

SIR GAWAINAND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Adapted from the fourteenth century poem

by

David Self

SchoolPlay Productions Ltd

15 Inglis Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3HU

SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

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PRODUCTION NOTES

This version of the Gawain legend has been specially adapted from the fourteenth-century poem *SIR GAWAYN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT*. The unknown author of this poem is thought to have come from the north Midlands or north west England - possibly Cheshire. This play uses the anonymous poet as storyteller and any production should emphasise that it is his story, and the characters are his 'puppets'. They perform the action as he unfolds it to the audience, just as a medieval minstrel might have done.

Bertilac and the Green Knight are, of course, the same character and should be played by the same actor. For his appearances as the Green Knight, he might gain added stature by wearing platform shoes (which can be hidden by a cloak). Note that Bertilac is not merely disguised as the Green Knight: he has been magically transformed (in fact by Morgan le Fay, though this enchantress does not appear in this version).

The beheading of the Green Knight may be covered by a momentary blackout (or 'green-out') as Gawain lets the axe fall.. The Green Knight can pull a suitably decorated hood over his head which he must then keep pulled into his chest or shoulders. The head that he holds up should be as realistic as possible!

Producers will find there are various recordings of suitable medieval music available. The original radio production used *An Anthology of Medieval and Renaissance Music* by the Court Players (on the Music de Wolfe label, DW/LP 3197).

This version of SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT was commissioned by the BBC Schools Radio and first broadcast (in two parts) on Radio 4 in October 1978.

The Poet was played by **David Brierley**

Gawain by **Gordon Gardner**

Arthur by **Kenneth Shanley**

Bertilac by **William Edle**

His wife by **Jo Manning Wilson**

Other parts were played by **Eva Hadden, Katherine Parr,**

Edward McCarthy and **Clifford Norgate.**

The producer was **Diana Reed.**

CAST

Poet *the Story-teller*

King Arthur

Queen Guinevere *his wife*

Sir Gawain *a young knight, Arthur's nephew*

Sir Agravain *another knight*

Sir Bertilac *who is also the GREEN KNIGHT*

The Lady *Bertilac's wife*

Other knights and their ladies *at King Arthur's court*

Servants *at King Arthur's court and at Bertilac's castle.*

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In the distance we hear a choir [or perhaps one solo voice] singing the carol "THE HOLLY AND THE IVY". After the first verse, the POET enters.

Poet: *(Over beginning of verse two fitting the words to the beginning of each line of the carol):*

Once upon a Christmas time...
The story that I have to tell took place,
Many, many years ago...
When King Arthur stayed at.... Camelot.
(The singing ends).
And who am I? Well, you need not know,
It matters not a jot, except to say
I am a poet; and my story's strange and true.
At least, I tell it now as it was told to me;
A story of King Arthur and his noble lords and knights,
And the feasting that took place one Christmas-tide.

(AGRAVAIN and another KNIGHT enter, laughing and joking).

Agravain: and if I joust with you again tomorrow, I'll have the better of you then, I trust!

2nd Knight: Provided you don't fall off your horse again!

(Many more KNIGHTS enter, accompanied by their LADIES. GAWAIN is among them. They all chatter happily to each other, laughing and joking. At this point some might take part in a dance. If so, it should be a happy but stately and decorous occasion. Those who watch applaud as it ends; and a number of SERVANTS then enter, bringing a large number of cushions. They place these informally around the hall and the KNIGHTS and LADIES sit, and chatter quietly. The SERVANTS then serve drinks).

Poet: Tussling in tournaments and jousting joyfully
These noble knights played through the days of Christmas,
With all the merry-making men could plan,
To celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

(There is a slight pause, during which the KNIGHTS and LADIES become silent).

And then came New Year's Day itself.
King Arthur and his lady wife, fair Guinevere,
The knights and all their ladies too
Went first to mass, sung in the church nearby.

(During these last few lines, KING ARTHUR and QUEEN GUINEVERE enter, walking formally, as in a church procession. The KNIGHTS and LADIES leap to their feet and process behind ARTHUR and GUINEVERE, who walk straight across and out again, followed by the KNIGHTS and LADIES).

Poet: And then the king and all the company
Came forth into the castle hall
To share and to receive their New Year gifts.

(ARTHUR, GUINEVERE, the KNIGHTS and LADIES, including AGRAVAIN and GAWAIN, enter, no longer in procession but all talking merrily, and exchanging Christmas presents. ARTHUR and GUINEVERE walk forward).

