Le Morte d'Arthur Study Guide

Le Morte d'Arthur by Thomas Malory

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Contents

Introduction

Although *Le Morte d'Arthur* is thought to have been written in 1469, the first known publication was in 1485, by William Caxton. Caxton's edition was divided into 21 books and 506 chapters. In 1934 another manuscript was discovered in the Fellows Library of Winchester College. The text of this second manuscript is more fully developed in sections than the earlier known edition and it is divided into ten parts, forming five larger sections. This later manuscript was published in 1947 as *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*. This second text, with the divisions into five books, is the text most commonly used text today.

In composing this work, Malory took a body of legends, mostly French in origin, and adapted them to English life, with an English perspective. Malory's sources, dating from 1225-1230, are largely a selection of courtly romances about Launcelot. These stories purport to be historical accounts of King Arthur and his knights and of their quest for the Holy Grail. In addition to the French sources, Malory added material from a fourteenth century English alliterative poem, the *Morte Arthur.* Although it is probable that a real Arthur did exist (it is a common name), there is little actual historical basis for the stories, which are largely legend and folklore. Many scholars have attempted to prove the veracity of the work, but the attraction of Malory's work has always been the text itself, with its emphasis on courtly love, honor and virtue, valor and devotion, magic and miracles. *Le Morte d'Arthur* was immediately popular with readers and critics and has remained so. It has been an influential source for many writers, including Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King.*

Author Biography

The authorship of *Le Morte d'Arthur* has long been in dispute, although for practical purposes, the actual identity of Thomas Malory is now less important than the literary folklore that surrounds this individual. Traditionally, this text has been credited to Thomas Malory, a knight, who was born in about 1410 in Warwickshire, England. As a young man, Malory is said to have served with the Earl of Warwick's forces in Calais, and later, succeeded to his father's estate in 1433 or 1434, probably when he was in his twenties. Shortly after, Malory married, although there is little reliable information about his personal life with his wife, Elizabeth. There is evidence of one child, a son, Robert, although there may have been more. There are, however, accounts of Malory's imprisonment, which followed what appeared to be a fairly respectable existence. After inheriting his father's estate, and a second estate a few years later, Malory led a quiet, and by most accounts, affluent life. But for some reason, in 1450, Malory turned to crime. The list of his crimes is appalling, including multiple rapes, robberies, and attempted murder. After a prison escape, Malory turned to robbing churches, and was again arrested, this time serving three years. When he was released, Malory returned to crime, was imprisoned again, and again escaped. However, he was evidently in prison once again when Edward IV issued a pardon for prisoners that specifically excluded Malory. Malory died in 1471 and is buried in Newgate, just outside London.

Malory is credited with writing *Le Morte d'Ar-thur* during the last years of his imprisonment. Scholars and historians who dispute Malory's authorship do so on the grounds that he was little more than a common thief, and was therefore, not capable of composing such an important work. There is no way to assert with complete accuracy, if this Thomas Malory, or any other Thomas Malory, was actually the author of this work, but Malory's criminal record is not an indicator of his literary capabilities. *Le Morte d'Arthur* is filled with battles, chivalry, jealousy, and lust. These are all ideas that Malory, the knight turned criminal, would know about, and with which he would be familiar. The statement at the end of the book says that *Le Morte d'Arthur* was completed in "the ix yere of the reygne of kyng edward the fourth." That date corresponds to the period between March 4,1469 and March 3, 1470, near the end of Malory's imprisonment and life. *Le Morte d'Arthur* was finally printed in 1485 by William Caxton. There is no evidence that Malory wrote any other texts.

Plot Summary

I. The Tale of King Arthur

The birth of Arthur results from King Uther's deceptive bedding, which is really a rape, of Arthur's mother, Igrayne. Merlin, who arranges with Uther for the satisfaction of his lust, is promised the child that results. After Arthur's birth, Merlin sends the child to live with Sir Ector. Two years later, Uther dies, and Merlin secures the dying king's promise that Arthur shall be king. With Uther's death, the kingdom is in disarray with several of the barons struggling to gain control. Merlin and the Archbishop arrange for a gathering of the lords. When the lords arrive, they find a sword buried in a stone. Upon the stone are the words, "whoso pulleth out this sword from this stone and anvil is duly born king of all England." None of the men present can budge the sword, but Arthur, who mistakes the sword for the sword mislaid by Kay, easily pulls the sword free. However, the lords do not wish to be ruled by a boy and resist proclaiming Arthur king. Eventually, however, the lords agree, and as king, Arthur is successful, ruling equitably and cautiously.

When Arthur has himself crowned king of Wales, the husbands of Uther's three daughters, who are themselves kings, arrive for the coronation. But instead of arriving to celebrate with Arthur, Kings Lot, Nantres, and Uriens arrive to make war. Although Merlin tells the three kings of Arthur's heritage and arranges a truce, Merlin returns to Arthur telling him to attack because destiny is with him. After his easy victory over his enemies, Arthur meets and falls in love with Guinevere. Arthur also creates a child, Mordred, with Lot's wife, whom Arthur does not realize is his sister. Soon, Merlin appears disguised first to tell Arthur that he is Uther's son, and later, to tell Arthur that he has lain with his sister and created a child who will destroy him. When Arthur loses his sword in battle against Sir Pellanor, Merlin leads Arthur to the Lady of the Lake, where Arthur promises a later gift in return for his sword, which will protect him, as long as he wears it. In a final effort to secure his kingdom and himself, Arthur orders the deaths of all highborn children born on May Day, but the reason for this order, Mordred, survives. And instead, Arthur incurs the wrath of his lords. Merlin has had a part in every event that has shaped Arthur's life although he does not yet know this.

The story now shifts to an emphasis on revenge, as a magical sword is used by a newly released prisoner, Sir Balyn, to slay the Lady of the Lake. When Sir Balyn attempts to win back Arthur's favor, he accidentally kills Launcelor of Ireland, one of Arthur's men, and is responsible for the suicide of Launceor's sister. Soon another battle with King Lot ensues, and Pellanor kills the king, and Arthur manages a great victory over his enemies. Merlin warns Arthur that he must guard his scabbard, and that the woman to whom he gives it, will steal it. Arthur gives it to Morgan le Fay, his sister, who gives the scabbard to her lover. After many battles, Balyn dies in battle with his brother, the two having killed one another by mistake. Merlin fixes Balyn's sword so that no man can use it except for Launcelot or Galahad.

Against Merlin's advice, Arthur married Gui-nevere. Her dowry is the Round Table, which seats 150, the seats of which Merlin fills with as many knights as he can find. One

of the new knights is Lot's son, Gawain. After some minor skirmishes, Arthur establishes the new code for the knights of the Round Table. The new code demands that the knights be merciful, righteous in their battles, and honorable toward women.

II. The Tale of Arthur and King Lucius

This book recounts the battles between Arthur and Lucius of Rome. Lucius has demanded tributes from Arthur, who refuses. Arthur promises war and is supported by his knights, who are eager for an honorable war. Although Lucius is warned of Arthur's strength, he chooses to attack anyway. Leaving his grieving Guinevere behind, Arthur leaves England for Normandy. The battles begin earlier than planned, after Gawain and King Bors precipitate a clash with the Romans. In spite of their lack of preparedness, Arthur's forces destroy the enemy with Gawain emerging as a heroic figure. Arthur next sends Launcelot and Cador to deliver the Roman prisoners to Paris but Roman forces ambush them. Launcelot proves himself a hero, and the small force defeats the Romans. Lucius' men beg him to end the war, but the Romans choose to attack yet again. This time, Arthur vows to take no prisoners, killing every one of his enemies in the battle. Arthur is crowned king of Rome, where he apportions the city's wealth. Soon Arthur and his men return to England and their wives.

III. The Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake

After his victory in Rome, Launcelot returns to England, an honored and heroic knight. This book relates Launcelot's adventures, which embody the ideal heroic knight and the code of the Round Table. In the first of the episodes related here, Launcelot is asleep under a tree when Morgan le Fay and three other ladies find him. She uses magic to return him to her castle, where the women demand that he must choose one of them or he will die. Launcelot is saved when he promises to help Sir Bagdemagus in a tournament. On his way to the tournament, Launcelot fights and wounds another knight, who has attacked him as he rested. After he wins the tournament, Launcelot is guided to Tarquin, who had earlier captured Launcelot's nephew. Launcelot kills Tarquin and has all of the prisoners released. He next kills a thief and rapist who had been attacking women, before moving on to Tentagil castle, where Arthur was conceived, and where Launcelot kills the giant that had been attacking women. As his adventures continue, Launcelot gives his armor to Sir Kay to protect him, and when a maiden seeks his help, Launcelot willingly risks his life to do so. He even agrees to help a lady who deceptively attempts to have him killed. Soon, everyone knows of Launcelot's many heroic deeds.

IV. The Tale of Sir Gareth

Gareth is another of Lot's son and the brother of Gawain. He is the perfect knight, more humble and pure than all the other knights. When this book begins, he is working as a kitchen boy and has adopted the name, Beaumains. Sir Kay is angered that this kitchen boy, whom he has always distrusted, is made a knight and that he is given an adventure, which is to help the maiden, Lynet. However, when Sir Kay follows him, Gareth seizes Kay's spear and shield. After several adventures and the defeat of many criminal types, Gareth proves his worthiness to be a knight of the Round Table. Finally

after a tournament in which Gareth, unknowingly, fights his brother Gawain, Gareth is married to Lyonesse to whom he has been a devoted suitor.

V. The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones

The book recounts the adventures of Sir Tristram, who at eighteen meets Isolde and falls in love with her. Unfortunately, he is bound to deliver Isolde to King Mark, whom Tristram serves. The love potent prepared for King Mark and Isolde, is instead, consumed by Tristram and Isolde, who consummate their relationship. Isolde marries King Mark, but she and Tristram will remain lovers. King Mark eventually realizes what Tristram and Isolde are doing, and the two lovers flee the castle. Eventually, King Mark is able to capture Isolde, and a wounded Tristram leaves Cornwall. In Britain, Tristram meets and marries another woman, Isolde le Blaunche Maynes, but he will not consummate the union. Tristram hears that Launcelot has condemned Tristram's betrayal of his lady.

After he again returns to Cornwall, Tristram is exiled by King Mark. Soon, Tristram encounters Arthur's knights, assists Launcelot, when Morgan le Fay threatens his life, and enters a tournament. Fighting under another name, Tristram nearly wins the tournament (Launcelot wins but declares Tristram the rightful winner), but is wounded and flees to the forest. After a series of adventures, Tristram and Launcelot fight one another, although neither knows the other. Soon, the two men arrive in Camelot, where Tristram is made a knight of the Round Table. Because of Tristram's success, King Mark is more jealous than ever. He plots to have Tristram killed, but even fails at this, and when his kingdom is at risk, King Mark is forced to ask Tristram for help. Once the kingdom has been saved, King Mark writes to Arthur accusing Guinevere of faithlessness. For the remainder of this book, Tristram, Launcelot, and various other knights engage in tournaments and adventures designed to reveal their valour and strength.

VI. The Tale of the Holy Grail

Previously, Launcelot had been tricked into an affair with Elaine, the daughter of King Pelles. The child of that affair is Galahad. At the beginning of this book, there is a report that a sword has been found in a floating stone. The sword is engraved with a legend that the sword belongs to the best knight in the world, but there is also a warning that any man who tries to pull it out and fail, will suffer a serious wound from it later. Gawain tries after Arthur orders him to do so, and Percival also tries to share in Gawain's curse. Galahad arrives and successfully pulls out the sword. Soon all of Arthur's knights vow to go on the Grail Quest. Galahad soon wins a white shield marked with a red cross. The story behind the shield claims that it has healing powers. Galahad undergoes many tests on his journey, and by successfully passing these tests, he proves his virtue, humility, generosity, and worthiness. Galahad is the Christ-figure, who refuses to kill his enemies, but is content to drive them off. Meanwhile, Launcelot is undergoing his own tests. As a result, he learns that he has been motivated in his successes, not by love of God, but by love of Guinevere. Launcelot regrets his sins and vows to become a better man.

Percival, Launcelot, Gawain, and Bors each continue their separate search for the Grail Quest. Each man has visions while sleeping that reveals his sins. Like the other knights, these three knights are also having no luck in their search, since, as their dreams reveal, each one is too sinful to succeed. Each man understands that he is too filled with pride and lacks the humility and devotion to God that is required to succeed. Launcelot tries to enter the Grail chamber but is struck down just when he catches a glimpse of it. He lies in a coma for twenty-four days before recovering. Galahad, accompanied by Percival and Bors finds the Grail. Galahad prays and is granted his wish of choosing his time of death. After this event, Galahad performs many miracles.

VII. The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere

After the Grail Quest, this book reverts to Launcelot's more human qualities and to a life less perfect than Galahad's. Launcelot has forgotten all the promises he made during the Grail Quest and quickly turns to his love for Guinevere. Launcelot must rescue Guinevere after Meliagrance captures her. Thereafter, Launcelot is less circumvent in his loyalty and love for the queen. Launcelot has been forced to choose between King Arthur and Queen Guinevere, and he has chosen the queen.

VIII. The Death of King Arthur

It is clear to everyone that the queen and Launcelot are involved in an adulterous love affair. Arthur, who has ignored this for some time, can no longer ignore what has become knowledge, and he orders Guinevere's death. As Guinevere is about to be burned, Launcelot arrives to rescue her, killing everyone who was ready to participate in her burning, including Gawain's brothers. The pope intervenes, and Launcelot returns Guinevere to the king and is banished. Gawain insists that he and Arthur attack Launcelot. This occurs and Launcelot wins, but refuses to kill Gawain. While Arthur and Gawain have been pursuing Launcelot, Mordred, Arthur's incestuous son, seizes the throne and the queen. Arthur and Gawain return to fight Mordred, and Gawain dies. While discussing a truce, an error is made, and the battle resumes. Arthur kills Mordred, but in doing so, receives a fatal wound. Arthur orders Excalibur thrown into a lake and his body is placed on a barge. Guinevere and Launcelot each turn to God in their grief and each soon dies. Sir Constantine becomes King, the Round Table disperses, and the knights simply wander off into other directions.

Book 1

Book 1 Summary

Book 1 recounts the conception of Arthur, his coming to power, his coronation, his fights to establish the empire, and the foretelling of his ultimate demise.

King of England, Uther Pendragon, calls his enemy, the Duke of Tintagil, and his wife, Igraine, for an audience. King Uther desires Igraine so much that he plans a deception in order to sleep with her. Uther's armies surround Tintagil's castle, and Uther falls "ill for love of Igraine," and Merlin is sent for. Merlin promises to help Uther and give him all his desires if Uther agrees to Merlin's demands. The price Merlin demands is the child of the union of Igraine and Uther. Merlin plots with Uther to disguise himself as Tintagil after Uther kills him. Igraine does not know her husband is dead and accepts the guise that Uther is her husband, conceiving Arthur three hours after Tintagil's death. Uther marries the widow, Igraine, who still does not know that it was the king who came to her bed.

Igraine gives birth to Arthur. Merlin demands his promise from Uther and takes Arthur away to be raised by Sir Ector as his own child. King Uther's health declines as his kingdom is being overtaken by enemies. Right before his death, Uther, at Merlin's urging, proclaims that Arthur should be his heir and King.

Much discontent exists after Uther's death with many people vying for power. At Merlin's insistence, the Archbishop of Canterbury invites all the lords and powerful men of the land to London at Christmas where the true king would be chosen. In the churchyard in London was a huge stone with a sword in it with the inscription, "Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil, is rightwise king born of all England." No one could pull out the sword, until Arthur's adopted brother, Sir Kay, loses his sword, and Arthur pulls the one out of the stone. Ector admits that Arthur is not his son by blood and kneels in allegiance. After numerous "proofs" of his righteousness as king, pulling the sword named "Excalibur" in and out of the stone at Candlemas and Easter, he is crowned.

Six Kings from the North, Lot, Uriens, Nentres and others, contest Arthur and refuse to bow to his throne. Merlin acts as defender and promoter of Arthur, as well as controller of situations by providing counsel. A battle between Arthur and his followers and the six Northern kings ensues where Arthur proves his might and prowess by killing many men with Excalibur.

Merlin advises Arthur to join with King Ban and King Bors to fight the six kings who will come back to fight again. Arthur pledges to help Ban and Bors fight Claudas if they will align themselves with him. The men of Ban and Bors prove themselves worthy through jousts and tournaments with Arthur's knights.

Arthur, Ban and Bors gathered their armies and secretly rallied together, at Merlin's advice, in the forest of Bedegraine. The six kings who fled after Arthur's coronation gather additional forces in five more Northern kings, bringing a force of fifty thousand men against Arthur at Bedegraine.

Arthur's forces are told by Merlin when and where the eleven kings would strike, and are able to attack them by surprise at night when they were sleeping. Merlin provides counsel and battle strategy for Arthur, Ban, and Bors, and mighty (and gory) tales of battle ensue. Arthur proves himself in battle, doing "so marvelously in arms that all men had wonder." The feats of individual knights are recounted.

Much explanation is given of the stages of battles and the valiant fights of Arthur's army. Many men die, but the 11 kings are still alive, and King Lot unites them all against Arthur by having them swear loyalty to each other.

Merlin comes in, rebuking Arthur for not stopping the battle, claiming that out of 60,000 men Arthur has only left 15,000 alive. He counsels them to withdraw because the 11 kings will not be overthrown at this time, but predicts three years of peace. Arthur rewards his knights, Ban and Bors. King Arthur sees Lionors, an earl's daughter, when she comes to pay homage, and he impregnates her with a child named Borre, who will become a knight of the Round Table. King Rience makes war on Arthur's friend, Leodegrance, and so he, Ban and Bors depart for war in Northern Wales.

Arthur's army fights King Rience, who flees after ten thousand are killed. Shortly after, Arthur sees the King of Cameliard's daughter, Guenever. Ban, Bors and Arthur part, leaving Ban and Bors to protect the north. Merlin prophesies the demise of the eleven kings (at the hands of Balin and Balan) who have gone back to their kingdoms to fight other battles against invaders.

Arthur sees Margawse (Lot's wife who was sent to spy on Arthur.) He slept with her, not knowing that she was his half-sister, (Igraine and Tintagel's daughter). This union begets Mordred, Arthur's child. Arthur then dreams of griffins and serpents fighting him, but after a long battle, he slays these creatures. To forget the dream, Arthur goes on a hunt and chases a huge hart (a large male deer) until his horse dies. While he waits for a new horse to be brought to him, a strange beast comes followed by a knight named Pellinore. The knight's horse had been killed by the beast, so Arthur gives him the horse that had been brought, and Pellinore continues to follow the questing beast. Arthur offers to take up the quest for Pellinore, but Pellinore believes that the beast can only be captured by him or his kin.

Merlin comes to Arthur in the guise of a 14-year-old boy and an 80-year-old man and predicts the destruction of the kingdom because Arthur "laid" with his own sister. Merlin also predicts his own "shameful" death by being "put into the earth quickly." To find out if Merlin is right about Margawse, Arthur sends for his mother, Igraine, who testifies that she did not know Arthur was the son of the king since Uther had been disguised when he came to her.

Griflet, a squire, enters the court and asks Arthur for a knighthood so that he could fight the knight who had killed his master, but when he meets him, the knight severely wounds Griflet and takes him back to court, where Griflet recovers.

Twelve ambassadors from Rome come asking Arthur for money and allegiance, which he declines to give. Arthur finds a knight in the woods who will not let anyone pass unless they joust, and Arthur fights this man, Pellinore. Pellinore breaks Excalibur in half and intends to kill Arthur. Merlin appears and puts a spell on Pellinore which causes him to sleep. When Pellinore wakes up, he will become one of Arthur's followers, and will eventually reveal to Arthur the name of his own son by Margawse who will destroy the kingdom.

Merlin tells Arthur that another sword is held above the water by a white-clothed arm for him. The Lady of the Lake says that Arthur can have her sword if he will give her a promise when she asks it. Merlin tells Arthur that the scabbard of the sword he just acquired is more important than the blade because as long as he has that scabbard, he will never lose any blood.

Merlin tells Arthur that a child born on May Day will be his destruction, so Arthur sends for all the children born on that day and, based on Merlin's instructions, sends the children away on a ship. Mordred, the child of Arthur and his half-sister, Margawse, was put out to sea with the other children, but the ship wrecked and Mordred survived, saved by a good man who found him and raised him until he was fourteen.

Book 1 Analysis

The idea of "righteousness" and valor being proven through "tests" is introduced in the first book and it continues throughout the entire twenty-one books of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. In the early segments of the book, as in this section, feats are performed that prove the person who is doing the action is entitled to a specific power or position. In this book, Arthur is the only one capable of pulling Excalibur out of the stone, illustrating that he is the rightful king of England. It is interesting to note that this test, and others like it that appear throughout the book, are often associated with the magic of Merlin and/or Nimue (The Lady of the Lake). The continual jousts, tournaments, fights, and battles throughout the book also reflect the idea that the "righteous" will be victorious through physical prowess.

Another recurrent theme that begins in Book 1 is the use of dreams as predictors of the future**.** The King with a Hundred Knights (one of the 11 Northern Armies) sees his own defeat in the upcoming battle with Arthur's forces. Arthur, too, has a dream in Chapter XIX, in which he fights great battles with serpents and griffins, but defeats them all, indicative of his future victory over the Northern Armies.

Themes of loyalty and relationships pervade the book, as Arthur forms an alliance with Ban and Bors against the Northern kings, and knights prove their loyalty to their kings

by fighting to the death for them. Ban, Bors and their descendents are integral members of the Round Table later. Loyalty is often determined by blood ties.

Merlin's power as a "mover and a shaker" is seen throughout this first book. In an interesting mix of magic and politics, he makes sudden appearances where he is needed and is known throughout England as the man who should be consulted. He consistently has information about the enemy, and he counsels Uther, The Archbishop of Canterbury and Arthur, telling them what strategies to use.

The characters in this book are not all good or all bad; in fact, many of them are extremely complex. Arthur, for all his seemingly noble traits, also demonstrates enormous cruelty to the innocent citizens of his kingdom. When it is predicted that a child born on May Day will be the destroyer of his kingdom, Arthur collects any such children and sends them all to their deaths out of fear.

Many Biblical parallels exist throughout the epic. It's interesting that many of the kings of the day did not want to give allegiance to the boy-king Arthur because his noble blood was not evident, and he was seen as a lowly born child with no credentials, similar to the story of the birth of Jesus Christ. Another Biblical parallel exists with the similarity of Arthur's disposal of the May-Day children because of the threat they posed to his kingdom and the story of the Egyptian Pharaoh drowning all the first-born children who were a predicted threat.

A subtle irony is apparent in the founding of Arthur's reign and the ultimate demise of Camelot, his kingdom. It's important to note that while Uther and Arthur are defined as the rightful kings of the kingdom, and while Arthur is commonly known for the nobility of his Round Table, the entire kingdom was established on deceit and deception. Uther (in disguise) takes Igraine without her knowledge or consent after killing her husband. Igraine's children by her first marriage are unknown to Arthur, and he unwittingly sleeps with his half-sister, Margawse. It's the child of this illicit union that will bring about the destruction of Camelot, Arthur and the Round Table, ultimately correcting the wrong that was committed by Uther and providing "justice for all" - even King Arthur.

Book 2

Book 2 Summary

Book 2 recounts the tragic story of Balin le Savage and his brother, Balan.

Arthur has established his stronghold and castle called Camelot. A messenger arrives from the Lady Lile of Avelion, bringing a noble sword that could only be removed from its scabbard by a knight, "a passing good an of his hands and of his deeds, and without villainy or treachery, and without treason." None of Arthur's knights, nor Arthur himself, can pull the sword from its sheath, until a poor knight named Balin le Savage that had been in Arthur's prison for killing a knight pulls it out.

The bearer of the sword predicts that Balin will "slay wit the sword the best friend that ye have, and the an that ye most love in the world, and the sword will be your destruction." Arthur apologizes to Balin for his imprisonment and promises to make it up to him.

The Lady of the Lake, seeking the favor that Arthur owed her for the sword she had given him, demands the head of the knight who had won the sword, or the head of the lady who had brought the sword to Court. The Lady of the Lake claims that Balin had killed her brother and that the woman caused her father's death. Arthur declines. As Balin prepares to leave court, he sees the Lady of the Lake, and since she had killed Balin's mother, Balin cuts her head off. Arthur is furious because he had owed a promise to the Lady and she came to his court under his protection. Balin protests and explains that the lady was evil and false, but Arthur doesn't listen and sends Balin away. Balin leaves to fight King Rience, Arthur's enemy, in order to win back Arthur's favor.

Merlin backs Balin's claim about the evil nature of the Lady of the Lake, explaining that the Lady of the Lake's brother fought her paramour and killed him. The Lady of the Lake went to the Lady Lile of Avelion and came up with the sword scheme to avenge herself on her own brother. Merlin predicts the goodness of Balin.

Lanceor, a knight of the Round Table, is jealous of Balin for winning the sword. He goes after Balin, and in defense, Balin kills him. Lanceor's lover comes on the scene and is so grief-stricken that she commits suicide, for which Balin blames himself. Shortly after, Balin meets his brother, Balan, who vows to go with him to fight King Rience. King Mark of Cornwall finds the scene of Lanceor and his lover's death and erects a tomb.

Merlin makes a prophecy about a meeting between the best knights of the world, Lancelot and Tristram, and he also says that because of the death of Lanceor's lover, "three kingdoms shall be in great poverty, misery, and wretchedness for twelve years." Merlin disguises himself, rides with Balin and Balan and gives them advice of how to defeat King Rience.

Balin and Balan defeat King Rience and 40 of his knights and send Rience to Arthur. Merlin predicts Balan's death and the coming of Rience's brother, King Nero, to fight

Arthur, whose feats of battle are legendary. Balin and Balan also are great warriors. Arthur's forces defeat Nero, and then King Lot, whose wife is Margawse, Arthur's half-sister and mother of Mordred, comes to the aid of Nero. A terrible battle ensues. King Lot is killed by Pellinore, who is killed by Gawaine, and twelve of Lot's kings died.

Merlin reminds Arthur that the scabbard of his sword keeps him from losing blood. Arthur gives the scabbard to his sister, Morgan le Fay, for safekeeping, but she wants her lover to rule the kingdom. She wants Arthur dead, so she makes a forgery of the scabbard so that when Arthur calls for it, it won't offer him any protection.

Balin has many "adventures," including fighting an invisible knight named Garlon, and then Garlon's brother, King Pellam. During the fight, Balin's sword breaks, but he runs through Pellam's castle to a kind of treasure room where he grabs a spear. The walls of the castle collapse, and he is trapped for three days until Balin was rescued by Merlin.

The Quest for the Holy Grail is mentioned for the first time; King Pellam is related to Joseph of Arimathea, who supposedly lay in the bed of the treasure room.

Balin's adventures also include aiding a knight in finding his lost love, but when she is found, she is discovered to be unfaithful in the arms of another knight. Balin tries, but is unsuccessful in preventing the distraught knight from committing suicide. Balin goes to a castle which requires each knight to joust before he can continue on. A knight of that castle says that Balin needs a new shield and so takes away his old one that identified him.

The required joust takes place with Balin fighting a knight clothed in red. After each knight severely wounds the other, they take off their helmets and discover they have each just killed their own brother. Balin and Balan are buried in a tomb by Merlin, who has taken Balin's sword and said, "No one should handle the sword except Launcelot or Galahad his son." Merlin makes another dire prediction and says that Launcelot shall kill the man he loves best with the sword, Sir Gawaine." Balin's sword is placed in a marble stone that floats in the water.

Book 2 Analysis

Merlin continues to be all-powerful and all knowing, making predictions which come true. His prophecies about Balin are fulfilled when he kills his brother, Balan. Again, Merlin is portrayed as a mixture of magician/wizard/fortune-teller making predictions about the use of the sword by Launcelot, which come true later in the book.

