blade and looked at the man who went [was there] on that ground, how that doughty man, without fear, was standing boldly fully armed, fearless, and it pleased his heart. Then he spoke merrily in a loud voice and with a ringing voice said to the knight, ‘Bold man, do not be so fierce on this field. No-one here has ill-treated you nor behaved other than according to the agreement made at the king’s court. I promised you a blow and you have had it: consider yourself fully repaid; I release you from all the rest of the obligations. If I had been nimble, perhaps I might have dealt with you more harshly and have done you harm. First I threatened you playfully with a single feint [pretended blow] and did not cut you with a gash, and I gave you this rightly under the agreement we made on the first night; and you held faithfully to your word and honestly to me, and gave me all your winnings as a good man should. I gave you, man, that other feint for the next day; you kissed my fair wife and gave me the kisses. For both these two here I gave you two mere feints without injury. An honest man repays honestly and then a man need fear no danger. At the third [day?] you failed there and so you took that blow. For it is my garment that you are wearing, that same woven girdle; my own wife gave it to you, I know this well for truth. Now I know all about your kisses and your nature too, and the wooing of my wife: I arranged it myself. I sent her to test you and I think truly that you are the most faultless man who ever walked on the earth. As the pearl is more valuable than the white pea, so is Gawain, by my faith, than other fair knights. But here you fell short a little, sir, and you failed in your loyalty; but that was not because of any cunning nor for the wooing, but because you loved your life; so I blame you the less.’

That other bold man stood a long while in thought; he shuddered inside, he was so overcome by mortification. All the blood drained from his heart and mingled in his face and he shrank for shame at what the man had said. The first word that he said at all was, ‘Cursed be both cowardice and covetousness! In you is villainy and vice that destroys virtue.’ Then he caught hold of the knot and

loosened the fastening, and flung the belt grimly to the man. ‘Look, there is the false thing, bad luck to it! Because of worry about your blow, cowardice taught me to associate with covetousness and to turn my back on my nature, the generosity and loyalty that pertains to knights. Now I am faulty and false, who have always been afraid of treachery and dishonour; both bring sorrow and care! I acknowledge you, knight, privately here that my conduct is wholly at fault. Let me know your will and henceforth I shall be careful.’

Then the other knight laughed and said amiably, ‘I consider the injury that I had completely atoned for; you are confessed so clean, cleared of your faults, and you have openly done penance at the point of my blade. I think you polished [clean] of that fault and refined as cleanly as if you had never sinned since the day you were born. And, sir, I give you the gold-hemmed girdle. Since it is as green as my gown, Sir Gawain, you may think about this very contest wherever you go among noble princes, and it shall be a perfect token amongst chivalrous knights of the adventure of the green chapel. And you shall come back in this New Year to my dwelling and we shall pleasantly enjoy the rest of this noble feast.’

The lord invited him there pressingly and said, ‘I think we shall reconcile you well with my wife, who was your keen enemy.’

‘No, indeed,’ said the knight, and seized his helmet and took it off courteously and thanked the nobleman: ‘I have stayed long enough. Good fortune befall you and may he who ordains all honours repay you. And commend me to that courteous lady, your fair lady; both to her and to that other, my honoured ladies, who have thus cunningly beguiled their knight with their trick. But it is no wonder that a fool should act madly and be brought to sorrow through women’s wiles. For so it was that Adam was beguiled on the earth, and Solomon with many and various [women] and Samson again — Delilah gave him his fate — and afterwards David, who suffered much misery, was deluded by Bathsheba. Since these were brought to disaster by their wiles, it would be to great advantage to love them well and not trust them, if a man could. For these were the noblest [men] of old, those who were preeminently favoured by fortune of all those who lived upon earth; and they were all beguiled by women with whom they had dealings. Though I am now beguiled, I think I should be excused.’