Guinevere: My noble lord, my Arthur dear, I give you this, and wish you all good luck. *(She gives him a present).*

Arthur: My queen, my Guinevere, I take your gift, I give you.... this. *(He gives her a tender, lingering kiss).*

Knights and Ladies: Aaaaahh! *(A happy sigh).*

Arthur: And also this. *(He gives her a present, which she unwraps).*

Guinevere: For me? What can it be? I wonder....

Arthur: *(loudly)* And to all my noble knights, and to their ladies, I do present my gifts and New Year wishes.

(A SERVANT brings in a tray of presents, which are then distributed).

Agravain: Our thanks to you, your majesty -

Knights and Ladies: Indeed, we give you thanks.

2nd Knight: - and our gifts to our dear Queen, if so we may....

(A SERVANT brings in a huge tray of presents, all of which are given to GUINEVERE).

Guinevere: Arthur, my lords, you all are much too kind! Arthur, look.... *(She begins opening them).*

Servant: *(loudly)* My lord, the feast is served!
(All quieten).

Arthur: Come Guinevere, sit here. And all of you, in order too, the highest-ranking first.

(The SERVANTS rapidly arrange the cushions in a circle, and all except ARTHUR and the SERVANTS sit. GUINEVERE sits down).

Arthur: Myself, I will not eat until you all are served. *(The KNIGHTS sit and talk quietly).* Good Gawain, come sit by Guinevere and me.

Gawain: My lord, I thank you. *(GAWAIN does so).*

Arthur: Agravaing, my fierce warrior, sit there - And all of you, I beg you take your places. *(All are now seated).*

Arthur: *(loudly)* Bring in the food!

(There is a chorus of approval which subsides into general chatter as the SERVANTS bring in many dishes which are placed on either the table or the floor inside the circle).

A Lady: Such delicacies!

Agravaing: There's hardly room for it all!

2nd Knight: I've got room for it though! *(Laughter).*

Gawain: My noble lord, my king, my uncle, with this wine, I drink your health and wish you all prosperity.

Arthur: I thank you Gawain, knight and nephew dear -

Gawain: And If I may, I also drink to Guinevere.

Guinevere: Gentle Gawain, our thanks to you -

Arthur: And we wish you well in all you venture in the coming year....

(ARTHUR sits next to GUINEVERE and all eat and chatter until there is a distant, barely audible knocking as if at the castle door: it is a hollow sound. It is repeated, more audibly).

Arthur: *(shouting over chatter)* My lords, who knocks? Pray silence....

(The noise quietens; there is silence with perhaps a nervous cough. The knocking is repeated, loud and ominous).

Arthur: Who is't that knocks? *(He pauses).* Open wide the gate!

(Offstage, a bolt is shot back, a heavy latch lifted and a gate creaks open. During this next speech the light dims).

Poet: And seated there upon a horse, there was a man,
Taller than any man on earth, was he;
Huge and square, great and strong,
A fearful sight, and yet a handsome one;
No ugly brute was he.
Yet King Arthur's knights and ladies gaped and stared
Because this giant knight in colour was:
Bright green.

(The GREEN KNIGHT enters and stands in a green spotlight).

His clothes were green, his tunic and his cloak;
The fur that trimmed his hood; his hose,
His gloves and shoes,
They all were green.
And what is more, his hair was green,
His beard was green,
And he himself was shining green.
And awful though he was
No helmet, neither armour nor a spear he had
But in one hand he held a bunch of holly,
And in his other, huge, a battle axe.
Of hammered gold and steel it was,
Sharp as any razor, as it glittered in the light,
And thus into King Arthur's hall
There strode this giant knight.

Green Knight: *(loud and challenging)* Who and where is the lord of this castle?
Gladly would I speak with him.

(There is a whispered reaction from the KNIGHTS, then they quieten. There is a pause).

Arthur: *(standing)* Sire knight, you are.... welcome.
I am head of this house, this company.
(Proudly). Arthur is my name.
I beg you, sir, tell us what is't you want.

Green Knight: (*Laughs*). God help me but I did not mean to stop -
But your reputation, king, is held so high
(And all your men are counted noble fighters)
So I could not pass your castle by.