The theme of knights proving themselves through adventure and physical prowess is central to the book. Those who win the jousts and battles are those who are "righteous" and proven so by God's providing them victory in battle

Women, in many instances throughout the book, are treacherous, dishonest, and evil. Note that Lady of the Lake and Lady Lile of Avelion are both vengeful and deceptive. Morgan le Fay wants Arthur dead and she is plotting to kill him through the manufacture

of a false scabbard. This theme continues throughout the work as women are categorized into two basic groups: evil, manipulative sorceresses who only want their own needs met, or sweet, devout women who often die young out of grief or of having completed their purpose on earth.

The realism of battle is portrayed. While jousting, warfare, battles and competition during tournaments are often romanticized in modern day literature, and while they are seen as an honorable pursuit in *Le Morte D'Arthur*, the book also illustrates that death is a frequent result of such combat. The graphic details of the fighting are often described, including details of the knight's wounds, the horse's injuries and how much bleeding and fatigue occurred. The time it takes a knight to recover is often recounted.

Book 3

Book 3 Summary

Arthur takes Guenever as wife, and Guenever's father presents Arthur with the gift of the Round Table which had been King Uther's, along with a hundred knights. Merlin, however, warns Arthur that Guenever is not wholesome enough to be his wife and that Launcelot would love her, but Arthur marries her anyway. Merlin helps Arthur find knights, and writes the knights' names in gold letters above each seat.

Gawaine, Arthur's nephew, son of his sister Margawse and King Lot, arrives at court and he is made a knight. Tor, the son of a poor farmer with thirteen children, is sent to court by his father because he is not like the other children and always wants to do the fighting of a knight. It is discovered when the farmer's wife is brought to court that Tor is actually King Pellinore's son. On the day that Arthur and Guenever are married, Tor is made a knight after Gawaine.

Gawaine and his brother, Gaheris, plot to kill Pellinore because he had killed Lot, their father. During the feast, a hart (deer) comes through the hall, followed by a dog who was snatched by a knight on horseback, followed by a lady on a horse who was dragged away by another knight who came tearing through. These are tests that Merlin provides for the three men who are made knight that day.

Gawaine is sent to catch the deer. Gaheris, his brother, goes with him as squire. In the forest, Gawaine finds two knights, Sorlouse and Brian of the Forest, who agree to submit to his will and go back to Arthur's court. Gawaine continues and kills Allardin of the Isle, who will not let Gawaine cross the river to catch the deer unless they joust. Gawaine continues after the hart and ends up in a castle doing battle with a knight who has killed Gawaine's hounds. A lady pleads for her knight, but Gawaine has no mercy, and in his haste to kill the knight, cuts off the lady's head. The knight is sent back to Arthur's court to report on Gawaine's doings. Four knights come upon Gawaine and Gaheris because they have shamed the knighthood and killed a lady. When one of the four ladies intervenes for them and explains that Gawaine is Arthur's nephew, the other four knights give him the head of the hart because that is his quest. When Gawaine returns to court, Arthur and Guenever rebuke him for the lady's death. They charge him to always be courteous and never to refuse anyone who asks for mercy.

Tor is sent on his adventure, searching for the knight who ran away with the dog. He comes across a dwarf, who announces a knight who fights with Tor until Tor forces the knight to plead for mercy. Tor commands him to go to King Arthur's court, and then another knight attacks him. Tor bests him, too, and he is sent back to Arthur. The dwarf leads Tor to the knight with the white dog. Tor finds the dog in a pavilion sleeping with a woman. He snatches it away and the lady complains and sends her own knight after Tor.

Tor and the dwarf find a hermitage, where they are fed before a knight attacks. They fight, but the other knight will not relinquish the dog. The lady who claims the dog rides up to Tor and asks for a gift - the head of the knight Abellus, with whom he's been fighting. Abellus killed her brother and he showed no mercy when she pleaded for him. Because Tor has made a promise, and because of the knightly code of honor which means promises must be honored, Tor cuts off the head of Abellus. The lady and her husband befriend Tor, and he returns to Camelot with the dog, achieving his mission honorably. He is rewarded by Arthur with the earldom of lands.

The third test was given to Pellinore, who had to ride after the lady and the knight that led her away. Pellinore finds a lady with a wounded knight in her arms, but he does not stop to help her because he is in such a hurry to follow his quest. The knight dies, and the lady is so sad that she kills herself with his sword. Pellinore is directed by a poor man where the lady is being fought over by two knights. He does battle with a man named Hontzlake, who kills Pellinore's horse. Pellinore kills the man and then turns to the second knight, who declines to fight with Pellinore because of his strength. The knight gives Pellinore a new horse, and identifies himself as Meliot, cousin to Lady of the Lake, Nimue. Pellinore sends Meliot and his brother, Brian of the Isles, to Camelot.

Pellinore returns to Camelot, but finds the body of the woman who had committed suicide when the injured knight died - all because Pellinore would not help them. He picks up the body and he is grieved by it. When he presents it at Court, Merlin informs him that he has killed his own daughter. Arthur declares that Pellinore's most trusted friend will leave him to be killed as penance for his lack of mercy to the woman who was his daughter.

Arthur rewards all knights and swears them into the fellowship of the Round Table.

Book 3 Analysis

The power of Merlin - and the combination of magician and politician - is continued in Book 3 as he is credited with writing "letters of gold" which give explanations and predictions. The chairs at the Round Table have been labeled, and it is Merlin who knows who should sit in each seat.

Merlin and Arthur's vision is to bring all men together from various parts of the world to fill the Round Table with strong, courageous men who fight to defend the kingdom and its noble principles. Throughout the book, it becomes obvious that the Round Table is not prejudiced against knights from other countries or of other races, as long as they pledge loyalty to King Arthur. Taken at face value instead of romanticized, the founding of The Round Table was also a political move to strengthen power and create allies.

Complex family ties and the need to avenge deaths becomes a theme early in the book as Gawaine and Gaheris plot to avenge their father's (King Lot's) death. This need to avenge a death is integral to the downfall of Arthur's Camelot and becomes an interwoven part of the relationships between the Knights of the Round Table.

Gawaine's lack of mercy is a foreshadowing of Gawaine's actions later in the book. His action here, where he refuses to have mercy and in his haste to bestow justice accidentally beheads a lady, is a precursor to his lack of mercy in the end of the book. If he had truly learned the lesson of mercy, then the outcome of Camelot might have been drastically different. However, he is unable to forgive the tragic circumstances that occur and in so doing, he helps to bring about the ultimate destruction.

The development of the knight's code is seen in the quests of the three knights: Never be cruel, always show mercy when asked, help all damosels in distress. Promises and pledges play an important role in the knightly code and they must be kept. (Promises made for a future favor can be especially troublesome.)

Book 4

Book 4 Summary

Merlin, after helping Arthur to start the Knights of the Round Table, falls in love with the Lady of the Lake, Nimue. He is "assotted" with her, so bewitched by love for her that he tells Arthur that even with all of his (Merlin's) crafts, he will be "put into the earth quick." Merlin reminds Arthur of the importance of the sword and scabbard, and then he follows the Lady of the Lake, never to be heard from again. Merlin and Nimue go to King Ban's land and sees Elaine with the young Launcelot, who is named Galahad Launcelot. Merlin makes one prediction that Launcelot will love to be a "man of worship," (honor.) Merlin desires Nimue, and "always lay about the lady to have her maidenhood, and she was ever passing weary of him." Nimue makes Merlin swear that he will never work his magic on her, and then when she grows tired of him, she puts a spell on him as he's showing her a rock, and places him under that stone.

Five kings come to Arthur's land, burning and destroying everything. Guenever goes with Arthur and his forces to the battlefield, and Arthur is unarmed and at rest with the Queen in his Pavillion when the five kings attack. Arthur goes with Guenever, Sir Kay, Sir Griflet and Sir Gawaine; they slay all five kings, and Arthur's men defeat the forces of the five kings, a supposed 30,000 of the enemy army. Only 200 of Arthur's forces and eight knights are killed.

King Pellinore and his army have come to meet Arthur, and upon returning to Camelot, Arthur and Pellinore decide to select eight new knights, choosing 4 older knights and 4 younger ones to take their place. Gawaine, Kay and Griflet are selected as three of the four young knights. Pellinore asks for his son Tor to be the fourth, and Arthur agrees, much to the dismay of King Bagdemagus who leaves court. Bagdemagus and his squire go into the woods where they find a cross written in letters that says he shall never return to court until he has won a knight's body of the Round Table, body for body.

King Arthur, Uriens and Accolon chase a hart and come upon a ship in the water. Upon investigation, they found it all beautifully decorated inside with silk. Hundreds of torches light the way in the dark and twelve maidens appear. Each man is led to a separate bedroom, and in the morning, King Uriens finds himself at home in bed with his wife, and Arthur wakes up in a prison where knights tell him stories about being held captive by Sir Damas. Each knight attests to being imprisoned by Damas because they refused to fight Damas' brother, Ontzlake. Arthur agrees to fight Ontzlake for the freedom of the 20 knights.

Accolon wakes up in Gaul, (modern-day France and Belgium), in a deep well. Accolon recognizes that the 12 women on the ship were evil sorceresses. He is approached by a dwarf bearing a message from Queen Morgan le Fay that Accolon will do great battle the next day, and so Morgan has sent him King Arthur's sword Excalibur and its

scabbard to do battle with. Accolon is lodged with Sir Ontzlake who has been injured in both thighs, and Accolon agrees to fight for Ontzlake.

As Arthur is ready to go into battle, Morgan le Fay sends him a sword and scabbard which look like Excalibur, but which are forgeries she has made. The Lady of the Lake comes to the battle because she is loyal to Arthur and is aware of the treacheries of Morgan le Fay. Arthur almost dies because his sword and scabbard are not genuine and cannot stand up to Accolon's use of Excalibur. The Lady of the Lake "by enchantment," causes the sword to fall from Accolon, and Arthur reaches for it. Arthur throws the scabbard away from Accolon. After much fighting Accolon identifies himself to Arthur who demands how he got the sword. Accolon confesses that Morgan le Fay gave it to him because she hates Arthur for his honor and for the power that he has gotten - and he is of the same blood as she, having shared the same mother. Accolon also confesses that he has been Morgan le Fay's lover. Her plan was that if she could kill Arthur, she could also kill her husband, King Uriens, and then put Accolon into power. Accolon swears, however, that he did not know he was fighting King Arthur. King Arthur agrees to have mercy on Accolon who was under the spell of Morgan le Fay, but he pledges his vengeance on her for her betrayal, since he has "honored and worshipped her more than all my kin, and more have I trusted her than mine own wife and all my kin after."

Arthur grants mercy to Accolon, and he dispenses fair justice to Damas by making him subservient to Ontzlake and able to ride only a donkey. He releases all 20 knights and restores their armor, and tells Damas that if he ever hears another complaint about him, Arthur will kill him. Arthur finds doctors to treat Accolon's wounds, but Accolon dies.

Queen Morgan le Fay thinks that Arthur will be killed in the battle since he didn't have Excalibur or the scabbard which kept him from shedding blood. Morgan tries to kill Uriens, her husband, but Uriens's lady-in-waiting gets Uwaine, Uriens's son, to stop his mother from killing her father as he slept. Uriens forgives his mother as long as she promises that she will never do such an act again.

Morgan le Fay asks Guenever for permission to travel through her country, and Guenever agrees until the king comes home. Morgan le Fay finds the abbey where Arthur had been brought to recover of his wounds, and while he's sleeping, she steals the scabbard. Ontzlake and Arthur go after Morgan, but she turns herself into a marble stone in the river after she threw the scabbard into the water.

Morgan and her part are returned back to human form when they come across one knight getting ready to drown the other, whose name is Manassen, for sleeping with his wife. Manassen is Accolon's cousin, and Queen Morgan le Fay demands that Manassen is released for the love of Accolon. Manassen immediately kills the other knight, and Morgan sends him to Arthur with a taunt telling him that she is not afraid of him as long as she can turn herself and anyone with her into stone.

Morgan sends the king a beautiful cloak, set with precious stones, as an apology. The Lady of the Lake, who is at court with the King, warns him not to put the garment on. He

asks the woman who brought it to him to put it on. She declines until he orders her to do it, and then she is burned to death. Because of Morgan, Uwaine is not trusted by Arthur, and so he leaves court with Gawaine, who is his cousin.

Gawaine and Uwaine have their own adventures, the first against Marhaus, the son of the king of Ireland. Twelve damsels tell the knights that Marhaus despises women. Uwaine and Gawaine joust with him until both are wounded. Marhaus is mighty in battle, and after wounding both Gawaine and Uwaine offers a peace, and upon acceptance, Marhaus tells the two knights that the women who spread such rumors about him are sorceresses. After recuperating and lodging with Marhaus, the three knights go off to find adventures, and meet three women, one young, one old, and one middle-aged, who lead each man to his own pursuit. They agree to meet back there in a year.

Gawaine goes first, taking the youngest woman. They find one knight fighting ten and then he agrees to be bound and led away, until the woman urges Gawaine to help him. Gawaine explains that the man needs or wants no help, and at that moment, a dwarf and a knight appear arguing over a lady. They come to Gawaine, who adjudicates the situation by giving the lady the choice, who goes with the dwarf. The knight who lost to the dwarf tells Gawaine's lady the story of the knight they saw defeating ten others. His name is Pelleas, and to win his love, a lady named Ettard, he jousted with 60 knights but even after he had proven himself and done battle with others, she demeans and insults him.

He says he will never leave the country until she loves him, he lodges at a nearby priory, and every week, she sends forth knights to fight him. He allows himself to be taken prisoner - after he's defeated each one - just so he can have sight of the lady. Gawaine pledges to help Pelleas.

Gawaine goes to the lady Ettard, tells her he has slain Pelleas and tells her that he loves a woman who doesn't love him back, and Ettard pledges to help Gawaine and do anything she can. Gawaine tells her that he loves her, and she fulfills her pledge to give him anything he desires of her, and she leads him into a pavilion where they stay in bed two days.

Pelleas finds them and wants to kill them, but because he cannot kill them when they're sleeping, he simply leaves his sword on their throats. Lady Ettard begins to see Pelleas in a more positive light, but he has gone to bed and pledged that he won't get up until he dies because he is so heartbroken. Gawaine leaves and the Lady of the Lake comes in, takes pity on Pelleas and puts a spell over him to make him sleep. Ettard sees him sleeping and falls in love with him, but when he wakes up, he detests her. The Lady of the Lake has performed a role reversal with Pelleas and Ettard, and Pelleas is no longer interested. Pelleas and the Lady of the Lake, Nimue, however, fall in love and "loved together during their life days."

Marhaus' adventure followed the damosel of thirty years of age. He lodges at a castle of a man who doesn't like Arthur because Gawaine killed his seven sons. They joust the next day, and Marhaus is victorious, so he sends the Duke and his remaining sons to

Arthur at Whitsentide. Afterward, Marhaus goes to a tournament where he downs 40 knights and wins a gold circlet. He continues to a castle where he fights a giant, cuts off his arm, kills him, gets riches, releases all prisoners, and on return, meets some of Arthur's knights and downs four of those with one spear.

Uwaine's adventure followed the damosel of 60 years. He went to a tournament where he kills 30 and wins a white horse. There he fights two brothers of the Red Castle for the Lady of the Rock because they had stolen her lands from her. Uwaine wins by killing Sir Edward, and sending Sir Hue back to Arthur. The Lady is restored to her lands, and all three knights return to King Arthur's court where Sir Pelleas and Sir Marhaus are made knights.

Book 4 Analysis

The fickleness and unkindness of women, who are often seen as sorceresses and enchantresses, is evidenced in Nimue's off-handed and murderous treatment of Merlin. After she makes him swear he will never use his power against her, he is stripped of his magic and placed for all eternity under a rock. Morgan Le Fay, also, is a traitorous adulteress with evil intents. It is perhaps an interesting comment of the power of women over men that Merlin, the most influential man in Arthur's world, can lose his mind, his magic, his power, his life, all because of a young beautiful woman. Women continue to be depicted as uncaring, unfeeling, selfish creatures, as in the Lady Ettard who insults and ridicules the man who fought to win her.

An irony is that the very code of justice that the knights are supposed to follow can create problems for the future. Uwaine, following the standards of the Round Table, grants forgiveness to his mother, Morgan le Fay, for attempting to murder King Uriens. This forgiveness then allows Morgan to plot to overthrow Arthur for the rest of her life.

A common theme throughout is that knights, for all their noble pledges, still succumb easily to the pleasure of the flesh. Gawaine is not honorable in taking for himself the Lady Ettard when he had pledged to gain her for Pelleas. The issue of knights who are "chaste" or "virgin" becomes important to the middle section of the book.

A power shift is exemplified as the Lady of the Lake takes Merlin's role as watcher and protector of Arthur and his knights, but this marks the last of her major influence.

Book 5

Book 5 Summary

Ambassadors from Rome appear in Camelot requiring Arthur to pay tribute to Rome. Arthur disputes their claim because, by right, they are descendants of Rome and have the right to claim the title of the empire. Arthur's knights counsel him never to bow to Rome, and they decide to take his Army to Rome to claim his place. The two sides plan to go to war, with Rome recruiting 16 kings, 50 giants and Lucius, the Emperor, to fight against Arthur.

On the way to Rome on board a ship, Arthur dreams of a beautiful dragon battling and killing a disgusting wild boar and sends for a dream interpreter who declares that the dragon is Arthur and the boar is Rome.

They land in Flanders to gather more forces and Arthur confronts a child-eating giant and widow-killer. They do battle, and Arthur defeats the giant and distributes his treasure, keeping only the kirtle and the club. He builds a church to commemorate the site. Lucius, the Emperor of Rome continues to destroy and advance on Arthur's lands.

Gawaine, Bors, Lionel, and Bedivere are sent as emissaries to Lucius, who tells them that they must leave the land or do battle, and after a Roman knight insults them, battle begins when Gawaine strikes down the offending knight. Arthur's forces defeat Lucius. Gawaine and Idrus were especially valiant. Launcelot takes the prisoners to Paris.

Romans try to take the prisoners back by laying an ambush with 60,000 men. Launcelot fights mightily with only 10,000 men because he feels his honor is at stake, even though Arthur tells him that it's "folly for knights to abide when they are overmatched."

The battle continues on all fronts, and Arthur fights nobly defending his people, and eventually kills Lucius, the Emperor of Rome. In total, they slay more than 100,000 of Rome's men, but after they have won, Arthur commands that all injured enemies are spared no expense or medicines to treat their wounds. The dead bodies of the Emperor and Senator are wrapped nobly and laid in chests of lead with their armor so they won't chafe. Arthur's tribute to Rome is to send the dead bodies back to Rome, with the phrase that more "tribute" could be sent if necessary. Rome stops all demands of "truage" from Arthur.

Arthur sends knights to get food, and Gawaine goes off on an adventure, meeting a Tuscan knight who challenges him. His name is Priamus. They wound each other and then agree to save each other: Gawaine will teach Priamus Christianity and Priamus will heal Gaawain's wounds.

Priamus warns of an impending battle against the Saracens, and he, along with Gawaine, Sir Florence, and Sir Floridas with 100 knights, fight a herd of beasts and seven hundred Saracens. The knights defeat the Saracens and take their treasure back

to King Arthur. Upon hearing of the defeat of Rome and the defeat of the Saracens, cities and towns all over France and Italy pay tribute and offer money and gifts to Arthur, who promises his knights will not rob, rape, or plunder on pain of death. The lords declare to Arthur, "your war is finished and your conquest delivered." Arthur returns to England.

Book 5 Analysis

The idea that righteousness is rewarded by victory through physical contest continues in the triumph of Arthur and his knights against the Romans and the Saracens.

Arthur's reputation grows. Previously called "the flower of chivalry," Arthur's reputation is enhanced by his fair and honorable treatment of enemies and the humane care of the dead and injured. Arthur's power as a leader comes through his own physical prowess and abilities and the fact that he fights with his knights instead of demanding that they fight for him. He never asks them to do what he himself would not do.

The knight's code expands. Religious "conversion" and "teaching" about Christianity begin to be seen as one of the knight's duties and they become a precursor to the Search for the Holy Grail that occurs in the middle section of the book.

Arthur's power has a subtle irony: The wealth of Arthur's kingdom is acquired from warfare and tribute, often given out of fear of the damage his army might do.

Book 6

Book 6 Summary

Everyone rejoices when the forces return to Camelot. After rest and recuperation, Launcelot and Lionel go for an adventure. While Launcelot sleeps, Lionel sees one knight defeat and tie up three other knights. When Lionel goes to fight him, he too is defeated, tied up and taken as prisoner.

Sir Ector, Launcelot's brother, follows Launcelot and Lionel out of the court, finding Lionel's sword where he was captured. The same evil knight, Turquine, captures Ector, but recognizes that Ector has inflicted more pain than any others have in 12 years. Turquine doesn't kill him, but puts him in his prison with lots of other knights who daily pray that Launcelot will come and save them since he is the only one to match Turquine's skills.

In the meantime, four queens find Launcelot sleeping. One of them, Morgan le Fay, puts a spell on Launcelot to make him sleep so that the women can bring him to the castle Chariot. The four queens declare that Launcelot must take one of them as a lover, or else he will die in prison. Morgan le Fay tells Launcelot that she knows of his love for Guenever. Launcelot will not take one of the four queens as lover, yet proclaims the fidelity of Guenever to Arthur.

The young maid who brings Launcelot his food is the daughter of King Bagdemagus, and she asks for Launcelot to do battle for Bagdemagus, who lost one of the Round Table seats to Sir Tor. She frees him, and Launcelot finds a pavilion where he goes to rest. When he is in bed, a knight comes in and begins to kiss Launcelot, who he thought would be his lady. Launcelot and the knight, named Belleus, fight, and Belleus is wounded by Launcelot. In return, Launcelot promises to recommend Belleus for knighthood at the next feast.

Launcelot makes his rendezvous with Bagdemagus and his daughter. He agrees to go to a tournament with Bagdemagus and fight on his side. Bagdemagus and his party win the prize at the tournament. Launcelot is directed by Bagdemagus' daughter to Turquine's castle.

Launcelot goes to Turquine. They fight and almost come to a truce and declare friendship, until Turquine, not knowing his foe's identity, says that he hates Launcelot. (Launcelot had slain Sir Carados, Turquine's brother.) Launcelot declares his identity, the battle begins anew and Launcelot eventually kills Turquine before going off to help a damosel who declares that a knight nearby is robbing or raping women. Turquine's sixty-four prisoners are released.

The damosel declares that the rapist/robber knight is Peris de Forest Savage. She asks Launcelot if he'd be interested in marrying her, and comment that "it is noised that ye

love Queen Guenever, an that she hath ordained by enchantment that ye shall never love none other but her, nor none other damosel nor lady shall rejoice you..."

Launcelot declines her offer, and as they cross a bridge, a man tells them that they cannot go over until he gives them permission. Launcelot fights and kills him and learn that this man was the chief porter of the castle. At the castle, Launcelot finds two giants, each with two clubs in their hands. Launcelot kills them, and sixty ladies are delivered from the castle Tintagel, where they have been made to work as servants.

Launcelot then happens to see three knights fighting one, and he determines to help the one knight, who is Sir Kay. Within three strokes, Launcelot knocked the other three knights to the ground. They yield to Launcelot, who commands them to go to Camelot and yield themselves to Guenever, saying that Sir Kay has sent them.

Launcelot asks Sir Kay to switch armor and shield with him for two reasons: If Sir Kay is wearing Launcelot's armor, no one will confront him because of Launcelot's reputation, and secondly, because Launcelot will have an advantage if adversaries can't tell who he is. Launcelot continues to find knights to do battle, and he always wins, sending knights back to Camelot and asking them to submit to Guenever and say that Sir Kay sent them. One day, Launcelot follows a brachet who leads him to a castle where there's a dead knight named Sir Gilbert the Bastard. His wife seeks the man who killed him.

Launcelot goes into the wood seeking the culprit when he meets another lady who requires help for her wounded brother. An enchantress told the sister that her brother would never be healed until she could find a knight to go into the Chapel Perilous and retrieve a piece of cloth and a sword that lays there. When asked, the sister declares her brother is Sir Meliot, a knight of the Round Table, and Launcelot goes on this quest for him. He finds the cloth and the sword, but on leaving, he is confronted with a damosel who says he will die if he takes that sword and Queen Guenever will never see him again. Then she offers to give him that sword for a kiss, which Launcelot declines. She says that since she can't have him alive, she'd just as soon have him dead. Launcelot leaves anyway, and Hellewas the Sorceress, the Lady of Castle Nigramous, dies of sorrow within two weeks. Launcelot then returns to heal Sir Meliot.

Launcelot also helps a lady retrieve her hawk by climbing, unarmed, into a tree. Her husband, Sir Phelot, appears and attacks him. Launcelot fights back with a big branch, knocks him down and uses his own sword to slay him. Launcelot's next adventure is to fight a knight who is chasing his wife with the intent of killing her. Launcelot rides alongside the woman to protect her, but when the husband, named Pedivere, distracts Launcelot, the husband cuts off his wife's head. Lancelot goes to kill him, but he cries for mercy. Launcelot commands him to take the head of his wife back to Camelot and report to Guenever. When he does, Guenever sends him to the Pope with the lady on horseback. From that point on, Pedivere was a holy man and a hermit.

Launcelot finally returns back to Camelot, where Arthur grants his request and makes Belleus a knight.

Book 6 Analysis

The need to prove strength by physical prowess continues. Even in peaceful times, knights search out "adventures," always looking for a way to prove themselves.

Launcelot's adventures provide the basis for important alliances at the end of the book. Not only do Launcelot's adventures prove that he is worthy and enhance his reputation throughout the land, they also are the precursor to the tragic end of the book, illustrating how he has helped so many and will cause the knights to have to choose between him and King Arthur.

The love relationship between Launcelot and Guenever begins to be mentioned. Rumors of Launcelot and Guenever's love are circulated throughout the country as part of common knowledge. While it's important to note that this love affair, is important to the ultimate demise of the kingdom, it is not the only factor. Vengeance, lack of mercy, political alliances and power struggles are also essential elements in the downfall of Camelot.

Growing religious emphasis is noticed in this book, particularly in showing Launcelot's faith and his devotion to God by noting how Launcelot always "betaught them [his enemies] to God." Launcelot's religious devotion is an essential element in the sections of the book that focus on the search for the Grail.

Book 7

Book 7 Summary

Arthur's Round Table has met the full quota of 150 knights at the Feast of Pentecost. While they are at dinner, a young man comes and asks Arthur for three gifts; one that day and other two demanded a year later at the next high feast.

Arthur agrees. The first demand of the young man is just that he would be given food and drink for the next year. However, he will not tell them his name. Sir Kay, acting as the steward of Camelot, is given control of the situation telling him that he should give the man the best, but Sir Kay doesn't like him because he doesn't have armor or horse and hasn't asked for any. Sir Kay makes fun of him, and puts him in the kitchen for a year, naming him Beaumains, or "Fair Hands."

Gawaine and Launcelot are angry with Kay and invite Beaumains to their chambers for food, but Beaumains refuses, and for a year acted as a kitchen boy with perfect demeanor, always polite and meek. A lady comes to court asking for a knight to go to battle with a tyrant called the Red Knight of the Red Launds. Beaumains has been in court a year, and asks his second favor of Arthur, to be made a knight by Launcelot du Lake who he asks to follow him and make him a knight when it's needed. Beaumains also asks Arthur to be granted permission to ride after the woman on this adventure, and a dwarf arrives with a horse and supplies for his journey. The woman says that she does not want a kitchen page, but Beaumains leaves the court with the lady. He has no spear or shield. Sir Kay wants to test him and comes after him. Beaumains recognizes Kay "as an ungentle knight," and when Kay comes after him, Beaumains wounds him with his sword and takes Kay's spear and shield so that he is now fully equipped. Then, when Launcelot follows, Beaumains fights him, but when Launcelot recognizes the strength and worth of Beaumains, he calls a halt and they continue together.

