

The Marriage of Sir Gawaine  
selected quatrains from Bp. Thomas Percy's  
*Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*

...

*[Arthur agrees to answer a threatening baron's riddle.]*

And bringe me worde what thing it is  
All women moste desyre;  
This is thy ransome, Arthur, he sayes,  
Ile have noe other hyre.

King Arthur then helde up his hande,  
And sware upon his faye,  
Then tooke his leave of the grimme barone  
And faste hee rode awaye.

And he rode east, and he rode west,  
And did of all inqyre,  
What thing it is all women crave,  
And what they most desyre.

Some told him riches, pompe, or state;  
Some rayment fine and brighte;  
Some told him mirthe; some flatterye;  
And some a jollye knighte.

In letters all king Arthur wrote,  
And seal'd them with his ringe:  
But still his minde was helde in doubte,  
Each tolde a different thinge.

As ruthfulle he rode over a more,  
He saw a ladye sette  
Betweene an oke, and a greene holléye,

All clad in red scarlette.

Her nose was crookt and turnd outwårde,  
Her chin stoode all awrye;  
And where as sholde have been her mouthe,  
Lo! there was set her eye:

Her haire, like serpents, clung aboute  
Her cheekes of deadlye hewe:  
A worse-form'd ladye than she was,  
No man mote ever viewe.

To hail the king in seemelye sorte  
This ladye was fulle faine;  
But king Arthùre all sore amaz'd,  
No aunswere made againe.

What wight art thou, the ladye sayd,  
That wilt not speake to mee;  
Sir, I may chance to ease thy paine,  
Though I be foule to see.

....

*[Arthur answers the baron's riddle.]*

Yet hold thy hand, thou proud baròne,  
I praye thee hold thy hand;  
And give mee leave to speake once more  
In reskewe of my land.

This morne, as I came over a more,  
I saw a ladye sette  
Betwene an oke, and a greene hollèye,  
All clad in red scarlètte.

Shee sayes, all women will have their wille,

This is their chief desyre;  
Now yield, as thou art a barone true,  
That I have payd mine hyre.

....

*[Gawain loyally pays his lord's debt to the Loathly Lady.]*

And when they came to the greene forrèst,  
Beneathe a faire holley tree  
There sate that ladye in red scarlèt  
That unseemelye was to see.

Sir Kay beheld that lady's face,  
And looked upon her sweere;  
Whoever kisses that ladye, he sayes,  
Of his kisse he stands in feare.

Sir Kay beheld that ladye againe,  
And looked upon her snout;  
Whoever kisses that ladye, he sayes,  
Of his kisse he stands in doubt.

Peace, brother Kay, sayde sir Gawàine,  
And amend thee of thy life:  
For there is a knight amongst us all,  
Must marry her to his wife.

What marry this foule queane, quoth Kay,  
I' the devil's name anone;  
Gett mee a wife wherever I maye,  
In sooth shee shall be none.

....

*[Gawaine is surprised by the outcome.]*

Nowe, gentle Gawaine, chuse, quoth shee,  
And make thy choice with care;  
Whether by night, or else by daye,  
Shall I be foule or faire?

“To have thee foule still in the night,  
When I with thee should playe!  
I had rather farre, my lady deare,  
To have thee foule by daye.”

What when gaye ladyes goe with their lordes  
To drinke the ale and wine;  
Alas! then I must hide myself,  
I must not goe with mine?

“My faire ladyè, sir Gawaine sayd,  
I yield me to thy skille;  
Because thou art mine owne ladyè  
Thou shalt have all thy wille.”

Nowe blessed be thou, sweete Gawàine,  
And the daye that I thee see;  
For as thou seest mee at this time,  
Soe shall I ever bee.

...

But now the spelle is broken throughe,  
And wronge is turnde to righte;  
Henceforth I shall bee a faire ladyè,  
And hee be a gentle knighte.