Agravain: (*standing and drawing his sword*) Well, if you want a fight, then here's
my sword -

Green Knight: Nay! (*Chuckles*). By this holly branch I bear,
You can tell I come in peace.
If a battle I had wanted,
Why then, with sword and shield and helmet
Would I travel. No, I wear soft clothes.
(*canny*) But if you are the men you say you are,
You'll play a game with me?

(*The KNIGHTS shout out: 'Yes, we'll play', 'Of course', 'Hand to Hand', 'I'll fight with you', 'I'm not afraid', etc.*).

Arthur: (*quietly disapproving of the shouting*) My knights! I beg you.... (*Aloud*).
Green Knight, if you unarmed combat seek,
We'll not fail to fight!

Green Knight: No, that is not my wish,
And indeed I will not fight with beardless boys -

Gawain: (*standing up*) My lord I do protest -

Arthur: (*aside*) Gawain, be quiet. (*aloud*) Green Knight speak on.

Green Knight: (*heavily stressing each word in this speech*)
King Arthur, all I ask this Christmas time,
Is that one man here will play a game....
That one rash knight will strike one blow
In exchange for just one other.
If there is, I offer him this axe.
This heavy axe to use as best he can,
To deal one blow;
Provided yet, that one year hence,
I shall have leave to give him back the blow,
In my way, as I shall choose.
Now who will come and take the weapon?
(*Pause*).
What, is this Arthur's house, the house of honour?
Where is your courage? Your valour and your pride? (*laughing*)

So is this far-famed Table overturned
By one man's sword?

Arthur: By heavens, what you ask is foolish!
But since you seek your folly,
Hand me now your axe
And I shall give the blow you seek!
Here, give it me and now stand fast!

Gawain: My king, I beg of you, let this fight be mine!
I you would, my lord, give place to me.
I know there is no braver knight than you.
I know you'd gladly take the challenge
And deal the blow the Green Knight asks;
But King Arthur; of ALL your noble knights
I am the weakest and the least in wisdom too -
So should my life be lost by some mischance,
Why then, my life would be the one least missed.

Agravain: He speaks true!

Arthur: (*angry*) Peace!

Gawain: My lord, am I to be valued only as your nephew?
Let me prove myself by joining in this game!

2nd Knight: Sir Gawain does indeed speak well, your majesty.
(*scornful*) It is not fit that you play this
Green Knight in his mad game!
(*The KNIGHTS call out: 'Hear, Hear', 'Well said', etc.*).

Arthur: Gawain, my boy, my knight, I give my place to you
For you have argued nobly. (*aside to GAWAIN*)
But take you care,
Chop once, and if you do strike clean,
Why then, in one year's time I think
(*laughing*) You will receive his blow with little pain.
Here, Gawain, take the axe, and beware,
Chop cleanly once!

Gawain: (*to Arthur*) Thanks, my lord....
(*aloud*) Now, Green Knight!

(He stands facing the GREEN KNIGHT and all the others get to their feet, and move to the side L).

Green Knight: So young sir, you are the chosen knight.
I beg you tell me your true name
Before I take the blow.

Gawain: In good faith, Sir Gawain is my name.

Green Knight: I rejoice, Gawain, I do indeed,
That it's from YOUR hand I shall receive the blow.
But do you swear that in a year,
You'll come to seek a blow from me,
In payment for the one you give today?

Gawain: But how and where shall then I find you, knight?
Your name and home I know not - tell me these
And then I'll swear.

Green Knight: When you have dealt the blow
I'll tell you all you need to know
So you may keep your oath and call on me.
Now grip the axe and see what you can do.

Gawain: Green Knight, I swear the oath
And seize the axe - and gladly seize it too!

(GAWAIN and the GREEN KNIGHT mime the actions described by the POET).

Poet: And so amidst that New Year feast
There stood the giant knight, so green and tall,
And young Gawain, with axe in hand
Had just one blow to deal.
The Green Knight stood with head on side,
His long hair lifted and his neck all bare;
And Gawain gripped the axe and swung it high,
He slashed it swiftly down upon the Green Knight's neck.
And that sharp blade sheared through that neck,
Shattered bone, sank through the flesh,
And the Green Knight's head fell from his neck,

Fell from his neck and struck the floor,
And red blood spurted against the green -
But yet the knight did falter not a bit,
The body stood on legs still sturdy,
Bent and picked up its head,
And held it by th'long green hair.
He strode towards the door without ado
But at the door he stopped and held his head
So that it looked at Gawain and at Arthur too,
And then its mouth spoke forth these words:

Green Knight: Remember to perform what you have promised,
Fail not to come to seek me, Gawain,
According to the oath you swore tonight.
This day next year, you must come to seek me out
As Knight of the Green Chapel am I known;
Therefore ask for me and I'll be found -
You gave your word - be not called a coward!