Beaumains demands to be made a knight by Launcelot, and admits that his name is Gareth, the youngest brother of Gawaine, but makes Launcelot promise not to reveal his identity. Launcelot goes back to court and Beaumains continues on his adventure with the damosel, who continually makes fun of him and says bad things about him. Beaumains come across a man who says that six thieves have taken his lord. Beaumains wins against them, and Beaumains refuses any reward, saying that God will reward him.

Beaumains' adventures continue as he kills two knights who blocked the way at a river passage. He then confronts a man all in black, The Knight of the Black Laund. The lady who Beaumains is protecting tells the Black Knight that she wants to be rid of this kitchen page because he is not of a high enough class to ride with a lady such as her. Beaumains and the knight fight, and Beaumains wins, continuing to be loyal to the woman who is unkind to him.

A knight in green challenges Beaumains for the killing of his brother, the Black Knight. Beaumains wins, the Green Knight calls for mercy, and Beaumains gives the knight to the lady, who says she'd like Beaumains to kill him. The Green Knight again pleads with Beaumains and offers forgiveness for the death of his brother plus thirty knights to serve him. The damosel says that Beaumains should not have knights serving him, as he is a lowly kitchen page. Finally, she asks Beaumains not to slay him, and the Green Knight gives homage to Beaumains. The lady continues to insult and rebuke Beaumains, who remains loyal. The Green Knight and his thirty men are sent to yield to Arthur.

Beaumains and the lady come to The Pass Perilous where the Red Knight, brother of the Black Knight and the Green Knight awaits him. The Red Knight fights with Beaumains and cries for mercy when he loses. He offers to yield himself and his fifty knights to Beaumains if he is spared. Again, Beaumains gives the lady the choice of what to do with the Red Knight, who asks that he save him. The Red Knight provides them with shelter and lodging and says he will obey Beaumains' command to report to Arthur.

The lady continues to rebuke Beaumains, but he is patient and loyal. Beaumains encounters Sir Persant of Inde, who is purported to be the greatest knight they've met yet. Beaumains refuses to flee, and the lady begins to see his courage, asking forgiveness for her treatment of him.

Beaumains and Sir Persant of Inde meet, and Beaumains knocks him off his horse and forces him to ask for mercy. The lady finally asks for mercy for the knight, recognizing his great strength and honor, and finding out that he is the brother of the Black, Red, and Green knights they've already met. Beaumains commands Sir Persant and his hundred knights to return to Arthur and yield to him.

In token of his appreciation for the mercy Beaumains granted, Sir Persant sends his daughter to Launcelot's bed, but he refuses her because a knight would never knowingly create any dishonor for the maid.

Beaumains and Persant go to the Castle Dangerous where the lady who rides with Beaumains has a sister kept captive. The lady is finally identified as Linet, and her sister is Dame Lionesse. Gareth identifies himself to Persant. They send word to Linet's sister that they have found a knight to do battle for her.

Forty knights come to Beaumains to aid in Linet's sister's rescue from the Castle. Beaumains sees Lionesse through the window and falls in love with her, claiming he will rescue her or die. They do come to battle, and Beaumains is almost defeated, but Linet reminds him of her sister watching from above, and Beaumains gathers strength and wins over the Red Knight. The Red Knight claims that he only harmed the other knights because a maiden told him that Launcelot or Gawain had slain her brother. Beaumains sends him to Arthur's court and tells him to seek mercy of Launcelot and Gawaine.

Beaumains wants to go into the castle to see Lionesse, but she won't let him in until he proves he is worthy, so he sadly leaves. Lionesse plans to find out his true identity by

dressing as a princess in front of Beaumains at a celebration. Lionesse's brother, Gringamore, sees Beaumains' looks of love and tells of his belief in Beaumains' nobility to his sister. Gareth (Beaumains) and Lionesse confess their love to each other, and they plan to meet in Lionesse's bed that night. When they are caught, a knight comes into the bedroom and wounds Gareth through the thighs, but Gareth cuts his head off. Gringamore and Linet claim that they had nothing to do with the attack, and Linet miraculously heals the knight by reattaching his head with ointment. She then heals Gareth.

The same knight enters the bedroom the next knight, and Gareth cuts off his head and cuts it into many pieces. Linet puts the head back together. All of the knights that Gareth had beaten report back to Camelot at the feast of Pentecost, with hundreds of their knights, and claim the glory of Beaumains. At the same feast, Queen Morgan le Fay also comes, seeing Gawaine, Agravaine and Gaheris for the first time in 15 years. She asks where her other son is, the one they shamed themselves by putting him in the kitchen, so Gareth's identity becomes known to court.

Arthur sends for Lionesse, and with her come Sir Gringamore and Sir Gareth. Dame Lionesse plans a tournament during the Assumption of our Lady, where her knights will match Arthur's. Linet continues to heal Gareth until he is as strong as he has ever been. Before the tournament, Lionesse gives Gareth a ring that enables him to change color, so that his identity will not be known. The ring also keeps Gareth from losing any blood.

At the tournament, Gareth wins many, many battles. Launcelot doesn't want to fight Gareth because he has already tired and because he is fighting for love. After proving his worth, Gareth gives the ring to the dwarf, and his color changes to yellow and remains.

He shelters at the castle of Duke de la Rowse for a night before leaving the next morning to be contested by a knight who will not let him pass. Gareth kills him, and continues on to the next castle where they have armed 20 men for the slaying of the knight. These men killed Gareth's horse, but he killed them one by one until only 4 were left who fled. Gareth continues on to the castle where there are thirty widows. The castle is kept by the Brown Knight Without Pity, but Gareth kills him and frees the ladies, who are to report to Arthur's court. He also jousts with Duke de la Rowse with whom he had sheltered earlier, and when the Duke is defeated, Gareth sends him to Arthur at the next feast.

Upon the road, Gareth meets another knight and begins fighting until Linet rides up telling him to stop, because the knight Gareth is fighting is Gawaine, his brother. Gareth and Gawaine go back to Arthur's court, Lionesse is called for and Arthur performs the wedding of Gareth and his lady. Launcelot is so thrilled to see Gareth that Gawaine becomes jealous of his own brother.

Book 7 Analysis

The complexities of character and the foibles of human nature are accentuated in the character of Sir Kay. He begins a habit of mocking or insulting people, a habit that continues in several instances throughout the book, and is certainly not indicative of the noble behavior of a knight.

The negative portrayal of women continues in the lady later identified as Linet, who makes fun of, insults, and mocks worthy men. Linet performs miraculous healings such as the re-attachment of a knight's severed head, again fulfilling the frequent classification of women as sorceresses. Men are often "besotted" or "assotted" with women, swearing undying love and becoming obsessed with one woman who often exercises total control over them.

An emphasis on class standing is highlighted by the treatment of Beaumains. Beaumains is thought to be of poor birth and not noble and is treated by Sir Kay as such even though that is contrary to the vision of the Round Table to grant equal treatment to all. (It is a repetition of the earlier treatment of the young and unknown Arthur, who was in actuality, heir to the throne as King Uther's son.)

The reputation of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table continues to grow. The knights are victorious in contests, known throughout the world, and continue to gain repute by sending those they conquer back to Camelot to pledge their allegiance to Arthur. This "mandatory" allegiance results in interesting loyalties at the end of the book.

Book 8

Book 8 Summary

A king named Melodias has a pregnant wife who he loves very much. Another lady loves Melodias, and she puts a spell on Melodias so that as he was hunting he came to her castle where she imprisons him. His pregnant wife searches for him, goes into labor and delivers Tristram before she dies.

Melodias eventually marries this woman, who tries to poison Tristram so that he will not gain the crown and it would go to one of her children. Melodias finds out and condemns her to be burned, but Tristram asks for the life of his stepmother. His father assents, but sends Tristram away. He takes his teacher and tutor, Gouvernail, into France, where he learns how to play the harp and all other musical instruments and where he becomes an expert in hunting and hawking.

King Anguish of Ireland demands that King Mark of Cornwall pay him "truage" or tribute. King Mark declines and tells Ireland to send a knight who will fight for their pay. Ireland sends Marhaus to Cornwall, but Mark cannot find a knight who would stand up to Marhaus.

Tristram goes to King Mark to ask for knighthood, while the King of France's daughter pleas with Tristram to love her. Tristram has no love for her, and the woman dies of sorrow.

King Mark agrees to knight Tristram, but Marhaus says that he won't fight with anyone who is not of noble blood. When Marhaus is advised that Tristram is born of a King and a Queen, Marhaus agrees, and they fight more than half a day, until Marhaus flees, leaving Tristram to claim his shield and sword. Marhaus goes back to Ireland, where he dies shortly afterward from a piece of Tristram's sword that is left in his skull. Tristram, too, is severely wounded by Marhaus' spear which was poisoned. A wise lady tells Tristram that he will never recover unless he goes to Ireland to find the same venom that injured him.

Tristram goes to Ireland but disguises his identity by reversing his name into Tramtrist. Here, because he is a great harper, the King and Queen bring him into their castle and put him in the keeping of La Beale Isoud, the King's daughter. He loves her deeply after she heals him. La Beale Isoud has had a long time suitor named Palamides, a Saracen; he pledged he would be baptized if she would love him. The two men become enemies because they both love the same woman.

King Anguish, the King of Ireland, calls for a great tournament where the man who wins would marry the Lady of the Launds, cousin to the King. Tristram plans to go to the tournament, but La Beale Isoud tells him that he shouldn't because Palamides will be there. Tristram convinces her to keep his identity a secret, and she finds him a horse

and armor. The squire of the King of France recognizes Tristram, but he won't give him away. Tristram goes to the tournament in a white horse and harness and strikes down Palamides, gaining the attention of Gawaine and other knights that were there. Tristram again beats Palamides until Palamides says he'll grant Tristram his asking. Tristram makes two requests: one, that Palamides will forsake La Beale Isoud, and two, that he will not wear armor or harness of war for a year.

When the Queen and King learn that "Tramtrist" is the one who put down Palamides, they make much of him. He stays at the castle with La Beale Isoud and her parents for a long time until the queen sees his sword lying on his bed, and she detects the piece that was missing from its point. She had saved the fragment from Marhaus, who was her brother, and she has now discovered that the person she harbored was her brother's killer. Tristram admits that he killed Marhaus. The king understands that this was done as a knightly act and forgives him, but tells him he cannot stay in the country. Tristram pledges himself to La Beale Isoud, who swears that she will not marry for seven years and only to whom Tristram gives his assent. They exchange rings, and Tristram asks anyone he has offended to make it known to him. No one does.

Tristram returns to King Mark, but jealousy erupts because King Mark and Tristram have loved the same woman, the earl of Sir Segwarides. This lady loves Tristram and sends for him to come armed. King Mark finds out and ambushes Tristram on his way to the lady. Tristram is injured by Mark and two knights, but he does injure King Mark and kills the knights.

Tristram continues on to his rendezvous with the lady, where he bleeds on her sheets and pillows. Her husband finds her bloodied bed and goes after the knight who had lain with her. She tells the king that it was Tristram who lay with her, and he finds Tristram on the road and confronts him. There they fight, and Tristram wounds Segwarides, but his men find him and Segwarides recovers. Tristram doesn't know that it was Mark who attacked him in the road, and Mark acts kindly to Tristram on the surface, but he truly resents him.

Bleoberis, Launcelot's cousin, comes to the court of King Mark and asks a favor, the most beautiful lady in the court. He chooses Sir Segwarides wife and rides way with her. Segwarides follows after. Three women who knew of the love between the lady and Tristram deride him for not championing her, but Tristram refuses because it is not his part "to have ado in such matters while her lord and husband is present here." Segwarides is severely wounded by Bleoberis, and Tristram is ashamed because he had not come to their aid. He goes after them, meeting his cousin Andred on the way, who claims that he has been beaten by two knights of Arthur's court that he was sent to fetch.

Tristram meets the two knights, Dodinas le Savage and Sir Sagramore, both of whom Tristram defeats. He goes on to meet Bleoberis, who knows Tristram for his reputation of killing Marhaus and overcoming Palamides. Bleoberis offers to forego the joust and let the lady decide. The lady chooses Bleoberis because Tristram hadn't bothered to ride after her when Bleoberis took her, and she figured out that Tristram didn't love her.

When the lady asks Bleoberis to return her to her husband, he complies, having finished his quest. Tristram and Bleoberis part ways.

King Mark plots against Tristram and asks Tristram to take a message to Ireland with a message to bring La Beale Isoud, who Mark wants to marry to spite Tristram. Because Tristram wants to do his duty to his King, he complies, but the ship is driven back to the coast, so Tristram sets up his pavilion in Camelot, where Ector and Morganor challenge him to joust. They do, and Tristram defeats both with one spear.

Bleoberis and Blamore had called King Anguish to Arthur's court, saying that if he did not come, the king would lose his lands. Arthur had assigned King Cardos and the King of Scotland to meet with Anguish since he and Launcelot were both gone. Blamore swears that the King of Ireland has killed one of his cousins by treason. If one man accuses another of treason, then they must fight body for body. King Anguish is given three days to consider, and during this time, Tristram is approached by a woman looking for Launcelot to fight the knight that stole her child.

Tristram goes after this knight, who is Breuse Saunce Pite, saves the child and makes the knight yield to him. He releases the man, but later regrets that mercy because Breuse Saunce Pite will be a lifelong enemy of Arthur's court.

Tristram learns that the King of Ireland has been accused of murder and needs someone to fight for him. Tristram takes up the cause for the sake of the king and of the lady, La Beale Isoud, as long as the King swears that he did not commit the murder and that he will give Tristram a reward when it is asked.

Tristram fights Blamore and defeats him. Blamore asks that Tristram kill him since he can't stand the dishonor of losing. Tristram doesn't know what to do, because he does not want to hurt anyone of Launcelot's blood, so he pleads that Blamore will never be shamed. Bleoberis and Tristram bear Blamore to King Anguish, and the two become friends, making oaths that neither would ever fight Tristram and Tristram made the same oath.

Tristram demands his reward from Anguish, asking for La Beale Isoud so that she might marry King Mark. Isoud comes to England with Dame Bragwaine, her gentlewoman. The Queen sends a special elixir with Dame Bragwaine that supposedly makes the drinkers love each other all their days. Bragwaine gives some to Gouvernail, Tristram's companion, to give to King Mark, but on board ship, both Tristram and La Beale Isoud find the flask and drink it, beginning their undying love.

They come to a castle named Pluere, and there they are taken prisoners when they were supposed to have been given harbor. The custom of the castle was that anyone who passes by with a lady must be imprisoned until his fate has been decided by the beauty of the lady. The knight of the castle was Breunor, and it would be a contest between his lady and the lady that is passing by. If La Beale Isoud wins the contest, Tristram can behead the lady of the castle. The people declare La Beale Isoud the most beautiful, and Tristram strikes off the lady of the castle's head to pay for all the good

knights and good ladies that have been lost to this custom. Tristram fights Breunor until he grovels and then cuts off his head too.

Breunor's son, Galahad, is fetched, and Tristram must also fight him. Tristram drives him back, but the King with a Hundred Knights comes to Galahad's defense. Sir Galahad forgives Tristram, because those he has slain deserved it for their unrighteous acts, and Tristram was right to stop the evil custom of the castle. Galahad swears that if Tristram goes to Launcelot du Lake, he will never again use the custom.

Launcelot and Tristram both hear about Sir Carados, who has taken Gawaine away in chains. Launcelot finds Sir Carados and defeats him, and Tristram is sorry that he didn't get to meet up with Launcelot.

La Beale Isoud marries King Mark, but Tristram and she continue to love each other. Two of Isoud's other ladies-in-waiting hate Dame Bragwaine and tie her to a tree. Isoud goes into the forest to search for her and meets Palamides who has heard hear moaning about Dame Bragwaine and says he'll bring her the lady if she grants him whatever he wants. He does as he promises, but declines to ask his promise until he can do it in front of the king.

Palamides asks the King to have Isoud "to lead and govern her whereas I list." The King agrees, knowing that Tristram will fight for her, but Tristram is off hunting when this occurs and the King can't find anyone to go after Palamides. Sir Lambegus, a knight of Tristram's goes after them. Lambegus and Palamides fight, and Lambegus is wounded, but the queen is able to escape into the forest and finds Sir Adtherp, who takes her to his castle and pledges to avenge her against Palamides. Palamides wounds Adtherp, but the King sees him coming and bars the castle against him.

In the meantime, Tristram has gotten the news and followed Palamides. Tristram appeals to Isoud, who declares that she doesn't love Palamides him but doesn't want him to be killed because he has not yet been baptized. Tristram obeys but sends Palamides out of the country, and La Beale Isoud commands that Palamides presents himself to Arthur at Court, making mention of the fact that are but four lovers within this land, "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenever and Tristram de Liones and Queen Isoud."

Tristram brings Isoud back to Mark's castle. Tristram's cousin, Andred, sets out to catch Isoud and Tristram, and one day when they are talking through the window, Andred calls the king, who calls Tristram a traitor and sends his forces against him. Tristram fights the knights of Mark, killing and wounding many of them. His cause is taken up by Sir Dinas, who pleads with the barons of the country to give safe conduct for Tristram to go back to Mark's court. He is received well, mostly because they do not want him to go to Arthur's court and form other allegiances.

While Mark and La Beale Isoud are hunting, Sir Lamorak happens by, jousting thirty of Mark's knights. The king wants Tristram to fight with Lamorak, but Tristram knows that there would be no honor in fighting a knight that has already done so much battle. When the King demands it, Tristram again declines, but must do what the king says,

explaining to Lamorak that his actions are against his will. Lamorak declines to joust with Tristram as well.

Morgan le Fay sends a knight to Arthur's court with a special horn that no woman could drink from unless she were true to her husband. If she were untrue, the drink would spill all over. Morgan sends the horn to Arthur, hoping to expose Guenever and Launcelot's love. Lamorak asks Tristram to bear the horn to King Mark, and out of all the ladies there, only four are able to drink. Mark swears that Isoud and the other ladies should be burnt, but the barons say that the horn was made by sorcery and can not be trusted.

Andred watches Tristram and Isoud and sets him up, capturing him when he is naked and abed with La Beale Isoud. Andred leads him to a chapel to take his judgment, and Tristram pleads his case showing all that he has done for Cornwall. He fights and kills Andred and jumps down to the rocks on the sea, where his men take him away.

His men find Isoud and bring her to Tristram and they shelter in a manor in the forest, but when he's hunting, he comes upon a man in the forest who wounds him with a poison arrow, having told King Mark where they were. By the time Tristram gets back, Isoud has been taken back and told never to contact Tristram again. Isoud has left instructions for Tristram to go serve King Howel, whose daughter, Isoud la Blanche Mains will help him.

King Howel asks Tristram to fight for him since his wounded son Kehydius could not go. Tristram goes and performs great feats of battle, and King Howel gives him all kinds of rewards. Tristram begins to fall in love with Isoud la Blanche Mains, and agrees to be married, but when he remembers La Beale Isoud, he never consummates the marriage. Tristram gets word from Arthur's court that Launcelot is greatly disappointed with Tristram because he was not true to his lady.

Tristram and his new wife and her brother Kehydius are on a boat, but a wind drives them to the coast of Wales. Dame Isoud was injured, and they go to the forest for refuge where they see Sir Segwarides, who pledges to help them. Segwarides takes Tristram to a woman who tells him that anyone who comes to this land is taken prisoner or slain. Tristram and Lamorak meet up and unite against Sir Nabon le Noire who is harming all knights. Sir Nabon calls for a contest at his castle the day he is to be knighted. Nabon fights Lamorak and kills his horse but won't fight directly with him. When he is tired, Tristram takes up the battle from him and has the chance to declare the lord of the isle. When Lamorak declines, Tristram chooses Segwarides. Segwarides releases all prisoners, returns to Queen Isoud and King Mark and tells them about Tristram and his bride.

Lamorak leaves and helps defend one knight fighting against four, killing two and making the other two flee. The one knight Lamorak defends is named Sir Frol, who challenges a White Knight to a joust, which is declined. Lamorak finds that the White Knight is Launcelot. After rejoicing in each other's company, they part ways again, and Lamorak fights Sir Frol who has confronted Gawaine Then, Lamorak has to fight Frol's

brother Sir Belliance, to whom he yields because of his great goodness, making pledges to each other never to fight. Lamorak returns to the court of King Arthur.

Book 8 Analysis

Tristram is introduced as an integral part of *Le Morte d'Arthur.* Tristram, the survivor of treachery surrounding his mother's death, is inherently good, even forgiving his stepmother who has tried to poison him to allow her son to inherit power. He parallels the character of Launcelot because both are noble, beautiful and strong. These qualities are the reason for physical prowess and their victories in battle. However, the parallel doesn't stop in similarities in personalities.

The main relationship between Tristram and Launcelot are that the Tristram story (Tristram-La Beale Isoud-King Mark) parallels and foreshadows the Launcelot-Guinevere-Arthur story. Both knights love a woman who is the wife of a king. The incident where Tristram bleeds on the bed of the lady is a foreshadowing of a later instance with Launcelot, and emphasizes the parallels that exist between Launcelot and Tristram throughout the book.

The idea of fighting for, and being rewarded with, the love of a woman is evident in the constant struggle between Palamides and Tristram who fight to prove themselves worthy of La Beale Isoud.

Hidden identities - without relationship to name or class - are important. Notice that Tristram is known to La Beale Isoud as "Tramtrist" and he keeps his favored position in the Irish court since they don't know that he is Marhaus' killer. Tristram's identity remains unannounced and unknown when he goes to the jousting match. Identity is also a factor in Mark's subterfuge the night he attacks Tristram on the road to see Sir Segwarides' wife, and this lack of identity prevents Tristram from knowing Mark's resentment and plotting toward him.

Complex mores and relationships are emphasized. Tristram, who is a supposedly honorable knight, goes easily to the bed of a married woman. La Beale Isoud is married to a King because he commanded it to be so. King Mark sends La Beale Isoud off with Palamides, even though she doesn't want to go with him. Tristram agrees to be married to Isoud La Blanche Mains, but he never consummates the marriage with his wife because he is still in love with La Beale Isoud. The idea of sexuality, fidelity, and complex relationships is highlighted by Morgan le Fay's "horn" which detects whether or not a woman has been faithful, in this case finding that only four of the women at court have been true.

Morgan le Fay's treachery against Arthur is interwoven throughout the book. In this book, she hopes to expose Guenever with the gift of a drinking horn from which only "faithful" women can drink.

Book 9

Book 9 Summary

Book 9 focuses around three central story lines: La Cote Male Taile, Tristram and Launcelot. The forty-four chapters also integrate the characters of La Beale Isoud, King Mark, Palamides, Dinadan, Morgan le Fay and Gaheris.

The first section of the book gives the story of La Cote Male Taile, a young man who comes to Arthur's court to be made a knight. Sir Kay's diminishing character is seen as he makes fun of, mocks, and spies on La Cote Male Taile, who gets his name from the "evil shapen coat" he wears. The coat was the one his father was murdered in. La Cote Male Taile proves his worth very quickly after being left behind at the castle. He protects Guenever from a lion that is loose in the castle. He is made knight and takes up the quest of a lady who comes to court. This lady continually mocks him and insults him, even though Cote Male Taile retains his grace and dignity. The woman's name is Maledisant, roughly translated as "bad speech." La Cote slays 12 knights at Pendragon Castle before being taken prisoner. Launcelot rescues him, renames her Bienpensant, "Good Thoughts" and makes her promise to honor La Cote Male Taile. The two are then married.

The second part of the book focuses on Tristram de Liones. La Beale Isoud discovers his marriage and sends for Tristram. Tristram takes Kehydius and begins to go to La Beale Isoud when he meets Lamorak for the third time. They pledge never to fight each other again. Palamides, who now follows the Questing Beast after Pellinore's death, fights Lamorak and Tristram.

Problems in the brotherhood of the Round Table begin to appear, as knights fight each other over which lady is more beautiful, Guenever or Margawse. Arthur continues to joust and take part in contests with and against his own knights. On a hunting adventure, Arthur sees Annowre, who desires Arthur. When he refuses her, she plots to have him killed. The Lady of the Lake knows about the plot and finds Tristram to aid Arthur.

Tristram and La Beale Isoud are finally reunited at King Mark's castle. Here, Kehydius also falls in love with La Beale Isoud and writes her love letters, which Isoud answers out of pity. When Tristram finds the letters, Kehydius escapes his wrath, but Tristram's presence is discovered, and he escapes into the forest where he goes mad and lives like a wild man in the woods. Tristram is eventually discovered and brought back to the castle, where his identity is revealed by a dog he had given Isoud. Tristram is banished from the kingdom by Mark. Andred, Tristram's evil cousin, spreads the rumor that Tristram is dead, causing Isoud to attempt suicide. Tristram pairs with Dinadan and continues on adventures.

Morgan le Fay, throughout this book, is seen plotting to harm any of Arthur's good knights, but she aims primarily for Launcelot and Tristram. She sends out 30 ladies who are in the guise of damosels in distress looking for knights to help them. She lures them to her castle where 30 knights lie in wait to attack.

A great tourney is to be held in North Wales and knights flock there. Palamides and Tristram are frequently matched, but Tristram always wins. Launcelot and Tristram even do battle, but while Launcelot wins, he points out to the crowd that Tristram came to the field earlier and stayed later. Tristram is awarded the prize. When Tristram goes back to the castle where he's lodging, he discovers that he has killed the sons of Sir Darras, the owner of the castle, and he, Dinadan and Palamides are put into prison, where Tristram gets very ill. After time, when Darras hears of Tristram's illness, he releases them from prison.

King Mark hears of Tristram's fame and is jealous. Gaheris and Dinas fight with Mark and win, forcing King Mark to treat Tristram with honor.

Tristram unknowingly seeks refuge at the castle of Morgan le Fay and promises to bear her shield at the next tournament. The shield represents Arthur and Guenever and depicts a knight holding them in bondage. Morgan le Fay wants to call attention to the love that Launcelot has for Guenever and make Arthur see it. Tristram doesn't know that the knight in question is Launcelot. Le Fay's lover fights Tristram, but Tristram kills him and goes to the tournament with the Morgan le Fay's shield.

Book 9 Analysis

The importance of name and identity dominate the storyline. Knights must declare who they are in battle, and if names are not given, identities are sometimes unknown due to the facial armor. Shields and colors are often switched. Identities are important because much of a knight's prowess is determined by his reputation.

The ethical code of fighting is frequently mentioned. Certain, unwritten rules of combat are adhered to by honorable knights. For instance, there would be no honor ("worship") in fighting 200 men against 20. There is no honor in purposely killing a knight's horse. There is no honor in fighting a knight before he is ready to do battle. It would be unworthy of a knight to prepare to fight against someone who had been doing battle for many hours or who had already fought multiple opponents. Times and places for future battles are set.

Class and culture prejudices and prejudgments exist against the knights of Cornwall, but such attitudes reduce the character of the one who speaks it. Sir Kay, who mocks and demeans La Cote Male Taile, as well as any knight from Cornwall, is seen not to be a good or courageous knight and is known for his ignoble treatment of others.

Evil and women often go hand in hand, particularly in regard to King Arthur's half-sister, Morgan le Fay, who is also a sorceress continually plotting to bring Arthur down. (Remember the earlier incidents of the Morgan's gift to Arthur of a stunningly beautiful

coat that would burn the wearer to death; the drinking horn that would expose unfaithful women, or the sending of 30 damsels to waylay Arthur's best knights.) Another example of a woman who plots to bring down a man is evidenced in the story of Annowre who captures Arthur.

The foundation for the parallels between the Tristram story and the Launcelot legend continue to be laid. Notice Tristram's "madness" and sojourn into the forest. Also, remember that the person who is plotting to expose Tristram and La Beale Isoud is a cousin of Tristram.