(He leaves the hall).

Green Knight: *(offstage, shouting)* Away!

Agravain: Phew!

2nd Knight: Well, what do you make of that?

Guinevere: Oh, Arthur!

Arthur: *(trying to laugh it off)* Do not be dismayed - such clever games
Make fine Christmas entertainment.
But truth to tell, I've lost my appetite
And fancy not this meal,
Having seen what we have seen!
Gawain, hang up the axe, you battled well,
And minstrels, music play and soothe away the
Anxious worries of this fight.

*(Music begins to play as everyone drifts out in twos and threes and SERVANTS
clear away the food. The music stops when the POET alone is left).*

Poet: And so the Yuletide season passed,
And indeed a year went by

Till next November came
And then upon the Feast of All the Saints,
King Arthur gave a feast for young Gawain.

(Cheerful, medieval dance music is heard. ARTHUR and GUINEVERE and the KNIGHTS and LADIES enter. Many dance but GAWAIN stands alone in deep thought. GUINEVERE stops dancing before the others and comes to talk to GAWAIN).

Guinevere: My gallant Gawain, how I grieve for you -
I fear you'll never stand the blow
That that Green Knight will deal to you!

Gawain: My gracious lady Guinevere,
I gave my word, as I'm a knight,
Forth must I go.

Arthur: *(approaching)* Speak not of gloomy matters now -
Come Guinevere and Gawain, join the feast.
You need not travel yet, my knight.

Gawain: I think, my king, I must. I gave my word,
I am bound to bear the blow
And so tomorrow must I travel north
To seek the Knight in Green.

(The dancing stops, and all watch as GAWAIN prepares to depart, miming the actions described by the POET).

Poet: And so next day, Gawain put on his polished armour,
Steel shoes and greaves upon his legs,
Breast plate and gauntlets too,
A helmet and a courtly cape -
Sword at his side, a spear to hold,
A handsome knight he looked to all around.
And then upon his good horse Gringolet
He made ready to surmount,
When, at that moment, brought they forth
A shield on which there stood in gold
The Endless Knot, a figure with five points,

Five lines that overlap and lock
A star of faith that will protect its bearer.
Thus guarded and thus ready,
And as the others wept to see him lost,
Gawain bowed unto his king and Guinevere,
And so from Camelot rode forth.

(All but GAWAIN back offstage, waving goodbye and leaving him alone, to mime his ride).

Throughout the realm of Britain,
Gawain rode, full of doubt and fear,
Seeking out the Chapel Green of that Green Knight.
Alone he rode, through northern Wales,
Past Anglesey he went,
And then across the River Dee he rode,
Into the wilderness of Wirral
Where (in those days) there few men lived;
And always as he went, if anyone he met,
He asked where lived the knight in green;
But none had heard of such a magic sight.
In sleet and snow, he rode alone,
Until the morn of Christmas Eve,
And then in deep despair,
He knelt him down to make a prayer.

Gawain: *(kneeling)* I do beseech thee, Jesus Lord,
And Mary, mildest mother dear,
I meekly ask that I may find a church
In which to hear a Christmas Mass.

Poet: And having prayed, he leaped upon brave Gringolet
And spurred his steed to carry on the search.
As evening fell, he came upon a wood
And in that wood of oaks, he saw a moat,
And beyond that moat, a castle dark.
Riding round the wood, he came upon a road,
A road that led unto a bridge across the moat
And there he stopped and called.
A porter opened up the bridge and gate,
He beckoned Gawain to ride in.

And many men came out to meet the knight.
They took and cared for Gringolet
And bowing to Sir Gawain, led him to their lord.

(BERTILAC enters and shakes GAWAIN warmly by the hand. BERTILAC is followed by many SERVANTS who bow to GAWAIN).

Bertilac: You are welcome here, my wandering knight.
Treat everything as if it was your own,
Help yourself to what you please.

Gawain: I offer you my thanks - may Christ reward you, sir.
This is indeed a warm and welcome castle,
Such a one I thought I would not find.

Bertilac: You must be cold and thirsty too.
Servants, go to prepare to feed our guest. *(They go out).*
And tell me, knight, from where you come
And why you travel at this time of year.

(BERTILAC and GAWAIN mime a conversation, while the POET continues).

Poet: And so Sir Gawain told of Camelot,
Of great King Arthur and what had come to pass
A year ago, when the knight in green
Had challenged to a game whichever knight would dare,
And how that he, Gawain, must now seek out that knight,
Before the next New Year was come.

Bertilac: *(aloud)* Why Gawain, you are indeed most welcome,
Right glad I am to have a noble knight of Arthur's
As my guest this Christmas-tide.
And you must stay the whole feast through.
God has given us grace in granting such a guest.

(Enter the LADY, his wife, who curtsies low to GAWAIN).

My wife and I will entertain you best we can
By offering sport and feasting too -

Gawain: Great thanks, my lord, in faith, great thanks,
I wish to do you service in return
But my errand's urgent, I can not stand delay,
For I must find the Green Knight's chapel
Before the feast of New Year Day.
I pray you sir, has rumour ever reached you of the chapel,
Of the knight to whom I swore my oath?

Bertilac (*laughing*) You may linger here a few days yet -
For truth to tell, you're at your journey's end
Fret not about finding of the chapel,
Stay here, brave man, stay here
Until New Year has dawned;
Rest here, Gawain, rest here,
You shall be shown the way,
It is no more than two miles walk away.

Gawain: Now do I offer thanks and will accept with joy,
My goal is nearly gained and with you I will stay.

Lady: Since you've travelled far
Lie late in bed each day,
Eat when you choose -

Bertilac: Yes, indeed, and my wife shall keep you company,
Especially when the Christmas feast is past
And I get up at dawn to hunt the day away.

Gawain: (*embarrassed*) You are most kind.

Bertilac: (*joyful*) Moreover, let us make a bargain
That, when I hunt, whatever in the woods I win
It shall be yours.
And whatever chance you here to gain
Why, you'll give it unto me when I return.
A glass of wine to seal the bargain!

(They laugh and go out being met by a SERVANT with a tray of drinks as they leave. The POET is again alone).

Poet: And so the days of Christmas came and went
And then the next day dawned.
The kennel doors were opened wide
And out the hounds came baying loud -
And Bertilac and all his men strode forth
Dressed ready for the hunt.

(In the distance a hunting horn blows three bold notes).

As the bugle called, throughout the forest dark
Wild creatures crouched in fear.
The huntsmen rode, the beaters bellowed loud
And deer in deep distraction darted down the dale.
'Let loose your arrows now!' cried Bertilac,
And arrow shafts flew through the forest fast,
A deer screamed loud, sank dead upon the ground
And blood poured from the arrow wound.
Another deer was hit, a third and then a fourth -
The hunters' skill was great, the dogs alert,
That so many had been slain by set of sun
There was a wondrous heap of does and other deer.
But what of Gawain all this time,
Resting in his bed back in the castle grey?

(GAWAIN can now be seen on a bed made out of cushions, just waking up).

Gawain: *(Yawns).* Why 'tis long after dawn of day. *(Yawns again).*
But I'll not get up, not yet I think.

(The LADY tiptoes out of the shadows, and freezes, fearing she has been heard).

Gawain: *(to himself)* Someone comes! Who is't? I'll feign to be asleep.
(imitation snore).

Lady: *(seductively)* Gawain, do you sleep or do you wake? My lord?

Gawain: *(to himself)* It is the lady fair, my host's dear wife -
I saw her late last night, she is so beautiful!
I'll still pretend to be asleep. *(snore).*

Lady: *(having approached)* I'll sit by his bed. *(She sits by his feet. A pause).*

How handsome is the knight as he lies here.
I wonder when he'll wake.

Gawain: (*aside*) Perhaps I'd better speak,
And discover what she wants. (*He yawns loudly*).

Lady: He wakes.

Gawain: (*with an even bigger yawn, and then in feigned surprise*)
Why someone's here! Why, lady - I am surprised.

Lady: Good morning, Gawain, lord.
How unsafely do you sleep that one may slip in here!

Gawain: Erm, good morning, lady fair.
If, er, you would allow me leave,
I'd rise from bed, put on my better clothing
That we might have a talk.