Book 10

Book 10 Summary

Eighty-eight chapters in total, this book is the second part of Tristram's story. Tristram's rise to fame is continued, as is his growing love and admiration for Launcelot, whose respect for Tristram is mutual and unabated. Much of the book also follows the exploits of Palamides, the man who loves La Beale Isoud and hates Tristram.

Tristram saves his enemy, Palamides, but sets a date for a future joust. In the meantime, Tristram has many adventures and "smotes down" many adversaries. Tristram and Launcelot meet, fight and discover each other, and go to King Arthur's court where they are received with great joy. Tristram is awarded the seat at the Round Table of King Marhaus, who he had killed.

King Mark follows Tristram to England to try to kill him, and while he's there, he hears Lamorak lamenting of his love for Margawse. Mark, Dinadan and Lamorak travel together, but when confronted by Arthur's knights, Mark runs off. Knights play a joke on Mark by dressing the Dagonet, the Court Jester, in Mordred's armor. Mark again runs off. Palamides finds Mark and fights Dagonet. Mark is brought to Arthur's court, where he forgives Mark for destroying his knights and Mark is given lordship over Tristram again.

Throughout the book, there are constant jousts and challenges between Palamides and Tristram. Palamides teams with Lamorak at times, and Gawaine plots against Lamorak because he loves his mother. Four brothers, sons of Margawse and Lot, Gawaine, Gaheris, Agravaine, and Mordred, plot to catch Lamorak as he visits their mother's bedroom. They kill their own mother and splinter off from the fellowship of the Round Table.

Tristram is called upon to save King Mark's country when after a terrible battle, it is decided to determine the fate of the kingdom in a one-on-one contest. Tristram, powered by thoughts of Isoud, defeats Elias and wins back Mark's kingdom for him. King Mark, shortly after, kills his own brother Boudwin because he was jealous of the fame that Boudwin had achieved through his great feats of strategy and the burning of the Saracen fleet. Boudwin's wife, Anglides, and their son, Alisander le Orphelin, escape with the coat of her dead husband. She raises her son until years later, he is made a knight and is given the quest to avenge his father's death.

Alisander fights and wins in many contests, but when he fights Malgrin, he is severely wounded and taken to Morgan le Fay, who heals him on the condition that he'll stay in the castle for a year and a day. When the rightful owner of the castle arrives, a lady who has had the castle usurped by Morgan, the damosel sends for her uncle to burn the castle down while she helps Alisander escape. He does so, and then stays on the land for a year and a day to keep his promise. Alisander falls in love with the lady, Alice la

Beale Pilgrim, and their child, Bellengerus le Beuse, will eventually revenge his father and his grandfather's death.

There is another great tournament where Lamorak proves his value and is loved and admired by Launcelot. Arthur wants Lamorak to come to court where he promises his protection of Lamorak from Gawaine and his brothers, but Lamorak refuses.

Tristram wins much at the tournament, but he is bruised and battered. Mark fetches him with the pretense of caring for him, but he drugs him and puts him in prison. Sir Sadok ambushes Mark and kills four of his nephews, and Sir Percivale arrives to fight Mark and release Tristram. Mark, again, vows never to hurt Tristram. La Beale Isoud has Mark put into prison until she can escape, and she and Tristram flee. Launcelot gives Tristram and Isoud his castle to live in where they happily dwell.

There are reports of Lamorak's death at the hands of Gawaine and his brothers, who waylaid him in a private spot. Mordred stabbed him in the back. The claim that lovers are better knights and better fighters is disputed by Dinadan, but Tristram and Epinegris prove him wrong.

More fights and tournaments ensue. Launcelot is always willing to give credit and honor to other knights who fight well. Palamides, one time, wins over Tristram, because he looks into the stands and is inspired by the sight of La Beale Isoud. Tristram wins the next match against Palamides, but Palamides plots to kill Tristram by disguising himself at the tournament. Isoud sees the treachery. Tristram and Launcelot again are the top winners, and Launcelot gives credit to Tristram who wins that day despite Palamides' treachery. Palamides leaves their company and encounters Safere, his brother. Palamides is attacked and trapped to a horse and put on the coast, where he is rescued by Tristram. Tristram hears Palamides declare his love for Isoud, and a battle date is set, but Tristram is wounded, and can't fight Palamides.

Launcelot's men are jealous of Tristram's growing fame, but Launcelot reproves them, maintaining his honor, integrity and loyalty.

Book 10 Analysis

Poor character and cowardice will be discovered. King Mark is made a laughing-stock figure when he runs from the Dagonet, the court jester, in fear.

The emphasis on an ethical code of knighthood continues: if safe lodging is requested, no matter who the enemy is, there can be no fighting. Noble knights will always follow the unwritten codes of battle.

An irony exists in that the code of honor and humane treatment toward his enemies which Arthur follows, also nurtures cruelty and treachery. Here, when Arthur forgives King Mark, he puts Tristram back under the "protection" of Mark, who will continue to betray him. Arthur's vision sees the goodness and potential of humanity, but the reality is that men are not always honorable.

Respect is won through honor in battle. Tristram and Launcelot's relationship is one of mutual admiration and respect because of conduct in battle and the honor of reputation. Lamorak, too, wins the esteem and notice of King Arthur because of his many deeds in physical contest.

Launcelot's honor, graciousness, integrity, strength and loyalty are almost too good to be true. He begins to be seen as the counselor to Arthur, giving him advice or cautioning him about certain actions. His leadership and counseling abilities will help determine which knights align themselves with him at the end.

Love is noble and improves behavior. The belief that fighting for love is honorable is evident in the debate between Dinadin and Tristram. The best knights are those who fight for love, as proven by Tristram's superior strength.

Family relationships define battles. The sons of Margawse and Uther - Gawaine, Gaheris, Agravaine and Mordred resent the idea of their mother's love affair with Lamorak. They kill their own mother and later, the noble knight, Lamorak. This is important because it shows the ferocity of blood relationships and the intensity of the quest for "vengeance" against anyone who has committed a supposed wrong. The fact that the sons could kill their own mother is an important precursor to the end of the story, as is the fact that the final blow to Lamorak was a stabbing "in the back" by Mordred.

Book 11

Book 11 Summary

This book portrays the conception of Galahad, Launcelot's son. Predictions about the finding of the Holy Grail are made. Percivale and Aglovale, Lamorak's brothers, are major characters.

Galahad is the son of Elaine, King Pelles' daughter. Pelles is cousin to Joseph of Arimathea and has possession of the Holy Grail, which is shown to Launcelot. Pelles says that when the Grail comes around, the Round Table will be broken.

Brisen, an enchantress, fools Launcelot into thinking Elaine is Guenever, and he sleeps with her. The prediction is made that the child Elaine conceives that night, Galahad, will achieve the Holy Grail and sit in the Seat Perilous at the Round Table.

Sir Bors is also at the castle and has dreams and many adventures. Bors is a good knight, and a virgin "save one," and he is sent back to Launcelot to tell him of King Pelles.

Elaine, Galahad's mother, brings her entourage to Camelot. Once again, Brisen the enchantress fools Lancelot into thinking he is going to have a liaison with Guenever, but it is really Elaine. When Queen Guenever finds out about the boy Galahad, she berates Launcelot and sends him away from court. Launcelot is so upset that he goes mad, leaving the court and wandering in the woods.

When Guenever hears about Launcelot's madness, she forgives him and sends knights in search of him. Sir Lamorak's brothers Percivale and Aglovale are two of the knights who set out across England to find Launcelot and bring him back to Arthur's court. Percivale goes off on his own to prove his worth and right the scorn of Sir Kay and Mordred who mocked him when he was made knight.

Book 11 Analysis

Strong parallels between Tristram and Launcelot are made obvious through Launcelot's behavior. After Launcelot is thrown from court by Guenever, who is angry that Launcelot has a son, Launcelot goes mad, wandering in the woods.

Religious influence becomes an increasingly important part of the book. In this book, the Quest for the Holy Grail begins to be obvious, with future predictions about Galahad being made. King Pelles is supposedly the holder of the Grail which came from him because of his ancestral kinship with Joseph of Arimathea. (Joseph of Arimathea was the follower of Jesus who came forward at the crucifixion and asked to bury his body.) Miracles occur at King Pelles' castle, including food and drink appearing for all the knights present.

Launcelot's child, Galahad, is the result of a deception by a woman enchantress, who makes Elaine appear like Guenever. Launcelot begat the child on Elaine only because he thought she was Guenever. The question of honor and love again becomes important since it is apparent in this book that Launcelot would "bed" Guenever, the wife of King Arthur, the man he's chosen to serve, if he had the opportunity. Furthermore, Guenever expects Launcelot to be faithful only to her, a woman who is married to another man. Another interesting note is that Galahad is predicted to be a savior-type of figure (the only one who can attain the Holy Grail,) but he was conceived through deception.

Book 12

Book 12 Summary

Book Twelve, with 14 chapters, focuses on the search for Launcelot and on the christening of Sir Palamides.

Two brother knights, Bliant and Selivant, find Launcelot and take him home, feeding and caring for him in his madness. They have him bound so that he does not hurt himself, but when they are threatened, Launcelot breaks his bonds to come to their aid.

Once free of his bindings, Launcelot is outside, still mad, when he is bitten by a boar. He ends up at Elaine's castle, where people throw him food. He is recognized by Elaine and then healed of his madness by the Holy Grail. He repents of his vehement attack on Elaine the morning after Galahad's conception and asks her to get a place for him to live in King Pelles' country. He and Elaine are sent to Castle Bliant, where he assumes the name of Le Cavalier Mal Fet, the knight who trespassed.

A tournament is declared, where Launcelot finds Percivale and Sir Ector, his brother.

Other knights have been searching for Launcelot as well, and Bors finds his son, Helin le Blank, begotten on King Brandegore's daughter. Bors takes him to Arthur for knighthood.

Launcelot goes back to Camelot with Ector and Percivale. Arthur does not know why Launcelot went out of his mind.

While Launcelot suffers his madness, Tristram's acclaim increases. Tristram goes to the feast of Pentecost without Isoud because she knows that knights will want to fight over her. Tristram goes unarmed and meets Palamides. Tristram borrows armor from a wounded knight to do battle. Tristram wins over Palamides, who asks forgiveness and he is baptized.

Book 12 Analysis

Issues of identity and reputation continue to be a thread throughout the book. In this book, Launcelot acquires one of his several names, "the knight who trespassed." Presumably, this term refers to his sojourn into the territory of lunacy, but it might also be interpreted as the sexual trespass with Elaine.

The growth and importance of Christianity is evidenced. The necessity of conversion is seen in Palamides' ultimate (and long awaited) baptism.

The theme of identity continues to be interwoven into the text. Identity is important in the tournaments, with knights often seeking to borrow the shields of injured or unknown

knights so that their identity is hidden until they have proven themselves or until it is to their advantage.

Book 13

Book 13 Summary

At the next annual Feast of Pentecost, all the knights gather at the Round Table. Once they've congregated, Launcelot is requested by a lady on horseback to come into the forest. Once there, he finds Galahad, his son, at the nunnery where he has been raised. Launcelot goes back to Camelot.

At the table, gold letters appear above one chair of the Round Table. The letters say that the seat will be filled 454 years after Christ, the current time. A sword floats down the river, encased in stone. The engraving says, "for the best knight in the world." This is the sword of Balin le Savage. Launcelot declines to try for it, saying that the sword will wound whomever it touches that is not the rightful owner. Gawaine tries it at Arthur's request, but cannot move it. An old man brings a new young knight to Court, dressed all in red, saying that he is of the line of Joseph of Arimathea. When everyone goes back to the table, new lettering has appeared above the seat with Galahad's name. Galahad is the knight in red who pulls the sword out of the floating stone.

After a day of jousting, the knights return to Camelot, where at dinner, the knights saw thunder and then brilliant light of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Grail appears without seeing the bearer of the vessel, and food and drink miraculously appears on the table. Then the Grail disappeared.

Gawaine swears to find the Grail, not returning to Court until he's completed his mission. The other knights, enthused by Gawaine's pledge, also make the same promise. Arthur is broken-hearted because he knows that the knights will no longer come together at the Round Table if they are searching the world for the Holy Grail. All 150 knights make the pledge.

Galahad achieves a white shield that can only be held by the worthiest knight in the world. It had been given to King Evelake who had converted to Christianity by Joseph of Arimathea's son.

Galahad has adventures, including casting out a body that was not worthy to lie in a tomb. His adventures are religious in nature and prove his righteousness. Galahad knights his squire, Melias, who goes on his own adventures. Galahad always prays and does right.

Launcelot, in his own quest for the Grail, dreams of the Grail's power and recognizes his own unconfessed sin - the love of Guenever. He confesses to a hermit (religious man) who counsels him about the love of God he has had and how ungrateful Launcelot has been for God's favors.

Book 13 Analysis

Magic and prophecy appear again. Merlin often wrote in letters of gold, and in this book, that kind of magical prophecy is repeated in the changing letters above the Seat Perilous at the Round Table.

Linkages between the previous generation and older Knights of the Round Table are obvious in the integration of the stories of Balin le Savage, a good knight, who killed his own brother with the sword that floats down the river in a stone.

The idea that "worth" or "righteousness" is indicated by the passing of some kind of test predominates.. The story of Galahad retrieving the sword out of the stone is repetitive of Arthur pulling Excalibur out of the stone, proving his right to the throne of Uther. Here, the act entitles Galahad to the title of "the best knight in the world."

The focus on God, religion and spirituality are increased. Galahad is referred to as "of the line of Joseph of Arimathea," connecting him closely to those who loved Christ. Throughout the text, Galahad is portrayed as almost Christ-like in his perfection and dedication to God. The Communion experience is seen as healing and purifying, not just at the table when the Holy Grail appeared, but also in all the hermitages that Galahad and Launcelot retreat to after having dreams and visions.

Yet, another ironic twist in the book is that the noble pursuit of searching for the Holy Grail helps further the disintegration of the fellowship of the Knights of the Round Table. Arthur knows that this is the end of the fellowship and says to Gawaine who leads the movement to follow the Holy Grail, "Gawaine, you have me in great sorrow, for I have great doubt that my true fellowship shall never meet here more again."

Book 14

Book 14 Summary

This section focuses on Percivale's quest and the adventures he has.

Merlin equated the Round Table with the world, and that the chosen knights were honored to be part of the joining of all brethren, but to do this, they left behind families and homes.

Percival finds King Evelake, a near-death-like-man who has been preserved by God for more than 300 years so that he can see the "blood of the 9th degree," a reference to Launcelot and Galahad being the 8th and 9th degree of blood from Joseph of Arimathea.

Galahad, alone, saves Percivale, who goes on to have more adventures. Percivale dreams of a lion and a serpent, and finds a maiden who explains that the lion of his dream is of the new church and the resurrected Lord, while the serpent represents old evils. Percivale promises to give a maiden whatever she asks if she takes him to Galahad. When she asks for him to sleep with her, he lies down next to her but the bed turns to smoke. Percivale acknowledges that the sins of the flesh rule him.

Book 14 Analysis

Dreams continue to be a method of foretelling the future and discovering the true meaning of events. Percivale's dream needs interpretation, and to find its true meaning, he must find a holy man or a woman capable of understanding the dreams. This search for the 'truth,' exemplified here by Percivale and later by other knights, results in the recognition of their own sins and in renewed devotion to the Lord and focus on their goal.

Biblical similarities: Merlin equated the Round Table with the world, and that the chosen knights were honored to be part of the joining of all brethren, but to do this, they left behind families and homes. It can be argued that the Knights of the Round Table are an analogy to the disciples who left home to pursue the cause of a better world in King Arthur's service.

Book 15

Book 15 Summary

Launcelot's search for the Holy Grail is the subject of book fifteen. Like Percival, Launcelot has dreams and visions and is always able to find a hermitage or a good maiden to translate the meaning of his visions. He is given a hair shirt from a holy man to help him remember to be humble and turn away from his sin. He is also told not to eat meat or drink wine while searching. His dreams are interpreted as being of great pride, and he is told that he has been ungrateful to God.

Book 15 Analysis

Book 15 describes the continued reliance of the plot on holy men and women with spiritual power to interpret dreams and show the knights their sins. The previous role of Merlin as knower-of- all and interpreter of signs has shifted to a religious and spiritual focus instead of a magical one.

Even Launcelot, the "best knight in the world" with the exception of Galahad, has significant sin. There is an underlying connection between Launcelot's sin and the demise of Camelot. Launcelot, though pure and noble in many regards, never overcomes his sin. Camelot, for all of Arthur's hopes and visions, cannot be the utopia intended because of the flaws in human nature. These flaws cause the tragic demise of a kingdom.

Book 16

Book 16 Summary

Gawain, like Percivale and Launcelot, has dreams and adventures in his quest. Ector and Bors also are discussed.

Gawaine, tiring of the Quest, meets with Ector, and they complain of the lack of adventure. At an old chapel, Gawaine dreams of a hundred and fifty bulls that were "proud and black," with two bulls that were pure white and one that was white with a black spot. Only one of the three white bulls came back.

Ector, also has strange dreams of his brother, Launcelot, but in the morning when Ector and Gawaine share their visions, a voice comes and tells that they are full of evil faith and of poor belief and they may not come to the Sangreal. A knight soon presents himself for a joust, and Gawaine fights him, but he is wounded. Gawaine kills Uwaine, a member of the brotherhood of King Arthur. The knights travel to a hermitage where Gawaine is healed and their dreams are interpreted.

Gawaine's dream is interpreted by the hermit (holy man) who defines the black bulls as the sinful knights. The two white ones are Galahad and Percivale, who are clean and without spot. The one white bull with the spot is Sir Bors, who "trespassed but once in his virginity." The black bulls are proud and may not enter the meadow of humility and patience, and they all slay each other for sin.

Sir Bors, on his own adventures, also meets with a hermit who gives him a scarlet coat to wear and tells him not to eat meat. Bors, in humility, begins to sleep on the floor. He also has two dreams before he is summoned to fight for the lady against the evil Pridam, who has usurped her castle. Bors wins the battle and restores the peace. He finds his brother, Lionel, bound to a cart by two knights who were beating him. He also sees a knight bringing a woman to the forest ready to rape her. Bors decides to save the woman, but he can't save his brother although he tries to get back and rescue him. He is told that his brother is dead, but he takes the body, goes to a priest and entombs the body. The priest tells Bors that the white bird in his dream is the holy church that he should be defending, and the black bird is the hypocrisy within. The dry tree of his dream was his brother, Lionel, who was without virtue.

Lionel comes to the chapel and confronts Bors because he is angry that he didn't fight for him and chose to rescue the maiden. Lionel fights Bors and knocks him down. However, the priest runs out and stops him. Colgrevance, another Knight of the Round Table, comes up at that time, and he, too, urges Lionel to hold his hand against his own brother. Lionel kills Colgrevance and the priest.

Lionel's evil is stopped by the sudden sound of a voice from above which told Bors to flee. Bors leaves and boars a ship that he finds where Percivale. Percivale and Bors now go in search of Galahad.

Book 16 Analysis

Arthur's fears about the disintegration of the Round Table begin to be obvious, as evidenced by the fight between Bors and Lionel, brother against brother. Gawaine kills Uwaine, another conflict between two Knights of the Round Table. Not all knights hold high the standards that Arthur has tried to set, illustrated by the fact that Lionel murders a priest.

Dreams and their religious significance are used to point out to the knights the need for a sincere and pure faith. The interpretation of dreams continues to be important to the story although their meaning is now focused on spiritual growth as opposed to the early dreams in the book which often indicated victory over enemies.

The candidates worthy of seeking the Holy Grail are narrowed down to a small group. Percivale, Bors, and Galahad come together and continue the quest for the Sangreal. Their "virginal" behavior is identified in Gawaine's dream as those of the two white bulls, and the one white bull with a black spot (Bors).

The sudden and mystical appearance of ships which transport worthy knights to destinations begins to be an essential element of the story, with Bors' flight and subsequent finding of the ship being the first of several appearances of ships.

Book 17

Book 17 Summary

Gawaine's ending of his quest, Galahad's reunion with Launcelot and the reunion with Percivale and Bors are all described in this book, as well as the ultimate ending of the Quest for the Holy Grail.

Galahad has many adventures; in fact, Book 17 simply recounts them before saying that he found a tournament at a nearby castle, but when he sees that the men are slaying others at the entrance, he helps them and does "wonderful deeds of arms that all there marveled." Sir Ector and Gawaine are at the tournament, and Gawaine is struck by Galahad with Balin le Savage's sword, pulled from the rock. Gawaine realizes that the prediction made by Launcelot was true - that anyone who tried to pull the sword out and who wasn't the rightful owner of it - would be sorely injured. Gawaine swears that he's never had so much pain from the stroke of any man's hand and declares that his quest for the Holy Grail is over. Gawaine stays to heal his wounds, and Ector stays with him.

A gentlewoman on a horse comes for Galahad and leads him to the ship where Bors and Percivale wait. The ship sails and eventually comes between two huge rocks where another ship rests with no one on board. The woman gives them the warning that only those with a steadfast faith can enter the other ship, and then she reveals her identity as Percivale's sister, the daughter of King Pellinore.

In the middle of the second ship is a beautiful bed with a silken drape and a sword and sheath. There are letters of blood on the sword which say that whoever is hardy enough to draw the sword "will never fail of shame of his body or be wounded unto death." Galahad declines to draw the sword, and then Percivale's sister relates the story of King Labor and King Hurlame, a Saracen. King Hurlame had been recently converted, but when this ship arrived, he had been at battle and lost his men, and ran to ship, clutching the sword which he used to kill King Labor. Great famine fell to both kingdoms, and when King Hurlame put the sword back in its sheath, he fell down dead. Anyone who draws it would be dead or maimed.

Percivale's sister continues with more stories about the sword. It was found on this ship 40 years after the passion of Christ by the brother-in-law of King Mordrains who was maimed after using the sword. She tells of King Pelles who found the ship and entered it, drawing out the sword, only to have a spear appear and smite him through both thighs. King Pelles was Galahad's grandfather.

Above the bed were two swords and two spindles made from the Tree of Life. King Solomon built the ship, which his wife apportioned with silk. She made a girdle of hemp for the sword because she had no great materials worthy to bear it, and King Solomon

took the pommel off of King David's sword and made a sheath. Angels then took the ship and placed letters on the side which said that only men full of faith might enter.

New girdles must be made for the sword, and Percivale's sister admits that she has already fashioned one from her hair because she knew that would be part of the quest. She cut her hair as a sign that she is no longer so vain and focused on the world. The group christens the sword with the name, "Sword with Strange Girdles," and the sheath with the title, "Mover of Blood." Galahad wears the sword.

The group slays men who attack them, and it was found that the men they killed were brothers who had incest with their sister. Galahad, Percivale, Bors and Percivale's sister are led to a castle with a "strange custom." At the castle, they are asked to let the maiden give her blood into a silver dish. They fight, and then are invited into the castle where they learn that the tradition of asking for the blood of a virgin was begun to heal the lady of the castle. Percivale's sister freely submits to the custom and gives her blood. She heals the lady, but Percivale's sister is near death, giving instructions for the disposal of her body. She asks to be put on a ship and buried under the tower where Galahad will be in the City of Sarras. Sir Bors rides off to rescue a wounded knight, and Galahad and Percivale find the tombs of sixty maidens who have died during the bloodletting.

Launcelot has a vision that he should board a ship when he finds it. He boards a ship without sail or oar, falls asleep, and wakes up to find the body of Sir Percivale's dead sister. Launcelot stays on the ship for a month and a half, being fed by the grace of God. Galahad comes onto the ship and reunites with Launcelot where they stay for six more months, "serving God daily and nightly with all their power."

Galahad is called forth from the ship by a voice, and Launcelot is tested and he fails because he automatically draws his sword. His lesson is to believe and rely on God more than his sword and his might.

Launcelot was brought to the King Pelles' castle where the Holy Grail rests, and he waits before the door praying to Jesus to reward him with the sight of what he seeks. The door flies open, but not before warning Launcelot that he should not enter. He goes in anyway, and catches a glimpse of angels hovering over the Holy Vessel, and a priest who was lifting the figure of a man. Launcelot, believing the priest needs his help, rushes into the chamber where he is struck down, blinded, paralyzed and deaf. He remains in a coma-like state for 24 days.

When Launcelot recovers, King Pelles brings him to dinner, and while there, the doors and windows shut, barring Sir Ector from entering the castle because he is not worthy. Some knights return to Camelot, and there Launcelot makes the prediction to Arthur that of the three men seeking the Grail, only one would return.

Galahad sees King Mordrains who has waited several years to see the one sent to find the Holy Grail. After seeing Galahad, Mordrains dies. Galahad performs other miraculous feats before arriving at the Castle of Carbonek, King Pelles' castle

Percival and Bors also arrive at the Castle. Galahad is able to solder the sword that pierced Joseph through the thighs, and once the sword is whole, it is given to Bors.

A meal is presented to the three Knights of the Round Table, as well as three knights from Gaul, three from Ireland, and three from Denmark. A man in a bed is brought in who tells that two of the three knights should not be in the quest of the Grail. Hearing this, King Pelles departs, and then angels descend from heaven bearing an archbishop to the silver table bearing the Grail. A vision of the Christ arising out of the Holy Grail is seen, and says that those present have been granted what they "most desired to see, yet hast thou not seen it so openly as thou shalt see it in the city of Sarras in the spiritual place." The voice then says that the Vessel will leave that land because the people of the land are too sinful. Galahad, Percivale and Bors are sent to the City of Sarras with more predictions that "two of you shall die in my service, but one of you shall come again and tell tidings."

When Percivale, Bors, and Galahad arrive back in the ship, they find the silver table and the Grail on board, and transport it to the City of Sarras. Upon arriving, they bury Percivale's sister as she requested, and then a crippled man is healed when he agrees to help them carry the silver table, but when the truth was told about what was on the table, the tyrant-ruler of the country named Estorause puts them into prison.

In prison, they are fed by the Holy Grail, and when Estorause dies a year later, they are released from prison. The people then make Galahad their king. Galahad has a chest of gold and jewels to hold the Holy Grail, and each day Percivale, Bors, and Galahad pray before it. One morning they find "the likeness of a bishop," surrounded by angels who offer mass for them. The figure of the bishop identifies himself as Joseph of Arimathea who says that he and Galahad are similar in that they have both seen the Holy Grail and that they were both clean "maidens," meaning virginal and without sin.

Galahad, after kissing and blessing Percivale and Bors, submits his soul to God, and a "great multitude of angels bare his soul up to heaven." Percivale and Bors see a great hand come from heaven and take the Vessel and the spear up to heaven.

Percivale and Bors bury Galahad next to Percivale's sister. Percivale joins a hermitage (a monastery) and becomes a monk before he dies a year and two months later. Bors buries him by Galahad and by his own sister. Bors returns to Camelot where Arthur chronicles all the adventures of the Holy Grail.

Book 17 Analysis

The supernatural power of God is evident in the use of voices from above, the miraculous appearance of the ships, and the healing of the crippled man who will help carry the silver table. Visions direct the actions of Launcelot, Galahad, Bors and Percivale.

Other elements of mysticism occur in "lettering" that appears to explain things. The gold lettering of Merlin in the past has become writing produced by heavenly forces to lead the worthy knights m to Jesus and the Grail.

Goodness leads to God and the ultimate reward. Percivale's sister, who is virginal, self-sacrificing and devout, dies. She is one of the few virtuous women seen in the book. She serves her purpose of explaining the holy relics found on board the ship to Galahad, she sacrifices her own blood and then she dies. Galahad, Percivale and Bors all practice devout prayer and worship, and are rewarded with sight of the Holy Grail. Galahad and Percivale, the two white "sinless" knights, die after seeing the Grail. Bors, alone, survives, fulfilling the prophesy that only one would live through the Quest. Bors' purpose is to report the quest to Arthur so that it can be recorded for history.

The recurring theme of a written letter of explanation is seen in the one that is attached to Sir Percivale's dead sister's hand that explains her part in the quest and in the explanations of the relics found aboard the ships. Strange, ghost-like ships continue to be a factor in the supernatural transport of the main characters.

The number 24 has significance in this book and in subsequent books. Launcelot was in a trance for 24 days after he beheld the Grail. Launcelot equates the number of days in a trance with the number of years he was a sinner.

Shutting of the castle against Ector, as well as the selection of a few innocent men to win the quest of the Holy Grail, is symbolic of the closing of Heaven to those unsaved and sinful. While it's important to note that Le Morte d'Arthur focuses on the achievement of the Holy Grail by Galahad, Percivale and Bors, there were nine other knights present at Pelles' castle during the final banquet, bringing the number of men there to witness the Grail to 12, the same number of Christ's disciples.

Book 18

Book 18 Summary

The Round Table begins to come alive again as knights that were on the quest return to the Court of King Arthur and Queen Guenever. However, for all of Launcelot's spiritual devotion on the Quest, he still loves Guenever. "...ever his thoughts were privily on the queen, and so they loved together more hotter than they did to-forehand, and had such privy draughts together, that many in the court spake of it, and in especial Sir Agravaine...."

To squelch the rumors that are beginning, Launcelot, much to the Queen's displeasure, spends more time away from court helping maidens, mostly to protect the Queen from the talk of the Court when they spend time together. Guenever, however, is furious with him and sends Launcelot from the court in anger.

Launcelot retreats to the hermit Sir Brasias until Bors can bring him news of Guenever's feelings toward him. Bors counsels Launcelot to remember that the last time he was sent from the Court, Guenever quickly relented and sent the Knights of the Round Table all over the country in search of Launcelot.

Queen Guenever, in an effort to show that she loves all the knights equally, invites 24 of them to a special dinner which she hosts and prepares. Agravaine, Gawaine's brother, is known for his love of fresh fruit and is one of the attendees at the banquet. Sir Pinel is related to Lamorak and hates Agravaine for Lamorak's death. Pinel poisons the apples to kill Agravaine, but unfortunately, a knight named Patrise eats an apple and dies. Sir Mador de la Porte is Patrise's cousin, and accuses Guenever of treason. All the knights present believe that Guenever might be at fault.

Arthur, because of the rules of his kingdom and his desire to have fair judgment of all, cannot help his wife. Equal judgment and equal treatment for all would doom anyone guilty of treason to be burned at the stake. Arthur adheres to his principles of justice, declaring that a knight could fight for Guenever against Sir Mador de la Porte and saying, "God speed the right."

None of the 24 knights present will do battle for Guenever, and God orders Sir Bors to do battle for Guenever's sake. Bors agrees on the condition that unless a better knight presents himself and verbally defends the Queen. On the day of the battle, Launcelot fights and wins against Mador, who then releases the Queen from his charges of treason. Launcelot makes him swear that no mention will ever be made of Queen Guenever's involvement in a treason charge. Launcelot reiterates his loyalty to Arthur and the queen.

The Lady of the Lake, Nimue, makes a return to court to attest to Guenever's innocence and to accuse Sir Pinel.

A tournament is declared for the Day of Assumption. The queen does not attend and Launcelot, also, healing from the battle against Mador, stays behind. The Queen berates him because he stays behind, opening them to more innuendo. Launcelot goes immediately to the tournament, but warns Guenever that he will fight against the King. Before arriving at the tournament, Launcelot secures lodging with a good man, the Baron of Astolat. In order to stay unidentified at the tournament, Launcelot uses the shield of one of the Baron's injured sons and agrees to wear the token of "the Fair Maid of Astolat" (a red sleeve) into the tournament since he had never before worn a symbol of a lady's affection. The Baron's son and brother to the Maid of Astolat is named Lavaine. He accompanies Launcelot into the tournament where they do great feats against many of Arthur's men, with Launcelot striking down 30 knights and Lavaine 10. However, during the battle, Bors puts his spear through Launcelot's side, and after the tournament, Lavaine takes Launcelot to the hermit, Sir Baudwin, who is a doctor as well as a holy man.

Gawaine searches the countryside for Launcelot and goes to the Baron of Astolat's manor, where he finds the maiden and learns that Launcelot's shield is there. He figures out that the knight at the tournament was Launcelot. Gawaine tells the maiden that he has known and loved Launcelot for 24 years. Lavaine tells Gawaine where Launcelot is, and Gawaine and the maid go to him, where she faithfully nurtures and attends him in his recovery. Bors, too, finds Launcelot at the hermitage and seeks forgiveness for the wound he inflicted. Launcelot declares that his own pride was the cause of his injury, because he wanted to overcome all the Knights of the Round Table, and because of that pride, he was almost killed.

Back at the Court of Arthur, Guenever is furious that Launcelot has worn the token of another woman in battle.

Launcelot continues to recover, but in his haste to go to another tournament, he re-injures himself and sends Bors to the contest instead. Bors and other Knights of the Round Table prove their might and then return to Launcelot who is well enough at the time to be moved from the hermit's home to the Baron of Astolat's estate. When Launcelot is ready to leave, the maiden, Elaine, pleads with Launcelot to marry her or at least take her for a lover. When Launcelot declines both offers, he says that if she takes another knight as husband, he will give her an annual sum of a thousand pounds to repay her for her kindness. Immediately she says that if Launcelot will not marry or love her, she will die. Her request was to be put into a black barge and floated down the river with a letter explaining why she dies.

The black barge bearing the Maiden of Astolat, otherwise known as Elaine le Blank, arrives at Camelot. Everyone there cries in pity after hearing the letter which she held in her hand explaining that she died of grief because Launcelot could not love her. The Queen recognizes that Launcelot was faithful to her.

Another tournament is declared, but while preparing for it, Launcelot is accidentally shot in the buttocks by a female hunter. Launcelot, Gareth (the youngest brother of Gawaine)

and Lavaine team up against Arthur and other knights. Launcelot, Gareth and Lavaine win the prize at the tournament.

The end of the book is a tribute to the month of May that "gives all lovers courage," and "where every lusty heart beginneth to blossom"

Book 18 Analysis

Portrayal of women, even the Queen, is not flattering in most cases. Guenever is seen as an angry, unfaithful woman. Not only does she demand Launcelot's attention, she is easily angered at him, even when he is trying to protect her. This anger is the second time that she throws him out of the court, with the first instance resulting in Launcelot's madness. Guenever, seemingly, doesn't remember the intense pain she caused him the first time. Later in the same book, Guenever is angry because Launcelot wears the token of another woman into battle, yet Guenever is married to a noble King.

The virtuous women die young. While the evil women (Morgan le Fay) and the fickle, demanding Guenever, continue throughout the book, the women who are good and virtuous, like Sir Percivale's sister, die young. Here, Elaine le Blank dies for want of Launcelot's love.

The books shifts back from the religious focus in the sections that dealt with the Holy Grail to a more magical focus as the Lady of the Lake, Nimue, makes a return visit to Court. Her knowledge aids Guenever in that Nimue testifies to Guenever's innocence in the poisoning of Patrise and accuses the guilty party of Sir Mador.

The idea that God will always provide justice by providing greater physical strength and ability predominates. Launcelot wins in all tournaments, and his prowess enables him to protect Guenever. Arthur believes wholeheartedly in this philosophy, saying when Guenever is accused of treason, "God Speed the Right."

The number 24 is significant. Guenever has 24 knights to her dinner, none who will defend her innocence. Gawaine has loved Launcelot 24 years. (Launcelot was struck dumb 24 days after he saw the Grail, and said he had been a sinner for 24 years.)

The use of barges and ships which mysteriously float to their destinations continues with the black barge bearing the body of the Elaine le Blank to Camelot.

Book 19

Book 19 Summary

Book Nineteen begins as Book Eighteen ends - with a tribute to the month of May as the Queen takes ten of her knights with her for a spring outing in the forest. Since Launcelot has stayed away from Court at the Queen's command, he is not one of the knights who attend and protect her, and Meliagraunce, a knight who has long loved the queen, takes the opportunity to waylay the Queen and attack their party. He injures all ten of them. To save the life of her knights, Guenever agrees to go wherever Meliagraunce takes her. The Queen and her wounded knights are brought to Meliagraunce's castle, where she sends a child with a message to Lavaine and Launcelot about their dilemma.

An ambush is laid for Launcelot where 30 archers shoot at him as he comes. They kill his horse, and Launcelot is forced to run through the woods until he finds a man with a cart carrying wood. The carter bears Launcelot to the gates of the castle where Meliagraunce, once he knows that Launcelot has come for him, pleads mercy of the Queen. Because she wants peace, she tells Launcelot that everything is now okay and there is no need for fighting. Launcelot promises to come to her window that night.

The escapade earns Launcelot the nickname "le Chevalier du Chariot" because of his arrival in the cart, and Launcelot has many adventures that year in the cart which are simply mentioned but not recounted in the text.

Queen Guenever has all the wounded knights brought outside her door so that she can attend to their wounds and their needs. In the middle of the night, Launcelot comes to the Queen's window, as planned. The window has iron bars across it, but after the Queen says that she wishes he could come to her, Launcelot pulls the iron bars apart to gain entrance, cutting his hand in the process. Then "Launcelot went unto bed with the queen, and he took no force of his hurt hand, but took his pleasaunce and his liking until it was in the dawning of the day..."

Meliagraunce storms the queen's chamber in the morning demanding to know why she isn't up yet and on opening the curtains finds her bed with blood all over it. Thinking that the Queen has been with one of the wounded knights, Meliagraunce cries treason. Since all of the wounded knights knew that they had not been in the bedchamber, the charge is not proven, but Launcelot challenges Meliagraunce to a battle to prove the Queen was not guilty. Meliagraunce attempts to call a truce with Launcelot (because he doesn't want to fight him) and offers to show him the castle. Launcelot agrees, only to be taken to a trap door that imprisons him.

Meliagraunce takes Guenever to Camelot where, for the second time, a knight accuses her of treason. Meliagraunce tells Arthur that Launcelot has agreed to fight for the Queen's honor, but that he is nowhere to be found. A lady rescues Launcelot the day of

the scheduled battle in return for a kiss. Launcelot proves that the Queen was not with one of the wounded knights by defeating Meliagraunce with no armor and one hand tied behind his back. Launcelot once again saves Guenever from burning at the stake.

A knight named Urre arrives at Court with his mother who has brought him to be healed. He had seven different wounds and he had been cursed by the sorceress-mother of his opponent with wounds that would never heal until "the best knight in the world had searched his wounds." All 110 knights and King Arthur attempt the feat, and Launcelot tries to avoid the task because he doesn't want his pride to play a part in doing something no one else could. After intense prayer, Launcelot heals Urre.

Another tournament is planned, and after proving themselves, Lavaine and Urre are made Knights of the Round Table. During this time, Agravaine watches Guenever and Launcelot closely, hoping to catch them together and put them to shame.

Book 19 Analysis

Launcelot continues to be Guenever's champion, even in the midst of her fickleness and her anger. She still calls on Launcelot whenever she needs help. Launcelot's strength and physical ability still help prove his righteousness, as he is always able to win against his opponents. In doing so, he is always able to save Guenever from the fire a second time.

While Launcelot can honestly defend Guenever from Meliagraunce's charge that the queen slept with one of the ten wounded knights, it is a matter of technicality. She did not sleep with one of the ten wounded knights, but the text makes it plain that she did sleep with Launcelot. This is an important point, since one debate of the book is whether or not the relationship between Guenever and Launcelot was a physical one. (When they are finally taken together later, they are NOT in bed and some say they were simply talking.) The text of this chapter leaves little doubt that the relationship had been consummated sexually.

Launcelot, learning from the lessons of the Quest for the Holy Grail, has overcome some of his issues of pride even though he has not been able to conquer his love for Queen Guenever. His devout faith, however, enables him to cure Urre, a task he would have liked to avoid. The strange irony is that the worthy Launcelot, the great champion and defender, can overcome his pride, but not overcome the one sin which destroys a kingdom - his love for Guenever.

Widening division is seen in the brotherhood of the Knights of the Round Table. While Gawaine is absolutely loyal to Launcelot, Agravaine, Gawaine's brother, is intent on destroying the kingdom by catching Launcelot and Guenever together. Another example of disunity between the knights is Meliagraunce's lust for Guenever, his ambush and wounding of his brother knights and his insistence on proving the Queen's unfaithfulness.

Book 20

Book 20 Summary

Agravaine, brother of Gawain, and Mordred, the illegitimate son of Arthur and his half-sister Margawse, hate both the queen and Launcelot and plot to shame them. They appeal to the courage of the knights of the court pointing out that as knights, they should be ashamed to let sin against King Arthur go on under their own noses. Gawaine reprimands them, reminding them of all the times Launcelot has saved and helped them, but Agravaine goes to the king with his accusation anyway.

Arthur does not want to admit that such a thing is possible, because Launcelot had done so much for he and the queen and he loved Launcelot. Agravaine encourages the king to set a trap, which he does, saying that he will be away overnight hunting.

Agravaine and Mordred take twelve knights (all from Scotland) to watch the queen's chambers. Launcelot goes unarmed to see Guenever and they are captured while they are together, although Malory says that "whether they were abed or at other manner of disports," he does not know. Before fleeing to find a weapon, Launcelot gives the queen instructions to lie with Bors, Lavaine or Urre if he is killed, and the queen declares that she won't live if he dies.

Launcelot fights and slays Colgrevance who is the first through the door, and after he kills him, Launcelot dons his armor and sword and slays the rest of the knights, including Agravaine. Only Mordred escapes with a wound. Guenever is sentenced to death for causing thirteen deaths of the Knights of the Round Table.

Those loyal to Launcelot, Bors, Ector, Lionel, and others flock to Launcelot who vows to fight for Guenever saying that she was faithful to Arthur. Sir Gawaine sides with Arthur but refuses to blame Launcelot because he says his brothers brought this on themselves. Arthur commands Gareth and Gaheris, the other brothers of Gawaine and those who loved Launcelot as well as Arthur, to guard Guenever at the stake as she is taken to be burned. Gareth and Gaheris go at the command of the king, against their will, but they are unarmed because they will not bear arms against Launcelot.

Launcelot and his forces come to rescue the Queen from burning, and in the turmoil of battle, many are slain, including Gareth and Gaheris who are killed unknowingly by Launcelot. Launcelot and his forces retreat to his castle Joyous Gard which he had previously given to Tristram and La Beale Isoud to live in.

King Arthur laments the loss of the Round Table and recognizes that he was blessed with "the fairest fellowship of noble knights that ever held Christian king together." It is the loss of the brotherhood and of the dream in which men could be treated as equal no matter where they were from, as long as they were noble, strong, and courageous, that hurts Arthur the most. He even makes the comment, "...much more I am sorrier for my

good knights' loss than for the loss of my fair queen; for queens I might have enow but such a fellowship of good knights shall never be together in no company."

When Gawaine learns that Launcelot killed his brothers, he swears eternal vengeance on Launcelot, even though Launcelot had made him a knight and they had loved each other dearly.

Arthur and Gawaine and their army lay siege to Joyous Gard, and Launcelot swears he will never do battle against Arthur. Launcelot makes an elegant appeal to Arthur saying that he did not steal the Queen from him, but simply saved her as he had done twice before, both times with the King's gratitude. Launcelot says that he killed the 13 knights only in his own defense, and he once again swears that the Queen was not guilty and begs the King to take her back.

Gawaine swears battle upon Launcelot, calling him a coward for not coming out of the castle, which Launcelot has been unwilling to do because he does not want to fight those to whom he has sworn loyalty. He begs Arthur and Gawaine not to come to the battlefield, but of course, they won't agree. Launcelot halfheartedly goes to war with them, but he continually saves Arthur, even finding him a horse after he has been thrown off. Terrible bloodshed occurs, and when Bors is wounded, Launcelot finally begins to give his whole strength to the battle, badly defeating Arthur's army. At last, the Pope commands Arthur to take back Guenever and make peace with Launcelot.

Launcelot agrees to bring Guenever back to Arthur at the Pope's command, and they make a royal procession with a hundred knights dressed in green carrying olive branches. Launcelot again states his case to Arthur, proclaiming that he had to save her from the fire, just as he had done twice before to Arthur's pleasure. Launcelot also asks to be reconciled to Gawaine, who again swears that he will die to avenge his brothers' deaths.

Arthur exiles Launcelot, and the knights who are loyal to Launcelot know that they will never again be welcome at Camelot, so they choose to go with Launcelot to France, where many of them came from. Upon coming to France, Launcelot and his nephews were rightful lords of the lands, and properties were distributed and rewards were made to all of Launcelot's faithful knights

Arthur and Gawaine follow Launcelot to France leaving Mordred in charge of the kingdom and of the queen. When Arthur's forces come to Launcelot, Launcelot again appeals for peace, but Gawaine will not be persuaded. Launcelot offers to create beautiful churches in memory and atonement for the death of Gaheris and Gareth, arguing that churches would be a more fitting means of memorial than a war, but Gawaine is unmoved.

Gawaine calls Launcelot a coward and calls him out of the city walls. Again, reluctantly, Launcelot and Gawaine agree to do battle with each other until one of them dies. Gawaine is a powerful knight who has incredible strength for 3 hours, but after those three hours, he dwindles. Launcelot is aware of this fact, withstands the strokes of

Gawaine's sword for 3 hours and then is able to come back and defeat him. When Gawaine is on the ground, Launcelot refuses to slay him saying "I will never smite a felled knight." Launcelot warns Arthur that if he and his men should come out to do battle, Arthur's army will suffer. Gawaine has been wounded by Launcelot and he takes three weeks to heal, during which time Arthur is also sick with worry about Gawaine.

Again, Gawaine challenges Launcelot to the death, and again, Launcelot withstands the superior strength of Gawaine for 3 hours until the strength subsides and Launcelot is able to defeat him, but he will not kill Gawaine. The two armies are ready to fight and then Arthur receives word that he is needed back in England, so they withdraw and go home.

Book 20 Analysis

The foreshadowing of Gawaine's character in Book 2, (where he accidentally beheaded a lady because he could not grant mercy to the knight she was defending), becomes an integral part of the demise of Camelot. Launcelot tries in multiple ways, to avoid fighting the men he loves. Gawaine, however, is unable to grant mercy or forgiveness to Launcelot for the killing of his beloved brothers, Gareth and Gaheris. The insistence on doing battle forces the two arms together. The sins and weaknesses of men destroy the potential for peace, just as the connection between Launcelot and Guenever destroys the Round Table and Arthur's creation of a kingdom where justice is done and virtues are defended. Ironically, the most virtuous knight living, Launcelot, is still sinful enough to cause the collapse of a kingdom through his inability to stop loving Guenever.

The jealousy, rivalry and allegiances to country and clan also contribute to the demise of the Round Table. Agravaine and Mordred's jealousy and hatred of Launcelot urge them to create a plot to bring him down. The French knights and friends of Lamorak rally around Launcelot. The knights of Scotland had been the ones chosen by Mordred and Agravaine to lay in wait for Launcelot and Guenever. Earthly connections and human frailties far outweigh the noble dreams of a kingdom where everyone is treated equally and where justice is done.

The final parallel between Sir Tristram, and La Beale Isoud, and Launcelot-Guenever is evident when Launcelot and Queen Guenever retreat to the castle at Joyous Gard which had been the haven for Tristram and La Beale Isoud. The very code of the Round Table, where deaths were avenged by kinsmen, also destroys the fellowship, for the complex family ties and need for retribution split the Round Table into separate armies.

The political influence of the church is apparent. In the early part of the book, the Archbishop of Canterbury (after being counseled by Merlin) helped direct the announcement, acceptance, and ordination of the young King Arthur. At the end of the book, the Pope himself intervenes on behalf of the church and commands that Arthur and Launcelot call a truce. Launcelot delivers Guenever back to Arthur before being exiled out of the country.

Book 21

Book 21 Summary

Arthur's army is called back to Camelot because Mordred has told the kingdom that Arthur has been killed. He has attempted to marry the Queen, (his father's wife and his uncle's wife,) but she has fooled him by asking to go to London to buy wedding clothes and then shutting herself in the Tower of London. When the Bishop of Canterbury rebukes Mordred for attempting to marry his father's wife, Mordred wants to kill him. The Bishop of Canterbury escapes to a small hermitage (monastery).

Arthur's forces come against Mordred, but Mordred has slandered Arthur and turned people against him so that many of them want to fight against the King. Arthur's forces, however, beat Mordred's army, and Mordred flees into Canterbury.

Gawaine is critically injured in the battle against Mordred, but before he dies, he asks to write a letter to Launcelot. The letter entreats Launcelot to pray for Gawaine's soul at his tomb and acknowledges that his death was of his own choosing. Gawaine appeals to Launcelot to come fight for Arthur against Mordred and free Guenever from the Tower of London.

King Arthur and Mordred set a date for battle, but the ghost of Gawaine comes to Arthur in a dream and warns him that if they fight, Arthur will be killed. Arthur then gets Mordred to agree to take the lands of Kent and Cornwall instead of battle, to which Mordred agrees. However, at the signing of this agreement, with both armies armed and present, an adder bites a knight upon the foot and the knight raises his sword to kill it. The stroke is misinterpreted and a terrible battle begins. Arthur fights as a king should but is always dismayed and disturbed by the huge loss of his men, and when he finally comes to battle Mordred, he kills him, but not before Mordred wounds Arthur.

All but two of Arthur's knights are dead. Sir Bedivere remains, and Arthur commands him to take Excalibur and throw it back into the river. Twice Bedivere says he will, and both times, he is unable to do it. Both times, Arthur questions him about what he saw when he threw it in the water, and when Bedivere says that he only saw winds and waves, Arthur knows he is lying. Finally, Bedivere does as he is commanded and an arm comes out of the water, takes the sword and descends. The King is dying, and Bedivere takes him to the water where a barge with many women and three queens awaits. The king is laid in the boat with his head on the lap of a queen who says, "Alas, dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me?" The queens were reported to be Queen Morgan le Fay, the Queen of Northgalis and the Queen of the Wastelands. Nimue, the Lady of the Lake was also on the barge.

There is legend and talk that Arthur did not die but went somewhere else, but many people say that there's a tombstone in England with his grave that says "Here lies the Once and Future King."

Queen Guenever retreats into a nunnery at Almesbury. When Launcelot hears of Arthur's death, he comes to England and hears how 100,000 of Mordred's army were slain the day of the battle. Launcelot goes to the tomb of Gawaine and prays for two days and two knights, and then goes to see Guenever at the nunnery. Guenever asks him never to see her again, for "through our love that we have loved together is my most noble lord slain." She claims, "through thee and me the flower of kings and knights is destroyed."

Launcelot comes to the hermitage (monastery) where the Bishop of Canterbury resides. Bedivere is also there, and both know Launcelot who asks for forgiveness of his sins and takes on the robe of the monk.

Bors sends the rest of Launcelot's army home, and a few of those loyal to Launcelot find the chapel where Launcelot is. Bors and seven more knights also stay at the monastery and do penance for six years. At that time, Launcelot has a vision that Guenever has died and that he must get her body. He goes with his fellows to Almesbury, finds her dead, and does the burial and mass himself for his beloved lady.

From that point on, Launcelot didn't eat or drink, and dwindled toward death, asking to be buried at Joyous Gard. One night, the Bishop laughs loudly in his sleep and he is awakened by the others asking what the matter is. The bishop declares he felt great joy and happiness at moment because he saw Launcelot being borne up to heaven by angels. The men go to Launcelot's bed and find him dead, with a huge smile on his face. He is carried to Joyous Gard with the same horse bier that took Guenever to her grave.

Sir Ector rides by Joyous Gard, discovers his dead brother and becomes part of the wake and ceremony that attends the burial of Launcelot, keeping the corpse above ground 15 days. The Bishop of Canterbury was restored to his post in London, and Sir Bedivere remained at the hermitage until he died. Most of the other knights went back to their home countries, but Bors, Ector, Blamore, and Bleoberis went into the Holy Lands and established their lands.

Book 21 Analysis

Even though the title of the book, *Le Morte d'Arthur* or "The Death of Arthur" implies that the story is about King Arthur, the reader who has completed the book knows that the majority of the story is not about Arthur, but about the many knights who were part of The Round Table. The text revolves more around the adventures of Launcelot and Tristram than about King Arthur.

While each of the twenty-one books of *Le Morte d'Arthur* details interesting escapades and facets of the Knights of the Round Table and their adventures, it is in the entirety of the story that the complexity and cohesiveness of all the diverse characters come together in a meaningful, unified whole.

A great irony dominates the entire text. Arthur's vision of equality, justice and harmony is proven to be unattainable because of human frailties. Sins of lust, greed and jealousy destroy Camelot. Other than Percivale and Galahad, (who still engaged in battles and fighting), all other knights had worldly sins. Obviously, it is Launcelot's desire for Guenever that is a major cause of kingdom's demise. The sexual impurity of the knights is highlighted in the section on the search for the Holy Grail, where it's noted that only three of the knights are worthy to find the Grail.

Arthur causes the demise of his kingdom when he takes the lady Margawse because he wanted to go to bed with her. This lust resulted in the conception of one of Arthur's illegitimate children, Mordred. Having a child outside of wedlock is not the major sin. In this case, Arthur's lust caused him to have sex with his own half-sister, creating Mordred, not just a illegitimate child but also the result of a union between siblings with the same father. It is Mordred - the child of this sin - who is integral in the plot to bring down Arthur.

The continued irony is that not only does Arthur bring down his own kingdom through his sin, but Arthur, who tried so hard to attain justice and harmony, also ends up going to battle against his own son and killing thousands and thousands of the men who hailed from his own kingdom.

Faith and retreat in the church for healing are important to the conclusion of the story. Launcelot and many of his knights turn to the monastery and to God for healing after the war with Arthur. Many of the knights continue for years at the monastery praying for forgiveness and offering penance. The retreat to the church is also evidenced in Guenever's stay at the nunnery.

The importance of written letters is seen one final time. Throughout the book, letters have been used to explain situations and objects. In the final book, Gawaine's letter offers Launcelot reconciliation and some sense of the forgiveness and mercy he was unable to grant while living. The letter is also a redeeming gesture for Gawaine's character because it shows that he is willing to grant mercy to help save Arthur, who he has loved and been faithful to for a lifetime.

The debate about the true relationship between Guenever and Launcelot will probably always exist, fueled by Malory's words that says he knows not whether they were in bed together when they were caught. As in the case before, when Launcelot fought to prove Guenever's honor because she was not lying with one of the ten wounded knights, it is a matter of semantics.

Some may argue that the love that exists between Guenever and Launcelot is that of "courtly love," the devotion and dedication to a married woman of the court offered by a knight. The incident at Meliagraunce's castle (where Launcelot pulled the iron bars apart and left blood on Guenever's pillows) seems to negate the "courtly love" argument, but the other passages about Launcelot and Guenever are much more ambiguous. Some would argue that the relationship is purely spiritual, an emotional bond that neither could

deny. Whatever the connection, Launcelot saves Guenever from burning at the stake for treason three separate times.

Another great irony exists in the fact that the great love between Guenever and Launcelot can also be the great destroyer of people and kingdoms.

The character of Arthur is seen as a man who sticks to his principles, even to the extent of not saving his wife from the judgment of burning at the stake. His devotion is to the Knights of the Round Table and to the ideals of Camelot. In modern terms, it might be argued that he was not an attentive husband and therefore Guenever turned to the good, powerful, sensitive Launcelot.

The character of Guenever is not that of the virtuous queen. Very early in the book, Merlin tells Arthur that Guenever is not the woman he should choose as queen. Arthur decides otherwise, but Merlin's predictions come true in the end. One must wonder about the character of Guenever, who though married to Arthur, demands complete chastity from Launcelot, who is furious when he has a child - (even though the child is born through an enchantment that made Elaine look like Guenever to Launcelot.) Guenever seems angry and trivial when she bans Launcelot from Camelot and causes his madness. She repents eventually and sends the knights looking for him, but shortly after this episode, she again is furious with him because he is trying to avoid contact with her to protect her from the rumors of the Court.) Her fury is repeated when he wears the token of another woman into battle. The only sign of regret is that at the end of the book she retreats to the nunnery, asks Launcelot never to try to see her again and declares that the love between them caused the death of her "most noble lord, the flower of kings and knights."