Lady: Nay, you shall not budge from bed,
For my knight I know that you are Sir Gawain
Whom all the world reveres, whom lords and ladies honour,
And so because we are alone, I would do what you will.

Gawain: In truth I'm hardly such a hero,
But in God's name, I'd gladly serve you, lady.

Lady: You are a noble knight, gracious and good-looking,
I vow there cannot be a better.

Gawain: (*embarrassed*) I know not what to say.

Lady: You know I do begin to doubt me if you are Gawain -
Gawain: How so?

Lady: Were such a man as Gawain staying with a lady,
Why, surely would he seek a kiss.

Gawain: Oh, well, yes, so be it, as you say,
I'll kiss at your command as does become a knight.

(GAWAIN gives her a short, brief kiss. She responds with a long lingering one).

Gawain: Why lady, let me go, I do - er - thank you.

(The LADY stands, smiles at him and leaves him. GAWAIN scrambles out of bed and puts on his over-garments then hurries out).

Poet: And so she left and Gawain dressed and went to church,
And then the evening came and Bertilac returned,
Bringing all the venison he'd shot.

(BERTILAC and GAWAIN enter separately. They meet and greet each other).

Bertilac: See, how does my hunting please you?
Am I not a splendid sportsman?

Gawain: Such spoil I have not seen for years!

Bertilac: Well, we promised one another what we won,
And so I give this game, I give it all to you.

Gawain: And all I gained in this house,
It must belong to you. *(GAWAIN gives him a long kiss).*
Accept my taking for I gained no more,
No questions ask, it would lack chivalry
Were I to say much more.

Bertilac: Well, for the gift of what you won, I er, er thank you.
Yes, well, enough is said, to supper now, let's eat,
But first, a drink!

(They leave, being met by a SERVANT with a tray of drinks as they go out).

Poet: Long before the sun lit up the morning after,
The kennel doors were opened wide
And out the hounds came baying loud
As Bertilac and all his men
Came ready for another hunt.

(Again three blasts from a hunting horn).

Today they hunted in a group
Through thickets and across a hostile land
They surged in search of game,
Till they gathered round a group of bushes
And they beat upon the bushes
Till out there raced a boar,
A giant boar of staggering size.
He hurled three hounds to earth
And thundered off, the others in pursuit.
The men rode after, aimed to shoot,
Loosed arrows after him
But for all their skill they did not bring him down.
Through the day they chased till dusk was falling,
Then the boar did turn and stand,
The men stood back afraid, but Bertilac
With sword in hand rode on -
The boar sprang at the man,
They tumbled both into a stream,
A swirling mass they made.
The wild pig snarled and bit
But Bertilac with courage great
Drove in his sword up to the hilt,
And left the men to lug the carcass to the shore.
Meanwhile, young Gawain lay in bed.

(GAWAIN is seen lying in bed. The LADY approaches).

Lady: Good morning, Gawain dear, may I come in?

Gawain: Oh good morning, lady fair - I've just awoke.

Lady: *(Laughs).* I'll sit me here. *(She sits much closer to him than she did before).*

Gawain: Oo, my leg.

Lady: You know I wonder if Sir Gawain you really are
For courtly knights should keep the rules.

Gawain: Tell me please if and how I am to blame!

Lady: Yesterday I told you how to kiss,
Now do you scorn me and forget your duty.

Gawain: (*doubtful*) Well, I am here and you may kiss me if you wish.

(*The LADY kisses him, lingeringly, tenderly.*)

Lady: (*seductively*) You are a gentle man, Gawain,
Your honour and your fame are widely known -
Yet I have sat here two separate times
Without you've uttered yet a word of love?

Gawain: (*eager*) In good faith, why - But no: (*recollecting himself*)
To please you lady, I would do much
And would remain your servant, help me God!

Lady: Why Gawain, then, I leave you with another kiss.

(*She kisses him again, stands, smiles and then goes. GAWAIN gets up, puts on his cloak, etc. and leaves during this next speech.*)

Poet: So for a second day the lady tempted him
But he remained so sure no sin he made;
Yet when she'd left, he dressed and went to church
And waited once again till evening came
And Bertilac returned, bearing home the boar.

(*BERTILAC and GAWAIN enter separately and meet.*)

Bertilac: Now Gawain, when saw you such a boar as that? (*He points*).

Gawain: Congratulations, sir, it was well fought!

Bertilac: Well, Gawain, you know our treaty - it is yours;
So what have you this day to give to me?