The ending, the actual death of Arthur, is interesting and ambiguous. To the modern reader, the ending of Le Morte d'Arthur is reminiscent to the ending of *The Lord of the Rings* when the Middle Kingdom ends and all the dignitaries leave on a mysterious ship. The fact that King Arthur was still living when placed upon the ship gives rise to the legend that perhaps he lived longer, and that no one knows where he is buried, although supposedly a stone exists that declares the resting place of the "Once and Future King."

One interesting and somewhat troubling aspect of the "death-ship" scene is that the ship also escorts powerful political women, like Nimue, the Lady of the Lake, and "many fair ladies in it, and among them all was a queen, and all they had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur." When Arthur is placed into the boat, his head is laid in the lap of the queen, who said, "Ah, dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me?" The reader must decide the identity of the woman. It could be half-sister, Margawse, the mother of Mordred, who has already died at the hands of her own sons. It could be Morgan le Fay, who has tried all her life to overthrow Arthur. Malory, the author of the text, claims later that he has never been able to find any more research on Arthur or his death, but that one text referred to the three queens on board the ship as Morgan Le Fay, the Queen of Northgalis, and the Queen of the Waste Lands.

The entire story has to be looked at in a bigger context than on a book-by-book basis. A kingdom that is founded in sin may never become a utopia of virtue. Remember that King Uther killed Tintagel to be with Igraine, and the conception of Arthur was done under disguise and without Igraine's consent. It's not just the story about the foundation of a kingdom and its demise; it's a commentary on human nature, on sin, on the search for religion. *Le Morte d'Arthur* has elements of cruelty, chivalry, honor, greed, lust, politics and power. The novel is part a description of combat strategies during the medieval period as well as a combination of magic, mysticism and religion. The deeds done in the past affect the future: the connections between people unite or divide armies and a kingdom.

Characters

Agravaine

Agravaine is one of Gawain and Gareth's brothers and is also a nephew of Arthur. Along with his brother, Gaheris, Agravaine participates in Mordred's plots and in the murder of his mother.

Archbishop of Canterbury

It is the Archbishop, who in concert with Merlin, arranges for the gathering of the lords. This results in Arthur's successfully pulling Excalibur from the stone, and the lord's acceptance of him as their king.

Arthur

Arthur is the child of Igrayne and Uther. Arthur was promised to Merlin as payment for his father's pact with the magician. After his birth, Arthur is placed in the care of Sir Ector and his son, Kay. When he is able to remove the sword from the stone, Arthur become king of Britain. He is wise and strong and is able to restore peace and tranquility to the kingdom. However, not everyone approves of Arthur and he must fight many battles. Finally to secure his kingdom, Arthur orders the death of all highborn sons. This action costs Arthur much support, but illustrates how far he will go to keep his kingdom intact. Arthur places great value on the friendship and loyalty of his men. Arthur forms the Round Table, a forum for knightly loyalty and fealty to crown. He also establishes a code of behavior, demanding that the knights be merciful, righteous, and honorable. One of Arthur's great strengths is the loyalty his men demonstrate for him. Even when Arthur makes a mistake in battle, his men quickly muster the strength to save both Arthur and his kingdom. He loves his knights so much that he ignores the love between Guinevere and Launcelot, until forced to act. His love for Launcelot is greater than his love for his queen. When he is forced to acknowledge his queen's love for Launcelot, he orders Guinevere burned and Launcelot banished, and only undertakes to fight Launcelot because Gawain insists upon it. Arthur dies in battle with Mordred, but not until after he has killed the usurper. With Arthur's death, the Round Table dissolves, and the knights scatter.

Isolde la Blaunche Maynes

This Isolde is Tristram's wife, the Princess of Brittany. Tristram refuses to consummate the marriage and make this Isolde unhappy.

Lamorak de Galis

Lamorak is a knight famous for his valor and his strength. Only Launcelot and Gawain are stronger, but he is unarmed when Gawain and his brother kill him because he has

an affair with their mother. Gawain cannot achieve greatness because of his role in Lamorak's death.

Bors de Ganis

Bors is one of the knights who accompanies Galahad on the Grail Quest. Like Percival, Bors is one of the purest of the knights, filled with humility and valor. He is rewarded for his purity when he is permitted to join Galahad in locating the Grail. Bors witnesses Galahad's death and ascension into heaven. He returns to the Round Table and describes his visions.

Sir Ector

Sir Ector is given Arthur to raise. He is one of Arthur's brave and honorable knights who willingly goes into battle for Arthur.

Elayne

This Elayne is the daughter of King Pelles. Launcelot is tricked into an affair with this lady and they have a child, Galahad. She loves Launcelot, although he rejects her.

King Evelake

King Evelake is an ancient ruler. He has been promised that he will live long enough to see the virtuous knight who will complete the Grail Quest. He is 400 years old when he dies after witnessing Galahad's successful completion of the quest.

Gaheris

Gaheris is one of Gawain and Gareth's brothers and is also a nephew of Arthur. Along with his brother, Agravaine, Gaheris participates in Mordred's plots and in the murder of his mother. Gaheris is ordered by Arthur to participate in the execution of Guinevere, although he is opposed and attempts to escape this duty. Gaheris is murdered by Launcelot during his rescue of Guinevere.

Galahad

Galahad is the son of Launcelot. He is the best of the knights, the only one capable of succeeding in the Grail Quest. He is virtuous and great enough to draw Balin's sword from the floating stone. Galahad soon wins a white shield, marked with a red cross. The shield gives him healing powers, which Galahad will need on his journey on the Grail Quest. Galahad represents a Christ-like figure. He will have many adventures on his journey and encounter many

enemies, but Galahad refuses to kill his enemies, content only to drive them off. Galahad rejects pride and greed and refutes all the seven deadly sins. Only Galahad is sinless, as is required to touch the magnificent sword and crown that he encounters on his journey. After he finds the Grail Quest, Galahad is able to perform many miracles,

protected from all dangers by God and faith. Galahad is motivated only by his love of God. Eventually, Galahad sees a vision of Christ and asks to join Christ in heaven. He dies, and Percival and Bors see Galahad raised into heaven.

Gareth

Gareth first enters in disguise, as a humble kitchen boy, Beaumains. But he is the brother of Gawain and proves himself a brave and virtuous knight. Gareth is one of the most gentle of the knights and one of the most virtuous. He is also patient and strong, the ideal of the Round Table knights. Gareth has many adventures and consistently proves himself worthy of the Round Table. Unlike many of the other knights, Gareth rejects the idea of vengeance, the spilling of blood that all the other knights appear to embrace. Gareth is ordered by Arthur to participate in the execution of Guinevere, although he is opposed and attempts to escape this duty. Launcelot, who rescues Guinevere from a sentence of death, murders Gareth. Gareth's death leads Gawain to seek revenge and leads to his death, as well.

Gawain

Gawain is Arthur's nephew, the oldest child of King Lot. He is one of the most virtuous of the knights and one of the most just. Gawain emerges as a hero after he helps Arthur defeat Lucius. He errs when he beheads a lady and when he murders the unarmed Lamorak. Gawain is a heroic figure, but is really as a secondary figure in the tradition of the loyal sidekick, loyal to Launcelot. He takes the heroic central figure in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knights.* Ultimately, it is Gawain's sin as murderer that prevents his complete success. When Launcelot murders his brothers, Gawain vows revenge, and this action leads to Mordred seizing the kingdom and the queen while Arthur and Gawain are fighting Launcelot. Gawain dies in battle, but before he dies, he admits to Arthur that his desire for revenge has led to all this calamity.

Guinevere

Guinevere is the daughter of Leodegrance and the wife of Arthur. Guinevere's dowry is the Round Table, which is filled with knights loyal to Arthur. She also represents the idea of courtly love, providing a reason for many of Launcelot's heroics. Thus Guinevere's role is central to Arthur's success, but she is also largely responsible for his defeat. When Meliagrance kidnaps her, Launcelot appears to rescue her. Her obvious love for Launcelot leads Arthur to condemn Guinevere to death. Launcelot again rescues her as she is about to be burned. Later, with Arthur in pursuit of Launcelot, Mordred seizes Guinevere for his wife. After Arthur is killed, Guinevere enters a nunnery. After her death, she is buried next to Arthur.

Igrayne

Igrayne is the wife of the Duke of Cornwall and the mother of Arthur. She conceives Arthur after Uther comes to her bed, disguised as her husband. Igrayne has already been widowed when the disguised Uther visits her bed, and she later marries her husband's murderer.

Isolde

Isolde is the daughter of Angwyssh. She heals Tristram when he is wounded. Tristram loves Isolde, but King Mark claims her as his bride. When Tristram assumes the role of delivering Isolde to King Mark, the two inadvertently drink the love potent intended for King Mark and Isolde, and fall in love. They consummate their love, and Isolde continues to love Tristram even after her marriage to King Mark.

Kay

Kay is the son of Sir Ector and Arthur's foster brother. When he loses his sword, Kay sends Arthur to find it, and Arthur mistakenly pulls the magic sword from the stone. Kay is loyal to Arthur and is wounded in the battle against Lucius. Arthur is equally loyal and tolerates Sir Kay's disparaging treatment of Gareth, although Kay is clearly wrong about Gareth's abilities.

Lady of the Lake

The Lady of the Lake assists Merlin in his goals. She demands a promise of Arthur when she returns his sword to him. When she reappears to demand her promise, it is to demand the head of Sir Balyn or of the maid who brought Balyn's sword. Balyn recognizes the Lady of the Lake as the woman who murdered his mother and he decapitates her.

Launcelot du Lake

Launcelot is the greatest of Arthur's knights, except for those who succeed in the Grail Quest. He gets his first real chance to distinguish himself in the battle against Lucius, when Launcelot steals Lucius' banner. Launcelot returns to England a hero after the war in Rome. He has many adventures and proves that he is virtuous and heroic. The queen is particularly impressed with Launcelot's heroic adventures. At this point, Launcelot represents the ideal in knightly behavior, except in one area. He is clearly working to serve the queen, rather than the king. Launcelot appears to forget that he is a member of Arthur's Round Table, not Guinevere's. Launcelot joins the Grail Quest, but he has too many sins to succeed. Launcelot's knightly deeds have all been in honor of Guinevere, not God. When Launcelot finally sees the Grail, he is struck down and lies in a coma for twenty-four days, and when he awakens, returns to Camelot. Launcelot forgets that it was his love for Guinevere that prevented him from succeeding in the Grail Quest, and he quickly returns to his old ways with Guinevere. When Melliagaunce kidnaps Guinevere, Launcelot rescues her, and he rescues her again when she is about to be burned for adultery. His loyalty is to Guinevere and it is this misguided loyalty that helps lead Arthur to his death. After the death of Arthur, Launcelot enters the priesthood and soon dies.

Launceor of Ireland

Launceor is one of Arthur's knights. After he is humiliated by Balyn's success, he rashly attempts to defeat Balyn and is killed. Launceor's death results in severe punishment for Balyn, who will die killing his own brother.

Elayne le Blanc

Elayne is the maid of Astolat who loves Launcelot and who dies when he will not love her. After her death, her body is placed on a barge, with a letter telling her story placed in her hand.

Morgan le Fay

Morgan is Uther's third daughter. She enters school in a nunnery, becomes a necromancer, and later, marries King Uriens. Morgan le Fay attempts to steal Arthur's sword and have him murdered. She is treacherous and evil, willing to murder anyone who gets in the way of her ambition.

Percival le Galois

Percival is one of the more virtuous knights, who also accompanies Galahad on the Grail Quest. Percival is raised in the woods and is lacking in everything that would be expected of a knight. However, his desire for the Round Table is so great that he willingly sacrifices to be a knight. Percival's desire to go on the Grail Quest means that he must repent of the pride that led him to the Round Table and to the desire to be better than Galahad. Galahad has many adventures on his journey and several visions before he joins Galahad in discovering the Grail. After Galahad's death, Percival becomes a religious hermit and does not return to the Round Table.

Balyn le Sauvage

Balyn is a knight who is fated to kill his brother. In response, Merlin puts the magic sword into a stone and it remains there until the greatest knight of the realm can pull it out.

Linet

Linet is a damsel who seeks Arthur's assistance. When the disguised Gareth is assigned to help her, she mocks him. However, it is this quest that proves Gareth's worthiness to join the Round Table.

Lot

Lot is one of the kings who marries Uther's daughter. Although King Lot is the leader of Arthur's enemies, he is the most heroic of these men. He is both noble and brave and is a worthy opponent for Arthur. Two of his sons, Gareth and Gawain, become the most noble and virtuous of the Round Table knights. In order for Arthur's kingdom to be secure, Lot must finally die. He is killed in battle by Sir Pellanor, who will die when Gawain avenges his father's death.

Lucius of Rome

King Lucius demands tributes from Arthur, but a distracted Arthur refuses, which leads to a war. Lucius loses decisively, but he refuses to accept defeat and ignores advice to withdraw. Lucius is finally killed and the battle can end.

Mark

Mark is the king of Cornwall who, in his jealousy of Tristram, insists upon marrying Isolde, the woman Tristram loves. King Mark plots to have Tristram murdered but needs him to save his kingdom. Arthur's knights trick King Mark and generally make a fool of him, but he is really unable to do much to defend himself. An inept ruler, King Mark needs the man he hates the most□Tristram□to defend his kingdom. Mark is jealous of anyone who achieves success, even his own brother, whom he has murdered.

Melliograance

Melliograance is a traitor who kidnaps Guinevere. When she will not yield to his demands, he accuses her of treason with Launcelot. In a fight with Launcelot, Melliograance is defeated and dies.

Merlin

Merlin is a master manipulator, who masters Arthur's conception and who, unseen, directs much of the action. As a great sorcerer, he is responsible for the creation of the Round Table. Merlin is both prophet and magician. Merlin arranges a truce between Kings Lot, Nantres, and Uriens, but then betrays the kings when he orders Arthur to attack. When Arthur loses his sword in battle, Merlin takes Arthur to the Lady of the Lake to retrieve it. Merlin provides Arthur with prophesies and he fixes the sword of Balyn so that only Launcelot or Galahad can use it, and when Arthur's life is threatened, Merlin steps in and saves the king. Merlin is opposed to Arthur's marriage to Guinevere, but is ignored. Merlin is able to assume disguises and appears before Arthur disguised as both a young boy and an old man. Merlin is directly responsible for everything that happens to Arthur. Although it initially appears that Merlin represents God, it soon becomes clear that he does not, and since he does not represent God, he must, according to the medieval world, represent the devil. Merlin meats his downfall when he falls in love with Nineve, who refuses to be bedded by Merlin but is willing to study his tricks. When she has learned his magic, Nineve has Merlin sealed alive in a cave where he must remain since only she can set him free.

Mordred

Mordred is the son of Arthur's incestuous relationship with his sister. He is an evil knight, who plots to seize the crown and Arthur's queen. His actions result in a battle in which Arthur kills him. But Arthur is also killed and the Round Table is dissolved and the knights scatter throughout the kingdom.

Nantres

Nantres is a second king who marries one of Uther's daughters. He joins with his other brothers-in-law to fight against Arthur and is defeated.

Nineve

Nineve is the maid Pellanor brought to court, the damsel of the lake. Merlin falls in love with her and fails to see that she is using him to learn his secrets. Nineve uses magic to seal Merlin in a cave, where he must remain since no one but Nineve can free him. She uses her magic to save Arthur's life and generally uses her magic for good.

Palamides

Palamides is Tristram's enemy and Isolde's admirer. Eventually, he is forced to admit that Tristram is a worthy knight, and Palamides becomes Tristram's admirer, as well.

Pellanor

Pellanor, the knight of the Questing Beast, kills Lot and is himself killed by Lot's son, Gawain. This series of murders is only one of the many that occur, in an epic that focuses largely on revenge.

Pelles

King Pelles' identity is often unclear, although some times he is the Fisher King of the grail legends. He arranges for Galahad to be conceived and is cured when Galahad achieves the Grail Quest.

Uther Pendragon

Uther is the king of primeval England. He lusts for Igrayne, who is the wife of the Duke of Cornwall. When his attempts to bed Igrayne fail, Uther's forces attack Cornwall's, and the king then beds Igrayne under the guise that he is her husband. With Igrayne's husband dead, Uther is free to marry the widow. The next two years are filled with wars and dissention for Uther, who eventually falls sick. As he lies dying, Merlin succeeds in convincing Uther to declare his child, Arthur, king.

Tristram

Tristram's story has many parallels to that of other characters. Like Arthur, Tristram is born after his father's death and is raised by a foster parent. Like Launcelot, who loves Guinevere, Tristram also loves the wife of his king. In spite of the poor treatment afforded Tristram by his king, he continues to be loyal to King Mark, returning to defend him and to save his kingdom. His love for Isolde is unabated, and even though he marries another woman of the same name, he refuses to betray the woman he loves and will not consummate the marriage. Tristram has many more adventures where he successfully proves his strength and valor as a knight.

Themes

Courtly Love

There are many examples of courtly love in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, including the story of Sir Gareth, his defeat of the Red Knight, and his winning of the Lady Lyonesse as his wife. Gareth represents the ideal love, one that ends in marriage and is, above all else, honorable. But the story of romantic love and chivalry that most often comes to mind is the story of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere, a love that is clearly adulterous. After his introduction into the text, it is clear that many of Launcelot's heroic actions are designed to please the queen. He is clearly her favorite, and justifiably so, since in all of his adventures, Launcelot is brave, honorable, and strong. Because Launcelot fights to please and honor Guinevere, and not God, he is excluded from the quest for the Holy Grail. This image of courtly love changes when Launcelot is called upon to fight to save Guinevere's life. In the first instance, Guinevere is unjustly accused of murder, and a disguised Launcelot becomes her champion, overcoming Sir Mador and freeing the queen. According to romantic tradition, a knight entering a tournament might also wear a lady's token to express his love. Sir Launcelot wears the token of Elayne of Astalot, but does so only to enhance his disguise. Later, he wears the queen's token, thus making public his love for her. Another aspect of courtly love is the knight's rescue of his lady. Launcelot has already rescued Guinevere once, but when she is kidnapped, he rescues her again from Melliagaunce, her kidnapper. Launcelot then fights and kills Guinevere's oppressor. But because of these events, Guinevere is judged guilty of adultery and treason and is sentenced to be burned. Again, Sir Launcelot rescues his lady, but as a result, sets into motion events that will lead to the destruction of Arthur and of the Round Table. Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere's courtly love was far more than a harmless romantic interlude.

Honor

When Arthur establishes the code for the knights of his Round Table, one important element is honor. Arthur's knights owe him honor, but, more importantly, they owe honor to God. Most of the knights waver on this last requirement. For nearly all of the knights, their adventures, battles and tournaments, are fought to honor their king, or more immediately, themselves. Gawain fights for personal and family honor, and Launcelot fights for the queen's honor. Because of this, almost all of the knights fail in their quest for the Holy Grail. Only Galahad, Bors, and Percival place honor of God ahead of personal honor, vanity, and pride. Therefore, only these three knights are permitted to complete the quest for the Grail. Malory makes individual character an important element of his story, and how each character conducts himself, in an honorable fashion, is a key point in the text.

Fate and Destiny

Thanks to Merlin's prophecies and his magic, many times the readers are told of a prophecy that includes death and destruction. Characters are fated to meet one another

on the battlefield or in tournaments, and fated to win or die based on an action that occurred much earlier, and for which, they may hold no responsibility. For example, Balyn easily draws out the sword affixed to a scabbard worn by the damsel. By doing do, he is fated to kill his dearest friend, his brother. In another example, the burial spot of Launcelor is fated to be the sight of the battle between Launcelot and Tristram, two knights who love one another and who would not willing fight one another, but who are destined to do so. This fate or destiny is not attributed to God or other spiritual matters, but instead to characters present in the text. Both Merlin and the Lady of the Lake act as representatives of fate, manipulating the characters and their actions to create a fate they predict.

Obedience

Obedience is an element of the duty and responsibility that all knights owe to their king and God. Obedience to Arthur is a part of every knight's code, even when obedience results in certain death. There are several examples of obedience to Arthur's commands, where to do so will bring harm to the knight. One such example occurs at the beginning of the quest for the Holy Grail, when Arthur learns of the sword in the floating stone. Arthur learns that the legend promises that only the best knight in the world can claim the sword, and if any others try to pull out the sword, they will be cursed. Launcelot refuses Arthur's order to try, but Gawain willingly obeys Arthur's order because Arthur is his king and he has commanded it. In another section, Arthur orders Guinevere to be put to death. In this instance, Gawain refuses to obey his king's command, but his brothers, who also object, are present. As a result, Gareth and Gaheris are murdered by Launcelot during his rescue of the queen.

Revenge

Much of the action in this epic revolves around revenge. The eye for an eye motif runs through the individual character's stories. For instance, Sir Pellanor kills King Lot, and Lot's son, Gawain, to avenge his father's death, will later kill Pellanor. In another example of revenge, Gawain and his brother, Gaheris, murder Lamerok, whom they accused of an adulterous relationship with their mother. This feud, between Lamerok and the sons of King Lot, has motivated many of the sons' actions before culminating in death. Finally, it is Gawain's insistence that his brothers be avenged that leads to the destruction of the Round Table. Because Arthur and Gawain are pursuing Launcelot, they leave Britain and the queen unattended and Mordred seizes both. Had Gawain been able to pass on the need for blood revenge, the battle in which he and Arthur were destroyed, would not have happened. Ultimately the theme of revenge, most particularly the familial blood revenge, runs throughout the epic and leads to the destruction of all that Arthur had created.

Style

Character

The actions of each character are what constitute the story. Character can also include the idea of a particular individual's morality. Characters can range from simple stereotypical figures to more complex multi-faceted ones. Characters may also be defined by personality traits, such as the rogue or the damsel in distress. Characterization is the process of creating a lifelike person from an author's imagination. To accomplish this the author provides the character with personality traits that help define who that person will be and how that person will behave in a given situation. Most of the characters in Malory's epic are derived from characters who appeared in his sources. But, Malory has also changed some of the characters, giving them more depth, such as Launcelot, who is transformed from a minor character in the sources to a major character in Malory's epic.

Epic

An epic is a long narrative poem that presents characters and events of high position. There may be a central heroic figure, as in the case of Arthur in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* . There is frequently a muse who inspires the writer to create a work that is inspired and magnificent in its scope. The epic most frequently recounts the origins of a nation or group of people. *Le Morte d'Arthur* recounts the story of King Arthur, but it also establishes a history for the English people, providing a source of national pride. Epics usually share certain features: a heroic figure who is imposing in his greatness; a vast setting or great nation; heroic deeds; supernatural forces, such as miracles, gods, or angels; elevated diction and style; and an objective narrator. *Le Morte d'Arthur* is not an epic in the tradition of *The Odyssey*, instead fitting more loosely into the genre of the romantic prose epic.

Fiction

Fiction is any story that is created out of the author's imagination, rather than factual events. Sometimes the characters in a fictional piece are based on real life, but their ultimate form and the way they respond to events is the creation of the author. In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, the story is purported to be historical and real, but actually it is based on a series of legends and folktales and has little basis in actual facts. Although the actual story is not taken from Malory's imagination, it is taken from the imaginations of his sources, and thus, it retains its fictional basis.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is a device in literature to create expectation and tension in the story. This device is one way to build anticipation and keep the reader interested in the story, or even worried about a character's future or well-being. There is much foreshadowing

in Malory's epic, primarily through the use of prophesy, which predicts death and destruction.

Genre

Genres are a way of categorizing literature. Genre is a French term that means "kind" or "type." Genre can refer to both the category of literature such as tragedy, comedy, epic, poetry, or pastoral. It can also include modern forms of literature such as drama, novels, or short stories. This term can also refer to types of literature such as mystery, science fiction, comedy or romance. *Le Morte d'Arthur* is a romantic epic.

Plot

This term refers to the pattern of events. Generally plots should have a beginning, a middle, and a conclusion, but they may also sometimes be a series of episodes connected together. Basically, the plot provides the author with the means to explore primary themes. Students are often confused between the two terms; but themes explore ideas, and plots simply relate what happens in a very obvious manner. In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Malory has expanded on the original sources, which were really just a series of legends, to create a chronologically based plot, which covers events over a duration of many years. The plot depicts the birth of Arthur, his succession to the crown, and the formation of the Round Table. The plot also depicts the many adventures of the knights, particularly the quest for the Holy Grail. But the themes include adherence to the knightly code of behavior that Arthur institutes and devotion to king and God.

Romantic Epic

A romantic epic is a long narrative poem that combines the medieval romance and the classical epic. The poets who created romantic epics used many of the features of the classical epics but combined these features with stories of love and both romantic and religious. Malory deviates slightly from the conventional, substituting prose for verse. Malory also combines the Grail Quest with romantic courtly love to add dimension to the romantic epic.

Setting

The time, place, and culture in which the action of the play takes place is called the setting. The elements of setting may include geographic location, physical or mental environments, prevailing cultural attitudes, or the historical time in which the action takes place. The location for *Le Morte d'Ar-thur* is mostly Britain, but the time is understood to be many years earlier, perhaps as early as the six century, during the Anglo-Saxon period.

Historical Context

A Time of War

Life in fifteenth century England was certainly turbulent during the period in which Malory is writing *Le Morte d'Arthur*. The century began with Henry V deciding to invade France. Henry found ways to justify his choice, claiming a hereditary entitlement to France and a desire to unite Europe under a Christian flag. These righteous claims allowed Henry to claim God's endorsement of this attack. As it turns out, Henry had need of God. Miserable weather and rampant dysentery hampered his invasion, but eventually Henry achieved great victories and succeeded in his quest to unite France and England. Henry emerged from these battles as a legend, having defeated the French at Agincourt, against almost impossible odds. The heavily armored French army, which was weighted down in the muddy field, quickly fell victim to the English archers, who deftly stayed out of the mud as they attacked from a distance. As a result, the French sustained thousands of lost lives and the English only a few. Henry gave credit to God, for having been party to the English victory. More importantly, Henry's exploits assumed a level more often associated with myth, and certainly reminding his people of the earlier British Legend, King Arthur, whose exploits on the battlefield were also legendary. To seal the comparisons, Henry also died soon after his victories, although not in battle as Arthur had, but of the dysentery that had plagued his men during the earlier campaign.

During Malory's lifetime, English life had been marked by dissention and war. The monarchy squandered the country's wealth by waging wars, when what England needed was an emphasis on recovery and stability. Except for the brief period of glory that the English found with Henry V, there had been little to cheer the people during the past hundred years or more. The Peasant's Revolt of 1381, which had been caused by the imposition of a Poll tax, had offered no lasting lessons for the monarchy. The revolt has been squashed in less than a month and it had failed as a social revolution, and so the problems that had led to the revolt were ignored. The Peasant's Revolt had been about much more than the Poll tax. There had been a shortage of laborers, and thus a shortage of food since the last serious outbreak of plague in the middle of the fourteenth century, which killed a third of England's population. The people were starving, and the aristocracy's solution was to raise taxes and fight among themselves for the crown. In short, the medieval period was a time of social unrest and disorder. In spite of severe economic conditions, the Hundred Years War raged in the background, until finally the French drove the English from their territories. Back in England, the aristocracy were more involved with the getting and keeping of land and wealth, rather than the social revolution that the country so desperately needed.

Late Medieval Life

As an adult, Henry VI established Eton College and King College, Cambridge. These actions revealed the king's interest in education. But education served the aristocracy and not the people. To add to the problems, the king's relatives had been engaging in

almost constant feuds since the date of his birth, finally erupting into civil war in 1453 with the birth of Henry's heir. This event led to a war that would last thirty years. During this period, the crown shifted several times between the Yorkist faction and the Lancastrians. Each side of the war had both their dissenters and their supporters, but both of these groups were quick to shift their allegiance if it appeared that the battle had been lost or, perhaps, won. During all this fighting, there was little change for the English peasant. The feudal system of life offered little benefit to anyone, except the aristocracy. The peasant owned neither himself nor his property. Absolute control resided with the landowner, who simply increased demand of his workers when he needed additional capital outlay, as owners frequently did. There were no accommodations for illness or death. As the poor suffered, the wealthy became even richer. This condition culminated in another peasant's revolt in 1450 and the peasant's march on London. Although there was some small blood shed during this revolt, there was little practical change. The influence of the Hundred Years War and the English civil wars led to increased lawlessness. There were many thefts, more than in any other period. Merchants were dishonest, selling shoddy goods and cheating their customers. The law was corrupt, with bribery too commonplace to ignore. The seas were filled with pirates and the highways with robbers. Greediness and a desire for even more money motivated much of what passed for English society. There was little to stop the common criminal, except the efforts of those citizens who retained some core of decency.

In spite of all this corruption, many people, mostly those who were poor and who lived as peasants, maintained the honestly and goodness that sustained England through this period. For the people of the late medieval period, the Catholic Church was the center of their lives. Its teaching guided all their actions, and its rules provided people with a pattern upon which to base all behaviors. The teachings of the church and its masses were in Latin, which few except the most learned could understand. Thus, the church held a position of authority that could not be challenged. Its representatives were charged with interpreting the word of God to the people, who trusted in their clergy. The people relied on the church to provide their moral compass, and although there was much corruption in the church, its authority still helped to maintain order. The Catholic Church still maintained a strong hold on England at the beginning of the sixteenth century. But the fist stirrings of the Reformation were being felt in Europe, and by the early sixteenth century, the Catholic church's rule in England had ended.

The end of the fifteenth century marked the end of the medieval period in England. The sixteenth century brought with it the first of the Tudor kings and a period of relative peace following the civil wars that had plagued England during much of the preceding century. Although it was still present in smaller, yearly outbreaks, the threat of the Black Death, plague, had finally decreased. In short, England at the beginning of a new century had become a good place to live. The first of the Tudor kings, Henry VII, formed alliances with neighboring countries and trade flourished in London. The cloth for which English sheep were so famous became an important commodity for trade in Europe. But the coming of trade changed the face of England. Instead of a country largely composed of an agrarian culture, England, and especially London, became an important center of trade. Land for agricultural use was enclosed, and displaced rural families fled to the larger cities, where crowding, unemployment, and plague were a

greater problem. The feudal order was ending, as well, as knights on horseback, who became obsolete after Henry V, proved that there was a more efficient way to win a battle. Literacy increased, too, as moveable type made books and other printed material more available and literacy increased as more people learned to read.

The Move to the Renaissance

Fifty years before Malory's death, and after Henry the fifth's early death, his heir became his infant son, Henry VI, and control of the government lay in the hands of the infant's uncles. The plotting and fighting that resulted eventually led to civil war. There are clear comparisons to Arthur's death, which led to the dissolution of the Round Table and the end of that period of greatness in England's prehistory. With Henry V dead, the period of England's greatness was also diminished. England lost the newly won France and did not emerge as a stable and strong country again until Richard III's defeat at Bosworth Field in 1485, when Henry VII, the first of the Tudor kings, would bring England back to that former glory. But Thomas Malory could not predict that the world outside his prison would change so drastically as he sat writing in his prison in 1469. Instead, what awaited England was the end of the medieval period and the beginning of the English Renaissance, which could only come about with the end of war and the establishment of peace.

Critical Overview

Malory's epic *Le Morte d'Arthur* deviates from traditional romantic epics in that it is a prose work, rather than a poem. This choice may reflect Malory's own talents and preference for the prose format. There is little knowledge of Malory's education, but it is doubtful that he had any serious education. Prior to Gutenberg's success in 1454, there were few books, and so there is no reason to think that Malory had any practical access to the epic tradition, as it evolved from works such as *The Odyssey* or *The Aeneid*. These Greek and Roman epics had virtually disappeared from public view until the Renaissance made them more widely accessible. There is no evidence that Malory wrote any other works, but that does not diminish his accomplishment in writing *Le Morte d'Arthur* . With this work, Malory functions as a compiler, compiling all the stories associated with the Arthurian legends and assembling them in one book. As a compiler, Malory also places the stories in a more straightforward chronological format, which makes the work more accessible to the reader.

Initially, many of Malory's readers focused on proving or disproving the historical veracity of his work. In the initial printing, William Caxton devoted a considerable portion of his preface to arguing that Malory's work proved that King Arthur really did exist and that his exploits really were true. Caxton ignored the fact that Malory had no scholarly sources for his text. He had performed no research, and in fact, none existed that would have aided him. Instead, Malory relied upon the early French legends and a fourteenth century alliterative poem for information. None of these details bothered Caxton, who demonstrated that he had all the makings of a good salesman as he marketed the book to readers. Caxton's assertions in the text's preface made little difference anyway since the book helped to establish a national heritage, and that was more important than any search for the truth.

Malory's text does suggest that the English were in need of the many important morals emphasized by *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Arthur's establishment of the Round Table indicates a need for a code of conduct that will govern the land. His knights are bound by honor, both to king and God, ideas that are equally important to Malory's readers. Sir Galahad succeeds in the quest for the Holy Grail because he is pure and without sin. He never forgets that he serves God before he serves his king. While most modern readers would recognize that Malory is suggesting a moral code, not all of Malory's early readers embraced this view. In *The Scholemaster*, Roger Ascham condemns the morality of Arthur's knights:

> In our forefathers tyme, when Papistrie, as a standyng poole, couered and ouer.owed all England, fewe bookes were read in our tong, sauyng certaine bookes of Cheualrie, as they sayd, for pastime and pleasure, which, as some say, were made in Monasteries, by idle Monkes, or wanton Chanons: as for example, *Morte Arthure:* the whole pleasure of which booke standeth in two speciall poyntes, in open mans slaughter,

and bold bawdrye: in which booke those be
counted the noblest Knightes, that do kill most men
without any quarell, and commit fowlest aduoulteres
by sutlest shiftes.

In addition to the obvious attacks on the Catholic Church, which were common in many English texts printed after the Reformation, Ascham is leveling criticism on the knights' behavior. Interestingly, this is the same criticism Malory implies. Only the purest of the knights□Galahad, Bors, and Percival□succeed in the Grail Quest. The implication is clear: those knights who engage in adulterous behavior or who use their strength or talent with a sword in an unjust or murderous manner, will not be rewarded with God's blessing. Ascham apparently misses this point, but he undoubtedly was not alone. Although Malory's epic was popular as entertainment, quasi-history, or even a model of morality, it was not regarded as serious literature for some time. Eventually, *Le Morte d'Arthur* took a place in the literary canon and was recognized as a major influ-ential work. While Malory's book influenced many of the poets who followed him, such as Spenser and Tennyson, it also created an interest in the world of Knights, jousts, and courtly love. In this century, the Knights of the Round Table have spawned several films and even a musical. And finally, comparisons during the John Kennedy presidency to Arthur's Camelot, recalled the excitement and perfection of Arthur's rule, and later after it had ended, the brevity of his world.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
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- Critical Essay #6
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Critical Essay #1

Metzger has a Ph.D., and specializes in literature and drama at the University of New Mexico, where she is a Lecturer in the English Department and an Adjunct Professor in the University Honors Program. In this essay, she discusses how Le Morte d'Arthur *fulfills the requirements of the epic tradition while incorporating all the aspects of a domestic drama into the story line.*

Historically, the epic genre derives from the Greek tradition and is the oldest form of Greek literature, existing before drama or history developed. As it evolved from its Greek roots, the epic form was a continuous narrative poem that celebrated the achievements of one or more heroic individuals. Most frequently, the hero or heroes were important personages historically or traditionally. Their exploits, as recounted in the epic, were useful in establishing a national identity. For example, Homer uses Odysseus' journey and triumphs as a way to counter the current dismal picture of Greek life. *The Odyssey* reminded Homer's listeners of Greece's former greatness, and his stories offered hope that Greece would arise once again as a mighty force. Similarly, Virgil used *The Aeneid* to provide Rome with a glorious national history□something they needed very badly at that time. Thomas Malory does much the same thing with his story of Arthur and his Round Table. In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Malory provides a history of greatness for Britain's past and the hope of greatness for the future. Thus, it is not important whether Odysseus, Aeneas, or Arthur actually existed; instead, it is the need for a sense of national identity and the promise of the future that is in important in the classical epic genre.

The epic is ideally suited for the purpose of providing a national identity because it is most frequently used to recount the origins of a nation and to provide a sense of national pride. *Le Morte d'Arthur* offers the vast setting that is required: the creation of a nation and an early history of Britain. There are also the Knights of the Round Table, always prepared to do heroic deeds or set out on a divinely inspired quest. Malory includes supernatural forces in the personas of Merlin and the Lady of the Lake. The quest for the Holy Grail also provides an element of the supernatural, in the miracles, and in the creation of Galahad as a Christ figure. This latter element clearly demonstrates an adaptation of the classical epic style to the Christian era. However, Malory's most important deviation from the classical epic is his use of prose, instead of verse, to tell Arthur's story. Greek and Roman epics use narrative verse, and both Edmund Spenser and John Milton will use narrative verse in their great epics, but Malory probably lacks the education and intimate knowledge of Greek epic, with which Spenser and Milton are familiar. Perhaps because he does not know the exact formula, Malory creates a new style of epic, blending the classical epic to the French prose tradition, injecting the French courtly romances into the heroic proportions of the classical epic. What Malory creates is a domestic epic, one that recounts the creation of a great king, providing both the battles and the victories to support Arthur's greatness, but also including the domestic tragedy that leads to the destruction of both the heroic figure and all that he created.

There is yet one other way in which Malory modifies the classical epic form. Instead of just one heroic figure, Malory creates several. Gawain, Gareth, and Galahad are each heroic figures in their own way, each one having a significant role in the epic, and yet, not the central role. The commanding heroic presence is, of course, King Arthur. But he is nearly upstaged by the heroic presence of Sir Launcelot. In his essay, "The English Prose *'Morte,'*" C. S. Lewis notes that there are many elements of *Le Morte d'Arthur* that make it an epic. Although Lewis observes that Malory's heroes commit many barbaric acts, they also have a morality that guides them. Lewis calls this "the civilization of the heart," which provides "a fineness and sensitivity, a voluntary rejection of all the uglier and more vulgar impulses," that creates the heroic figure. If Arthur more closely fits the classical definition of the heroic protagonist, larger than life and of mythical heritage, Launcelot is the human counterpart. With Galahad assuming the Christ role, Launcelot is left to be Adam, a flawed but certainly human creation. Lewis observes that even Launcelot claims to be no better than lesser men, capable of sinning, as he does with Guinevere. Launcelot and Arthur present two disparate images of epic heroes. Together, these two men create an imposing presence, saving damsels in distress, performing good deeds, and winning battles. But one mortal woman undoes them, whom both love: Guinevere.

Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* offers something few other epics offer□an emphasis on women and the domestic sphere as a way to find salvation, as a way to complete a man's journey. However, some scholars would argue that it is the domestic sphere that hampers women in Malory's text and prevents them from enjoying the success that men enjoy. In her study of patriarchal marriage and courtly love, MaryLynn Saul argues that women in *Le Morte d'Arthur* are portrayed as sexually insatiable, overly aggressive, needy, and more concerned with acquiring property than with male happiness. Arthur, on the other hand, is portrayed as loyal to his men, rather than to any woman. But this is the way a classic epic hero is expected to behave. Odysseus and Aeneas always put loyalty to their men and to the mission before the needs of their women. In this respect, Arthur is performing as he should perform. Saul also points that when love affairs go badly, "the woman may find herself receiving all the blame." As an example, Saul cites Launcelot's many love affairs, which Saul says work to serve his ego. Saul declares that "the benefit of loving Launcelot goes not to the women but to Launcelot, who receives their praise and gains in reputation by the number of women who love him." However Launcelot's ego is in keeping with what Lewis observed□Launcelot's humanity and humanness; his propensity to sin is one of his most important defining characteristics. Although Saul is critical of the way Malory treats women, comparing his treatment to the patriarchal system in place during the medieval period, she concludes that medieval women, and probably medieval men, are captive to the social structure that governs their behavior. Thus, she seemingly excuses the very behavior she criticizes.

Not all critical studies of *Le Morte d'Arthur* find the women characters at such a disadvantage. In his essay on Guinevere, Edward Donald Kennedy argues that Guinevere escapes the typical outcome of other feminine characters. Guinevere, says Kennedy, can give Launcelot something that no male character can: salvation. She sacrifices her happiness with Launcelot to prevent his sinning with her, to save his soul. Kennedy reminds his readers that Launcelot's love for Guinevere kept him from

succeeding in the Grail Quest. Now in his love for the queen, he promises to devote his life to God, just as she has. Kennedy argues that Malory includes this final scene between the lovers as a way to provide Launcelot with a chance for salvation. After Guinevere is buried next to Arthur, Launcelot blames himself for their deaths. Like Aristotle's tragic hero, Launcelot is to be pitied because, in his grief over his mistakes, he is as human as any of Malory's readers. As Kennedy says, "[Malory] would not have had to read Aristotle to know that good people often make terrible mistakes and to realize it only after it is too late to do anything about it." The role of savior might have gone to Galahad, who, as the Christ figure, should have been able to save his father. Kennedy observes that "on the Grail Quest women had been depicted as a stumbling block on the road to salvation." Launcelot failed to find salvation from the quest because of his love for Guinevere, but now in their final scene together, Guinevere provides what Launcelot could not have otherwise achieved. Kennedy says that Guinevere emerges as a hero when she does what the male heroes could not: lead Launcelot to salvation. His choice to reject the secular life and marriage and, instead, embrace the church was the clearest way to redemption in the medieval world. Guinevere succeeds where men have failed, as a woman who leads Arthur's greatest knight to choose God.

Unlike Homer's *Odyssey* or Virgil's *Aeneid*, Malory creates a human woman in the image of the epic goddesses, a woman of complexity who is capable of leading a man to redemption. Where Odysseus has the goddess Athena to assist him in his journey, and Aeneas has the goddess Venus to led help when needed, Launcelot has only the love of an ordinary mortal woman. In a way, this change toward the mortal reflects the Christianizing of the World. In the pre-Christian world, Odysseus and Aeneas journey toward their homes or toward a new home. But in the Christian world, the journey is toward salvation. This is but one way that Malory adapts the epic tradition to fit his purposes and to fit the requirements of the Christian era.

Two hundred years after Thomas Malory composed *Le Morte d'Arthur*, John Milton used the traditional epic form to explore a domestic romance, between man and woman in *Paradise Lost*. Milton's use of the epic is more pure to the genre than that of Malory, but, like Malory, Milton saw the connection between the epic and the domestic. Malory took the love triangle between Arthur, Guinevere, and Launcelot and turned a domestic tragedy into an epic romance. Appearing as it does at the end of the fifteenth century, *Le Morte d'Ar-thur* straddles the move from the Medieval Period into the English Renaissance. Malory's text was, then, the last old and the first modern domestic tragedy of this period. In the five hundred years since *Le Morte d'Arthur* appeared, the domestic tragedy has become a staple of theatre and fiction, while in the twentieth century, Malory's text has adapted effortlessly to both novel and film. Whether he knew it or not, Thomas Malory created the first steps toward making domestic romance a legitimate topic of poets, playwrights, and novelists.

Source: Sheri E. Metzger, for *Epics For Students*, Gale, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In her chapter "Adultery and Killing in La Mort le roi Artu," *Sarah Kay analyzes the unique representation and use of adultery in* La Mort *as it relates to the taking of life, not property, and how its treatment becomes important to poignant actions in the work.*

Insofar as adultery is considered wrongful, in medieval texts, it is often because it is connected in some way with an offence against property. This is either because of the importance laid on legitimate inheritance (which in turn requires wives to be faithful to their husbands), or because of the tendency to see women as themselves a form of property. In *La Mort le roi Artu* (*The Death of King Arthur*), however, adultery is presented in relation not to property but to the taking of life. How and why this is so is what this chapter will explore.

The *Mort* is the last work in the great early thirteenth-century compilation known as the *Prose Lancelot*, and describes the decline and fall of Arthur's kingdom. The adultery between Arthur's queen Guenevere and his greatest knight Lancelot plays a key role in this apocalyptic narrative, since it leads to the estrangement of Lancelot and Arthur. When Arthur pursues Lancelot abroad, he entrusts his kingdom to Mordred, who usurps it for himself; Arthur feels unable to call on Lancelot to assist him against Mordred, and so his army perishes along with Mordred's.

In the early part of the *Mort*, Arthur is induced by court spies to ask himself repeatedly whether Lancelot and Guenevere are guilty of adultery. But he is also called upon to approve legal challenges against both of them for wrongful killing. For both have caused death, in episodes which present striking parallels. The victims in both cases are knights who have similar names (Guenevere kills Gaheris, Lancelot kills Gaheriet), and both are commemorated by inscriptions put up by members of the court. The brother of each victim wants to avenge his death: Mador de la Porte obliges Arthur to put Guenevere on trial; Gawain's love for Lancelot turns to implacable hostility as he pressures Arthur to go to war against Lancelot, and eventually challenges him to single combat. Then again, each of the killings could be described as accidental. Guenevere hands Gaheris a poisoned fruit which was prepared by someone else (Arvalan) and intended for Gawain; she was completely unaware that it was poisoned. Similarly Lancelot strikes down Gaheriet, who is his dear friend, without recognising him in the confusion of rescuing the queen. Finally, when each of the avenging brothers (Mador, Gawain) obtains a judicial duel (or approximation to one, in Gawain's case), he is pitted against Lancelot who fights first on behalf of the queen and then on his own behalf, and on both occasions wins. Although much of the romance is about efforts to ascertain whether or not Lancelot and the queen are lovers, attempts to entrap them are not successful. Thus Lancelot and the queen are never required legally to defend themselves as adulterers, only as killers. The killings, it seems, function as a displacement of the crime of adultery, and also as a narrative metaphor for it.

This metaphorical dimension is established textually by the close association that exists in each case between the question of adultery and the alleged wrongful killing. In the

first case, that of Guenevere and the poisoned fruit, the link is established from the outset. Arthur has returned to court from the castle of his sister Morgan, who has shown him Lancelot's paintings which reveal his love for Guenevere. And so for Arthur 'there was never a time again when he was not more suspicious of the queen than he had been, because of what he had been told'. Only two sentences later those suspicions find an object, as Arvalan hands the fruit to Guenevere and Gaheris dies. Meanwhile, Lancelot has been dismissed from the court by the queen as a result of a misunderstanding, a fact which causes Boors to curse the love between them. The interweaving of these episodes associates the themes of love and death.

A similar convergence of these two themes occurs in the case of Lancelot's accidental killing of Gaheriet. It is causally linked with the adultery plot, since it takes place while Lancelot is rescuing the queen from execution. When later Lancelot hands her back to Arthur, he seeks to justify himself with respect both to the queen, and to the death of Gawain's brothers, so that the issues of adultery and the killing are linked again: 'Sire, behold the queen, whom I return to you, who would earlier have been killed as a result of the disloyalty of members of your household, had I not taken the risk of rescuing her. [□] And it is better that they should perish in their treachery than that she should die'. He goes on: 'If I loved the queen with foolish passion, as you were given to understand, I would not give her back to you, not for months, and you would not win her back by force'. But Gawain pulls the discussion back to Lancelot's guilt for Gaheriet's death: 'You can be sure that you will not lack for war [□] for you will have it, and mightier than you ever did before, and it will last until my brother Gaheriet, whom you wrongfully killed, will be avenged on your own body; and I would rather see your head cut off than have the whole world'.

These links between adultery and killing shift the ground on which the adultery is considered. Most characters in the text want to know whether Lancelot and the Queen are committing adultery as a matter of fact, not how to judge them if they are. For Arthur, adultery calls for automatic condemnation. Gawain, Guerrehés and Gaheriet prefer that he should not know, rather than cause enmity in the court. We readers, however, know that the couple are lovers; our problem, rather, is what attitude to adopt to this. As the story goes on, an increasing number of characters know the truth about their relationship, and some (such as Lancelot's kin) are clearly loyal to them. But no character, whether in the know or not, discusses the question which is uppermost in the reader's mind, namely how we should view their adultery. On the contrary, there is a gap between the discourse that maintains, of Lancelot, that he is the best knight in the world because of his love for the queen, and the discourse lamenting that, because of his love for the queen, a terrible cataclysm will engulf the Arthurian kingdom. If the text seeks to evaluate the fact of their relationship, it does so via the thunderous silence between these two positions. In the matter of the killings, however, the facts are agreed between readers and characters; it is their evaluation which is in question for all of us together. Both the judicial duels address the question of whether the killers are guilty of a disloyal and treacherous act. That is, they ask with respect to the killings what the reader might ask with respect to the adultery. In this way, the metaphorical importance of the killings becomes both more obvious, and more interesting.

The Guenevere trial considers disloyalty and treachery from the point of view of intention. Before the combat, Mador makes his formal accusation to Lancelot: 'Sir knight, I am ready to prove that she killed my brother disloyally and treacherously', a charge Lancelot rebuts with an important change of wording: 'And I am ready [□] to defend her on the ground that she never intended disloyalty or treachery'. Lancelot's formulation is, for Gawain, an illumination of Guenevere's innocence. Arthur agrees that this new perspective makes it likely Guenevere's champion will win. And Guenevere herself repeats the winning formula: 'I never intended disloyalty or treachery,' she says. Win Lancelot duly does; the queen is exonerated. If, as I have argued, the trial is a metaphorical displacement of anxiety about adultery, can we infer from Guenevere's acquittal that she is also to be exonerated sexually because she 'never intended disloyalty or treachery'? Is the text driving a wedge between intention and result, and inclining us to base our moral judgements on the former not the latter? The fact of Gaheris's death is undeniable, but Guenevere has been found innocent because she did not mean to cause it; likewise, although her adultery has dire political consequences, since she did not intend them, should she be acquitted of responsibility for them too?

One could feel more confident about making this inference if the text were more committed to the concept of intention. When members of the court first find Gaheris's body, the question of intent is raised, and Guenevere protests her ignorance that the fruit was poisoned, but Arthur counters: 'Whatever the circumstances in which you gave it to him, the outcome is evil and intolerable, and I greatly fear that you will suffer more for it than you imagine'. No one believes Guenevere to be innocent or is prepared to dishonour himself defending her. The consensus view is unambiguously expressed by Gawain: 'for we know very well that the queen killed the knight, as she stands accused; I saw it and so did many others'. Even Lancelot who did not see it believes her to be guilty: 'for I know truly, from what I have heard, that I shall be on the side of wrong and Mador on the side of right'. He fights only because he loves the queen, and her reputation is hitherto unblemished. The outcome, not the intent, of her deed is what mesmerises everyone's attention.

So Lancelot's all-important formulation at the trial, which wins support and eventual acquittal for the queen, is curiously inadvertent; while the switch of position by Gawain and Arthur is almost somnambulistic. In fact, the text seems more inclined to dull the distinctions between intent, outcome, and responsibility than to illumine them. This obfuscation reaches a peak when Arthur, shortly afterwards, reproaches Gawain for having withheld the truth of the queen's adultery from him. Gawain's reply, 'Indeed, my treachery never did you any harm', is simply mind-boggling. Has he forgotten what treachery is? His use of the term implies that he meant no ill, had no ill effect, and bears no responsibility: the word becomes empty of meaning.

Throughout the *Mort,* the capacity of the characters to form, or respond to, intention is extremely limited. The text contains several examples of unintended killing or wounding apart from the two cases I am concerned with. They include Lancelot being wounded twice (by Boors who failed to recognise him at the Winchester tournament, and a huntsman who missed his intended quarry in the forest); and Arthur killing his last-but-

one survivor by hugging him too hard. On each occasion questions of intent and moral responsibility are dimly raised but they never get anywhere. Thus Boors tells Lancelot that he ought not to be blamed for wounding him since Lancelot was fighting incognito, and Lancelot agrees but nevertheless remains full of reproaches. Elizabeth Edwards has described the characters in medieval prose romance as resembling 'a distinctive mark, or graving, on the surface of the text [□ which is] of insufficient capacity to accommodate more than one code at a time'. In the *Mort,* they seem able to focus either on intent or on outcome but not on both at the same time, as they would need to do in order to evaluate the ethical significance of one *vis-à-vis* the other. Guenevere's trial may involve the question of intent, but it no more succeeds in making it a determinate issue than these other episodes do. We cannot infer from it that intent defines the moral horizon of action in the *Mort*. Does the text, then, have anything clearer to say on the question of justice?

When Mador enters the judicial duel, he does not know who his opponent is. Only when he has been defeated does Lancelot declare his identity. Mador then protests to the king: 'Sire, you have deceived me, setting my lord Lancelot against me'. In the Gawain-Lancelot encounter over the death of Gaheriet, the question is again raised whether the outcome of a trial depends less on what is being fought over than on who is fighting. Gawain sends a messenger to challenge Lancelot to single combat. The messenger thinks he must be mad to fight such a 'good and seasoned knight' and Arthur, repeating these same words, also fears that Gawain cannot win, but Gawain insists that justice will be done, for right makes a weak knight prevail, whereas wrong makes a strong one lose. In the course of the combat Gawain's strength grows and ebbs, so that he seems first likely to win, then headed for defeat. Does he lose because his strength declines, or because he was wrong to fight in the first place?

The Gawain-Lancelot combat echoes the concerns of the Guenevere trial. Once again, the charge involves killing 'treacherously and disloyally'. Different opinions are expressed as to which of the two, Gawain and Lancelot, is on the side of right, and Lancelot himself, acting as his own champion, is as diffident about the justice of his cause as he was when fighting for Guenevere. He prepares himself for the duel by confession and vigil, 'for he was very afraid lest ill befall him against lord Gawain, on account of the death of his brothers whom he had killed'. But rather than foregrounding the status of intent in relation to the notion of right, what is at stake here is the status of right itself. What is it and how do you know when you have it? Many of the *Mort*'s critics seem persuaded either that Lancelot clearly has justice on his side, or that he clearly does not. R. H. Bloch, for example, writes: 'Lancelot's victorious support of a merely adequate cause against Mador and a patently indefensible one against Gawain can only be interpreted as the triumph of might over right'. Convinced that Lancelot's causes are undeserving, Bloch is obliged to see the *Mort* as a world in which belief has been lost in the efficacy of an immanent God to achieve justice through human intermediaries. For other critics, however, Lancelot is just as obviously in the right, as borne out by his victories.

Such critical responses, it seems to me, make too much sense of a text which (just as in the murky issues of intent and outcome) clouds and inhibits judgements; the critics are

reliant on notions of right and justice being transparent whereas in the *Mort* they are at best dimly lit, at worst wholly opaque. For justice in the *Mort* is linked to an irresolvable problematic of how far the world is governed by providence and how far by chance or fortune; and how far we could possibly know which, or what that meant. This is a problem on which, as Karen Pratt has shown, the characters can shed no light.

> They are constantly 'reasoning why'—hence the frequent references by them to God, Fortune, Destiny, and their own guilt or sin. Yet they never reach a conclusion. This is because not only is it not man's place to reason why, it is also a futile activity, since it is evident that the world of the flesh is subject to laws which are far less just and predictable than those that govern the salvation of an individual's soul.

It is also a problem from which the text as a whole retreats into secular gloom, reflecting 'the equivocal attitude of so many secular writers in the Middle Ages towards the problem of explaining history and the rise and fall of great civilisations'. Thus while it is true that Lancelot emerges from his second duel having apparently demonstrated to Gawain's satisfaction that he did not kill Gaheriet 'treacherously and disloyally', this duel does not clarify our ethical attitude towards Lancelot either as a killer, or as a lover. It merely leaves the whole field of ethical inquiry darker and more impenetrable.