Gawain: My lord (*Kisses him*). by the word I gave you,
(*Kisses him again*). There's nothing now I owe you!

Bertilac: (*aside*) That's twice I've tested you and found you true!

(aloud) Let's now seek out food and wine,
And drink to what the third day brings!

Gawain: Indeed sir, that we will....

(They laugh, and go out, arm in arm, being met by a SERVANT with a tray of drinks as they leave).

Poet: The third day came, the sun came up,
And once again the hounds were eager for the chase;

(The hunting horn: three blasts).

Away rode Bertilac and all his men.
Soon they found a fox's track
And gave chase to find the crafty fellow.
They galloped hard, they hallooed loud,
But Reynard led them all a dance,
Till in the afternoon, just ere the sun went down,
The hounds caught up the wily fox
And chased him back towards the men.
The knight drew out his sword,
The fox lunged left,
And all the pack were on him;
But Bertilac did stab the fox
And held him high o'erhead.
Meanwhile Gawain still slept a-bed.

(GAWAIN is lying on his cushions as the LADY approaches and lies down beside him).

Lady: What, Gawain? What sound asleep?
The morning's bright and clear!

Gawain: *(Yawns himself awake).* Oh lady, I was dreaming of the Chapel Green
Where tomorrow I must meet the Giant
And receive the blow he promised.

Lady: *(Laughs).* Think not of that Gawain *(She kisses him).*

Gawain: Ahh! You are more beautiful each day! *(Sighs)*.

Lady: *(Kisses him again)*. Before we part, give me something as a present!

Gawain: I would I could, but I ride with little luggage
And no worthy gift I have to give.

Lady: *(Sighs)*. Well, though you give me none, let me give this.

Gawain: A ring? No, gracious lady, no gift can I receive.

Lady: If you reject my ring, then take this belt.
It is but a girdle of green silk
But he who wears it always safe will be -
No man can kill or slay him,
No evil cunning can destroy him.
Well?

(Pause).

Gawain: I think perhaps -

Lady: 'tis good, take it and wear it secretly,
Let not my husband see, but keep it safe,
My noble knight.

*(She kisses him and he accepts the belt. Then she gets up and leaves quickly).
GAWAIN gets up, dresses and exits).*

Poet: And so she quickly left Gawain, who dressed,
Went to church to make confession
And waited till the lord return.

(BERTILAC and GAWAIN enter separately and meet).

Bertilac: Well, Gawain, once again I'm back.

Gawain: And straightaway my lord I do salute you. *(Kisses him three times, quickly)*.

Bertilac: By heaven, you're doing well.

Gawain: (*only just sure of himself*) 'tis all I gained this day.

Bertilac: And all I gained is this one fox.
Well, to food and drink let's turn.

Gawain: And tomorrow being New Year's Day,
A guide I hope you'll lend me
Who'll steer my way towards that Chapel Green
Where my fate awaits. (*Sighs*).

Bertilac: (*unsettled for once*) I said I would - I'll keep my promise,
A guide you'll have; now let's feast....

*(BERTILAC and GAWAIN depart. The POET is left. During this next speech
GAWAIN might re-enter and mime the actions in one central spotlight).*

Poet: And so the New Year dawned,
A cold and bitter morn -
Sir Gawain rose and dressed,
Fitting all his armour on,
And underneath his overcloak
He did not fail to wear that silken belt.
Then to the stables made he way
Where ready fretting for a gallop
Stood his noble horse, great Gringolet.
He stepped into the stirrup, up aloft
And holding high his shield, rode out -
The guide came trotting close behind.
They'd not gone far before this man did stop
And said he would no further follow
But pointed out the way that Gawain had to go
To find the Green Knight's chapel.
So Gawain spurred on Gringolet
And galloped down a path into a wild ravine
Where building was there none, save one green mound,
A grassy mound such as might house the dead.
In this unholy natural chapel,
Gawain leaped off his mount and looked around.

(A cold wind is blowing. Enter GAWAIN alone, if he has not already mimed the ride).

Gawain: *(alone, shouting)* Who is the ruler here and who would meet with me?
(Pause).

Green Knight: *(calling from some distance away)*
Stay there and I shall come to deal your blow!

Gawain: *(to himself)* Without a doubt it is that knight -
A sharp new axe he holds, one shining bright;
His looks and limbs the same, his head new fast upon his neck...

(The GREEN KNIGHT enters).

Green Knight: Welcome to my chapel, and you are come
Just when you should to keep the word you gave.
Take off your helmet, knight, and have your payment now.

Gawain: So I do.... and by God I grudge you not the blow. *(He kneels).*

Green Knight: Stand fast then Gawain, sir. Right, it comes. Now! *(The GREEN KNIGHT raises the axe and then, as it falls, GAWAIN moves away and the axe hits the ground).* You moved, you flinched - I did not think you such a coward!

Gawain: *(cowering on the ground)*
I shall not flinch again. Strike a second blow.
But by your faith be quick. *(He kneels again).*

Green Knight: Stand fast again then - now. *(The GREEN KNIGHT heaves up the axe and strikes as before. This time GAWAIN does not flinch but the GREEN KNIGHT misses).*

Gawain: *(scornful)* You missed!

Green Knight: May your knighthood save your neck now, if it can!

Gawain: *(angry)* Hit again, fierce man, you threaten much too much!

(The GREEN KNIGHT carries out the actions as the POET describes them).

Poet: And so again the Green Knight raised his axe
And swung it down to hit Sir Gawain's neck
And caught it just a little nick,
A mere slight wound with just a little blood!
Gawain leaped a sword's length off,
And stood defiantly.

Gawain: (*standing away from the GREEN KNIGHT*)
Cease your blows, you'll strike no more.
I came, I kept my word, I had your stroke,
And any more, why then I shall reply!
The single blow we waged in Camelot
Is paid, is paid indeed.

Green Knight: (*Sounding kindly for the first time*).
My brave Gawain, in Arthur's court
I promised you a blow; you have indeed received it now:
Your debt is paid.
The first and second blows in which I did not touch you
Were for keeping of your word,
When you paid me back the kisses that my wife did give to you!

Gawain: Your wife!

Green Knight: For those two days I aimed two harmless blows.
The third tap that you took - that was for the belt.
(*GAWAIN is startled and embarrassed*).
Yes, I know she gave it unto you
I know you wear it secretly,
But 'twas I who set her on,
To try your virtue and your faith,
To test you as a blameless knight.

Gawain: Curse my cowardice and curse my greed!
There, there's the belt, I take the blame,
I give it back to you. (*He does so*).

Green Knight: You have confessed your fault,
Guiltless are you now, you have no shame!

And as for that green belt, I give it you
As memory of this battle in my chapel green.

Gawain: I'll wear it - not in pride but shame!

Green Knight: Well, so be it, but now come to my castle home
And let us celebrate New Year.
My wife I know would like to see you!

Gawain: I thank you, sir, but I'll say no -
My luck has held me safe thus far
And I'll return to Camelot,
But tell me, sir, before I go, your name.

Green Knight: Bertilac they call me -
And through the magic of one Morgan Fay
I was enchanted and sent forth
To test King Arthur's knights,
And frighten Guinevere -
So as the knight in green I did appear. *(Laughs)*.
I ask you once again to visit me.

Gawain: I thank you lord, I thank you truly
But on brave Gringolet I'll make my way
Back home to Camelot.

(They bow to each other and then depart, going their separate ways).

Poet: *(alone)* And so they parted there.
Gawain rode south to meet King Arthur
At his court of Camelot
And meeting there the knights and King and Queen
He told them all that came to pass.

(ARTHUR, GUINEVERE, all the KNIGHTS and LADIES enter and meet GAWAIN who approaches from the other direction. Cheerful music is heard in the distance as GAWAIN kneels before ARTHUR who motions him to rise. GUINEVERE kisses him and the KNIGHTS and LADIES applaud. All but GAWAIN are cheerful).

Arthur: Rejoice, my Gawain, nephew dear -
I pray you look not sad upon your safe return.

Gawain: My lord I cannot but be sad
So long as I do wear this belt -
A heavy burden and one that I must bear
So long as I shall live.

Poet: And Gawain said how he (in shame) would always wear the belt
As a sign of how he broke his word;
But all the knights in laughter answered him.

Agravain: Why, we shall wear one too!
Arthur: That we will indeed -
Not in shame but as an honour,
To the knight who won it,
Gawain, who kept his word,
Was brave and bold and honest.

(The music swells in volume, as everyone moves off in procession, talking and joking merrily. The POET is left alone, watching them. Then he bows and walks slowly off in the opposite direction).

THE END