So far I have considered the trial scenes of Guenevere and Lancelot as metaphors—inconclusive ones—for how readers might attempt to put them on trial for adultery. I now want to examine the crime with which they are charged. Why are they represented as killers? What do adultery and killing have in common?

The deaths for which Lancelot and Guenevere are tried (even if they are not found guilty) are only two among the indefinitely many to which their adultery might be said to contribute. For the *Mort* portrays an increasingly violent world, its conflicts aggravated by the rift between Lancelot and Arthur. The text opens with a series of tournaments, but these soon give way to genuine warfare in the wake of the attempted entrapment of the lovers and Lancelot's rescue of Guenevere. Arthur finds himself at war, successively, with Lancelot, the Ro-mans, and Mordred. Armies are wiped out as civilisations crumble. Fighting dominates the text, and killing becomes necessary and unavoidable, simultaneously appalling and banal. (Bresson's 1974 film *Lancelot du Lac*, based on the *Mort*, excellently captures the frenzied meaninglessness of violence in this text.) In identifying the lovers as killers, then, the text both integrates their adultery to the *Mort* 's cataclysmic canvas, and represents it as (literally) lethal.

The sinister and guilt-laden implications of this contrast markedly with the role of the philtre in the *Tristan* story, guarantor of the lovers' innocence. As the philtre marks equality between Tristan and Iseut, so the striking parallels between the deaths of Gaheris and Gaheriet signal the parity between Lancelot and Guenevere. But while the *Tristan* lovers drink the love-potion together, Guenevere, as if in reminiscence of Eve's role in the Fall, offers a poisoned fruit to someone else. And while the *Tristan* potion is a

presage of the lovers' eventual death, in the *Mort* the lovers themselves are oddly immune to the fatality they are associated with. In fact, their killings are a curious reversal of the anticipated story-line, namely that *they* should be the ones to be killed. As in other Celtic-influenced texts, the penalty for adultery in the *Mort* is death, but Arthur is prevented from executing Guenevere. The couple might have shared the fate of other literary adulterers (such as Iseut) who die of their own accord, as though in acknowledgement of society's condemnation of them, but they do not. Like all the major characters in the *Mort*, Lancelot and Guenevere are at times so overwhelmed by grief or anger that they are convinced they will die, but only the maid of Escalot, much earlier in the text, is as good as her word and actually dies from her grief whereas Lancelot and Guenevere don't. Instead the plot effects a curious exchange between killing the lovers and having them kill others. Their enemies (except for Morgan) predecease them, dying violent deaths, whereas Guenevere does not die until very nearly the end and Lancelot outlives virtually everyone. In a text where death is so commonplace, the lovers are almost magically protected from it.

Not only that; the lovers also avoid deliberate killing. Lancelot does not kill Mador; he deliberately saves Arthur's life; and he refuses to kill Gawain ('I could not do it [□] for my heart to which I belong could not agree to it on any account'. Although the best knight in the world, he actually kills very few people. The crimes of which he and Guenevere are accused consist in killing outside socially prescribed norms; it is not the deaths but the aberrant circumstances of them that lead to their being perceived as 'treacherous and disloyal', and if Lancelot had lost his two fights he would have been made to die a socially sanctioned death. Killing, the text seems to suggest, is inevitable and universal, and yet society polices it in such a way that accidental killing calls for legal investigation whereas killing on purpose does not. Adultery, likewise, is love in the wrong place, and thus perhaps only an arbitrarily censured instance of universal and inevitable behaviour. The guilt involved is one of social convention, not absolute value.

Indeed, the 'guilt' of the 'adultery killings' in the *Mort* begins to look quite innocent when one compares them with what could be called the 'incest killings', the reciprocal slaying of Mordred and Arthur. Mordred, the text reveals, is both son and nephew to Arthur, a child incestuously conceived with his sister. In Arthur's absence Mordred usurps his throne and tries to marry his wife, thus compounding treachery with attempted bigamy and further incest. Despite repeated warnings that this war will bring his reign and his kingdom to an end, Arthur seeks out Mordred and each deals the other his death-blow. Here is a striking instance of how sexual crime and killing can be linked: this tight-knit family drama crystallises Freudian preoccupation by economically combining transgression of the two most sacred taboos: parricide and incest.

By contrast, both Lancelot and Guenevere (their adultery apart) show exemplary love and respect for Arthur and his authority. By sparing Arthur's life Lancelot avoids Mordred's parricide and by handing Guenevere back voluntarily desists from sexual transgression. As Méla says, because '[Lancelot] chooses to live henceforth in a state of unfulfilled desire out of respect for the Name of the Father [□] the essential achievement of *La Mort Artu* is to have integrated love for the king into Lancelot's love for the queen'. Compared with the meaningful deaths of Arthur and Mordred, the killings for which

Lancelot and Guenevere are tried are impressively insignificant. Their victims are neither figures of oppression (such as a father) nor are they rivals. There is no psychodrama involved: on the contrary Gaheris, recipient of the poisoned apple, has no connection whatever with the adultery plot, while Gaheriet was doing his best to keep out of it. Gaheris is the medieval equivalent of today's 'innocent bystander', unheard of until killed. Gaheriet is slightly more prominent, but still a relatively minor figure. Each is simply the wrong person in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The random character of these deaths in contrast with the Arthur-Mordred confrontation seems to indicate that anyone could die at any time. And the fact that they die by accident corresponds with the lovers' lack of control over the rest of their lives. The lovers' killings, in other words, can be read as a projection of their own mortality and frailty, a condition they share with the other characters in the text. Here at last the literal and the metaphorical converge: death is literally about human mortality and frailty, while adultery is their ethical expression. The poisoned fruit serves as a textual marker of this convergence, since the Genesis intertext links sexuality with human weakness and death.

This essay has grappled with the lack of clear interpretation available to readers of the *Mort*. We are offered the trials as metaphors for our inquiry into adultery; and yet they don't lead very far, and when one trial is over, we start again with the other and a further set of questions. The equation between adultery and killing, which seems so sinister and guilt-ridden, conveys in fact a curious innocence which makes it difficult to evaluate. I think, however, that the way that the point eludes the reader *is* the point, and that we are invited, in reading this text, to contemplate a depressing portrayal of human limitation. This is a penumbral text which, as it narrates the demise of civilisation, looks back (via the episode of the poisoned fruit) to the time before civilisation began. In the intervening shadows, lacking the light of Eden or of heaven, we are uncertain about the ethical significance of intention and responsibility, guilt and sin, justice and truth. Love and death are worked together in a pessimistic duo, ingrained in the shallow experience of humanity, arbitrarily treated by society, fraught with violence, subject to uncontrollable intent and unpredictable outcome, and resistant to moral judgement.

Source: Sarah Kay, "Adultery and Killing in 'Le Mort le Roi Artu,'" in *Scarlet Letters: Fictions of Adultery from Antiquity to the 1990s*, edited by Nicholas White and Naomi Segal, MacMillan Press Ltd, 1997, pp. 34-44.

Critical Essay #3

In discussing La Mort le Roi Artu*, Donald McRae argues that while destiny is a major theme in the story, the theme of free choice plays an equal if not more important role and describes how this idea drives many of Arthur's actions and the consequential events of his decisions.*

In his *Etude sur la Mort le Roi Artu,* Jean Frappier has suggested that the "□ thème de Fortune□du Destin□est sans doute le thème majeur de *La Mort Artu*" ("□ theme of Fortune□of Destiny□is undoubtedly the major theme of *La Mort Artu*"). Elsewhere he restates this conviction when he refers to the "□ cercle de fatalité qui pèse sur son [Arthur's] royaume terrestre" ("circle of fatality that weighs heavily upon his [Arthur's] terrestrial kingdom"). Everything, he insists, gives the impression of tragic inevitability so that at times Fortune even seems to acquire a force all its own: "□ le destin est comme l'âme du roman; le thème en est traité avec assez de force et de profondeur pour que la *Mort Artu* □ puisse faire penser par endroits aux tragiques grecs ou au drame élisabéthain" ("destiny is, as it were, the soul of the romance. The theme is treated with enough force and profundity that the *Mort Artu* reminds one in places of Greek tragedy or Elizabethan drama"). There is no doubt about the importance of fate in the *Mort Artu*, but to suggest, as Frappier and others have done, that the role of this one motif is so striking that it dominates all others would seem to place too great an importance upon its function to the detriment of other important themes in the story. Indeed, consideration of the work essentially as a fate-tragedy is to ignore, or at least to play down, certain essential characteristics which contribute not only to the superb psychological portraits of which the mediaeval author has proved himself a master, but also to the very structure of the romance itself.

Without denying the slow but inexorable rotation of the Wheel of Fortune in turning the tide in the affairs of men, Eugène Vinaver, however, argues convincingly for a much more complex and subtle pattern of cause and event leading to the final catastrophe. In his discussion on the poetry of interlace, he draws attention not just to "□ one major cause, but [to] □ several concurrent causes," citing in addition to this theme: the withdrawal of divine protection from both Arthur and Lancelot; conflicts arising out of the divided loyalties which Lancelot feels toward Guinevere on the one hand and Arthur and Gauvain on the other, as well as Mordred's incestuous birth. These, he indicates, are a part of the intricate setting, the vast design, without which there can be neither plot nor characterization. This complex fabric provides a "□ continuous and constantly unfolding panorama stretching as far into the past as into the future□such are the things that hold the reader spell-bound as he progresses through these interwoven 'branches' and themes." Destiny, he asserts, is inextricably linked with character, and destiny means "□ the convergence of simultaneously developed themes, now separated, now coming together, varied, yet synchronized, so that every movement of this carefully planned design remains charged with echoes of the past and premonitions of the future." Vinaver's arguments are eminently reasonable, accounting, as they do, for the complexity and apparent confusion of the many themes of the *Mort Artu* and lifting it above the state of a mere fate-tragedy to which the others would seem to relegate it.

There is, however, one essential theme which Vinaver does not take into account and which plays a major role in the development of character and plot in the *Mort Artu*. I refer to a critical measure of free choice, granted to Arthur in particular, which permeates the story from beginning to end. It is this measure of free choice which lies behind all of Arthur's decisions, influencing and directing his behaviour in the various situations in which he finds himself. If, to the thirteenth-century mind, his fall from grace is unavoidable "□ as a result of Arthur's rise to excessive heights of success and fame" the introduction of this theme of free choice clearly provides a tangible and logical foundation for the inevitability of that process. In this fact lies "□ the convergence of simultaneously developed themes" to which Vinaver has referred. There is absolutely nothing inconsistent in that. However, the role of free choice is not a simple one in the *Mort Artu*. The King's inability or, more frequently, his unwillingness to distinguish between the appearance and the reality of a given situation directly affects his subsequent course of action. Consequently, this clouds his vision and prevents him from choosing wisely and correctly. When one realizes that the decisions which Arthur must make are invariably imposed upon him during a time of crisis in the story, it is relatively easy to understand how the effect of these decisions gradually builds up to the tragic battle on the Salisbury Plain where not only King Arthur but also the entire Kingdom of Logres are destroyed. This, then, is the essential theme of the romance to which we have referred: confronted by a need to make a decision in a moment of crisis, Arthur is unwilling or unable to see the situation as it really is and invariably chooses the wrong course of action. It is not Fate acting wilfully and arbitrarily, but Arthur himself, who is ultimately responsible for his own demise.

In the opening pages of *La Mort le Roi Artu*, King Arthur is confronted by the insistence of his nephew, Agravain, that his Queen, Guinevere, is involved in an adulterous affair with Lancelot del Lac. Even though the situation is a recurrence of an earlier illicit relationship which Lancelot has vowed to terminate *[Queste del Saint Graal],* Arthur is outwardly struck by disbelief and, at least initially, refuses to pay heed to the accusations. In spite of the fact that Agravain's suspicions are well-founded, the King's angry rejections of this contention as totally without justification would seem to indicate the impossibility of such a relationship. Arthur seems certain that Lancelot could never betray their friendship in so base a way, and yet, in virtually the same breath, he belies this apparent conviction and vacillates: "□ et certes se il onques le pensa, force d'amors li fist fere, encontre qui sens ne reson ne peut avoir duree" ("and indeed if he ever did, he was compelled by the force of love, which neither common-sense nor reason can resist"). Aware of the inherent dangers in Agravain's accusation, Arthur vehemently denies the possibility of such behaviour on Lancelot's part, but in spite of his protestations, he knows there may well be something in his nephew's words. Thus, he immediately leaves himself this opening, but in so doing, he contradicts his own certainty in the matter.

This is but the first hint of many such instances in which the King proves himself at best indecisive and hesitant, at worst weak and pitiful. He is ill at ease in this situation, and his anger that he must do something is clearly evident. Thus when Agravain pursues the matter further and suggests that Arthur have the two lovers closely watched in order to prove the validity of these accusations, Arthur finds himself in a dilemma from which

there is no easy escape. Although he has the choice whether or not to act upon Agravain's information, he closes his eyes to the truth of the matter because he is immediately and painfully aware of the consequences for the Kingdom should they prove to be true. Arthur does not want to know the truth and this is why he neither approves nor disapproves of Agravain's plans, for any confrontation with Lancelot del Lac at this particular moment would hardly be in the best interests either of Arthur or of the Kingdom of Logres. The quest for the Holy Grail has just been brought to a conclusion, but only at the cost of the lives of many of Arthur's knights. Indeed, aware of the crisis now facing them, and in a last desperate attempt to bolster the failing morale of a sadly-depleted Round Table, the King has just announced a tournament. Conflict with Lancelot at this time would surely spell disaster to his hopes for a rebirth of his Kingdom. It is abundantly clear to him that the well-being of the Round Table is directly dependent upon the choice he must now make. Consequently Arthur avoids taking the firm course of action necessary to discover the truth for himself, and at the risk of his honour, he is forced to close his eyes to the reality of Agravain's accusations, all the while trying to convince himself that they are not true.

That night there follows a period of deep soul-searching during which the King must wrestle with his problem. Ultimately, his predicament being what it is, he is able to persuade himself that there is no truth to Agravain's contention and therefore no need for action on his part, and yet, in spite of this, his actions in leaving the Queen behind when he goes to the tournament, "□ por esprouver la mençonge Agravain" ("to put Agravain's accusation to the test"), clearly show that he is deceiving himself in order to avoid coming to terms with reality.

Although this psychological aspect of Arthur's character is important in itself, it has further implications for the structure of the romance. His moments of weakness, his vacillations and self-deception invariably occur in times of crisis during which the necessity for decisive action, the hallmark of the young King Arthur, is of the utmost importance. Here, as elsewhere, Arthur is faced by a freedom of choice between two distinct alternatives: the one centered in reality, the other in the illusion of reality. It is the latter, however, the deception of appearances, assuming the form of deliberate distortion or misinterpretation of the facts and half-truths, which invariably holds sway at these crucial moments in the story and ultimately brings about the final hours of the Round Table on the Salisbury Plain.

If the hatred of Agravain for Lancelot has been the impetus for Arthur's dilemma, his meeting with his sister, Morgan, further complicates the situation. Like Agravain, she, too, is motivated by hatred, but her means of revealing to Arthur the deceit of the two lovers whom she would destroy is even more carefully and deliberately planned. The proof with which she thus confronts him with all the supernatural powers at her disposal is, therefore, all the more difficult for him to ignore. Even the circumstances of the King's arrival at Morgan's castle would seem to suggest something more than mere chance; the subsequent systematic way in which she sets about to convince Arthur to take action against Lancelot and Guinevere would tend to reinforce this assertion. After his stay in Tauroc, Arthur enters the forest in which Morgan once imprisoned Lancelot del Lac. As he does so, he feels unwell and shortly thereafter he and his company have lost

their way. The suspicion that the supernatural powers of Morgan are already at work is strengthened by the sound of the horn. Although it is later made clear that the King is tired after a long ride from Tauroc, the fact that no further issue is made of Arthur's illness suggests that it was a transitory state, probably induced by the supernatural powers of Morgan herself and followed up by the sound of the horn and the dazzling display in the castle itself. Clearly Morgan has laid the groundwork for her plan most carefully.

At first she tells him no more than is necessary for her purposes until such time as she is prepared to reveal her identity to him and to allow him to discover the pictures on the wall of the room to which he has been brought. Having once examined these pictures and deciphered them, Arthur is forced to consider the truth of the message they convey. Significantly, he is not yet prepared to accept the reality of the evidence that they present, for once he has recovered from the initial shock of his discovery, he immediately questions their authenticity. The consequences of the situation and the need for a decision, however, are obvious to him; his own honour and the well-being of the Kingdom of Logres are at stake. And so, in the light of Morgan's carefully prepared arguments which corroborate the message of the pictures on the wall, Arthur declares that he sees "toute aparissant" ("clearly") and that he is more convinced than ever of the need to act. In spite of the overwhelming evidence before him and in spite of his apparent resolve to take the steps that the situation demands, Arthur still refuses to admit the truth to himself and continues to seek a way out of the unpleasant circumstances which a deliberate decision on his part would bring about. "Et *se* il est einsi □" (53:59: the italics are my own; "*If* it is as □" [p. 73]). And again:

"Je en ferai tant □ que *se* li uns ainme l'autre de fole
amor, si com vos me dites, que ge les ferai prendre ensemble
ains que cis mois soit passez, *se* il avient que Lancelos
viegne a court dedens celui terme." (the italics are my own)

("I shall make sure □ that *if* one loves the other adulterously
as you say, I shall have them caught together before the end
of the month, *if* Lancelot should return to court by then."

Putting his crown on the line, he promises punishment to both, *if* they are guilty. It is obvious that Arthur has a choice how he will react: the tragic truth of the matter is that whichever way he moves, he stands to lose. Should he fail to take action to avenge his shame, his own position as King would be jeopardized, his authority a sham and his honour degraded. If, however, Arthur were to move against Lancelot he is certain that the reverberations of his actions would be sufficient to bring about the final destruction of the Round Table as he knows it. This is for him the greatest fear of all.

This latter consideration should not be underestimated. Subtle but repeated references to the glories of the past punctuate the entire text and make obvious the concern of an old man for a world□the only one he has ever lived for□which is slowly but surely crumbling about him. Nowhere is this more clearly stated than in the scene in which

Gauvain and Arthur come upon the boat containing the corpse of the maid of Escalot. Gauvain remarks to the King:

"Par foi □ se ceste nacele est ausi bele dedenz com dehors, ce seroit merveilles; a poi que ge ne di que les aventures recommencent."

("In faith □ if that boat is as beautiful inside as it is outside, it would be a marvel; it is almost as if adventures were beginning again."

Both are aware that they are living in the twilight of the Round Table.

When Arthur finally leaves Morgan and returns to Camelot, he is surprised to learn that Lancelot has spent but one day at court. As a result he becomes confused why this should be so if he loves the Queen adulterously. More than willing to accept the situation at face value, Arthur immediately finds in this just cause to doubt the words of both Agravain and Morgan:

"□ et c'estoit une chose qui moult metoit le cuer le roi a aise et qui moult li fesoit mescroire les paroles que il ot oïes □."

("This was a thing which went a long way to set the king's mind at rest and which led him to discount what he had heard□.")

His escape from reality is short-lived.

If one were to apply Jean Rychner's linguistic analysis of the *Mort Artu* to this situation in order to substantiate these arguments even further, the willingness of the King to close his eyes to the truth would become adequately clear. Rychner suggests:

Entre le pn sj sans conjonction [sujet pronominal: i.e., le pronom personnel, il, ele, et le pronom démonstratif cil, cele] et le pn sj avec conjonction on peut être sensible à la même différence qu'entre sj nm [sujet nominal] et 'et' + sj nm: plus de calme et de ponderation d'un coté, et de l'autre plus de familiarité et de vivacité.

(Between the pronominal subject without a conjunction [i.e., the personal pronoun, *il*, *ele*, and the demonstrative pronoun *cil*, *cele*] and the pronominal subject with a conjunction, one can be aware of the same difference that exists between a nominal subject and "and" + nominal subject: more calm and equilibrium on the one hand, and on the other more intimacy and vivacity.

Elsewhere he refers to the "□ entrée plus vive et plus dramatique □" ("more lively and dramatic opening") of such phrases, and "Le syntagme en 'et il' de même sujet est

habituellement prospectif et pourvu d'une suite" ("The syntagma in "et il" of the same subject is usually prospective and provided with a continuation"). The thrust of the story is, therefore, clearly in the direction of this clause rather than the preceding one and thus toward Arthur's attempts to discredit what he has heard and seen. He continues to close his eyes to the truth in the hope that the threatened confrontation with Lancelot will somehow disappear. The presence of the "et" which introduces this section looks ahead to the continuing attempts of the King to avoid making an unwanted decision.

The episode of the poisoned fruit follows and Lancelot is called upon to prove the innocence of the Queen in the death of Gaheris. Once he has done so, however, he falls more hopelessly in love with her: "Et se Lancelos avoit devant ce amee la reïne, il l'ama orendroit plus qu'il n'avoit onques mes fet a nul jor, et ele ausint lui□." ("And if Lancelot had loved the queen before, from now on he loved her more than he had ever done in the past, and so did she him"). Unfortunately, their lack of discretion makes this illicit relationship obvious to almost everyone and ultimately leads to yet another crisis.

To some extent this crisis provides an interesting contrast with the initial Arthur-Agravain episode, for this time, Agravain finds himself on somewhat firmer ground. By now, the gravity of the situation is clear and he deliberately allows Arthur to overhear the conversation between himself and his brothers. Once he has captured the King's attention, he then allows both Gaheriet and Gauvain to parry Arthur's questions in order to cover up the truth about Lancelot and Guinevere. In spite of the King's anger, neither will yield to Arthur's pressure and tell him what they have been discussing. Sig-nificantly, he reacts to their refusal in a totally irrational way, demanding to know their secret, first, on the oaths they have sworn to him, and then, threatening them on pain of death if they should fail to inform him. In spite of these angry words, neither Gaheriet nor Gauvain gives in and both leave the King's presence; Arthur does nothing about it. Left in the room with the others, Arthur asks them, begs them and finally, beside himself with rage, stands ready to strike Agravain dead with a blow from his sword. No longer in control of himself, Arthur shows signs of cracking under the strain of his dilemma. However, as soon as Agravain has finally told him what he wants to know, Arthur recoils from the truth he fears; subconsciously, he does not really want to hear the truth: "Comment, fet li rois, me fet donc Lancelos honte? De quoi est ce donc? Dites le moi□" ("What," said the king, "is Lancelot dishonoring me? What are you talking about? Tell me□"). One would almost think that he was hearing this news for the first time! When Agravain assures him of the facts, Arthur turns pale, and as earlier in the initial Agravain scene, as well as in the scene with Morgan, falls silent, lost in deep thought. He can no longer take refuge in appearances; the truth is out and the reality of the situation known: "□car il set bien de voir que, se Lancelos est pris a cest afere et il en reçoit mort, onques si grant tormente n'avint en ce païs por la mort d'un seul chevalier" "He knew perfectly well that if Lancelot were caught in adultery and put to death, there would be such torment in the country as had never before been caused by the death of a single knight". Once again in a position to make a choice (although admittedly the options open to him are not very attractive) Arthur is so emotionally involved because of the faithlessness of his wife, the deception of a friend, and the certain downfall of all his kingdom that he can hardly act with a clear and rational mind. Accepting the treacherous advice of Agravain, he rejects his loyal nephew, Gauvain, and from this

point onward, acting out of "desmesure" ("lack of moderation"), he swears revenge upon Lancelot and the Queen. Unlike Morgan, who finds herself forced to remind Arthur constantly of the steps he must take, Agravain no longer needs to goad him into action. He merely capitalizes on a situation from which Arthur cannot escape. Once the oath has been sworn to him, there can be no turning back□the crisis which must inevitably lead to bloodshed has been reached.

The death of Gaheriet, a direct result of Agravain's hatred for Lancelot, is significant, falling as it does almost exactly in the middle of *La Mort le Roi Artu*. Once again, appearances play an essential role in the progress of the plot and lead to an irreversible turning point in it. Gaheriet's death is a simple case of mistaken identity, for he is not who he seems to be or Lancelot would never have slain him willingly. This single event, originating in appearances, irrevocably alienates Gauvain and sets him off on his senseless quest for revenge upon Lancelot. This, in turn, marks the beginning of the end and that which Arthur fears more than anything else: a confrontation between himself on the one hand, and Lancelot and Ban's kin on the other. The King is quite aware of the inevitable consequences of such a conflict for the Kingdom of Logres.

Lancelot's love for the Queen, while obviously important in itself, finds its real significance, not in adultery, but in the fact that it threatens to bring about the confrontation which Arthur has sought to delay as long as possible. The King is prepared to close his eyes to the truth, to accept the appearances of the situation, as long as he can postpone the inevitable. The pity he betrays when he sentences Guinevere to death is indicative of the genuine love he still has for the Queen, while the anger he shows at Lancelot's good fortune in the tournament at Karahés is a reflection of his frustration that the very knight he loves most should be the catalyst in his dilemma. Indeed, there are times, in particular when Lancelot's actions seem to contradict the reality of the situation, when Arthur's vacillations would seem to suggest that he could almost live with the shame of the Queen's adultery if only he could somehow avoid the impending conflict with Lancelot. Let there be no mistake; it is not because Arthur fears Lancelot, but because he loves him and because he is quite aware of the consequences of his choice that he finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. From a structural point of view, it is important to note that the adulterous love affair plays a less significant role in the second half of the story than the first, although that aspect of it which would lead to confrontation is retained and developed, not in the love affair itself, but in Gauvain's passionate hatred of Lancelot. The thread of unity in the work is thus maintained.

As we have seen, the love affair aggravates the dilemma in which Arthur finds himself by slowly but surely forcing a confrontation between Arthur and Lancelot del Lac. The "desmesure" of Gauvain takes up where this adulterous relationship leaves off and continues inexorably to force Arthur into a conflict which he knows will ultimately destroy himself and, more significantly, the Round Table. Gauvain's obsession for revenge plays an important role in the second half of the *Mort Artu* not only as an end in itself, for that is certainly important, but also insofar as it contributes to the death of Arthur and with him, the downfall of the entire Kingdom of Logres.

The death of Gaheriet is significant for our discussion of appearances and reality, for out of it arise the hatred and irrational behaviour of Gauvain, who, in a state of shock at the news of his brother's death, is unable to see the situation as it really is. Blaming Lancelot for slaying Gaheriet willingly, he does not realize that it was a case of mistaken identity and that Lancelot would never have killed the man he loved so much. Gauvain should have known this, but his inability to recognize the truth of the matter leads him to an "idée fixe"□a fatal aspect of "desmesure." He derives his very "raison d'être" from the thought of revenge upon Lancelot, and this grows so out of proportion that he cannot see clearly nor make rational decisions. He neither can nor will recognize the truth. Motivated by blind passion which originates in mistaken observations, Gauvain's subconscious quest for his own death which so dominates the second half of the romance begins, bringing with it the realization of Arthur's fears of an end to the glorious days of the Round Table. Overwhelmed by grief, he mistakenly lays the blame for his brother's death and his own sorrow on Fortune, for therein would seem to lie the source of the problem. But he fails to see that Agravain's hatred□a hatred which he, himself, has already warned against□has contributed directly to Gaheriet's death and that he is mistaken in his accusation of Lancelot. Gauvain, in emotional shock, is therefore deceived by the appearance of things.

When Gauvain lays the blame for his tragic loss upon the whims of Fortune, he is making a serious error, for Fortune is only the apparent cause of his troubles. Indeed, she almost becomes the scapegoat for his own weaknesses, since the real source of his dilemma lies within himself, in his "fol apel," his irrational behaviour, his inability to see things as they really are. But it is easier and perhaps more human for Gauvain to blame Fortune rather than himself. In this, the mediaeval author of the *Mort Artu* measurably broadens the scope of his characterization of Gauvain.

Arthur's reaction to Gaheriet's death is also significant, for even though the King has retreated somewhat into the background in a scene devoted primarily to insight into Gauvain's behaviour, the author has found it essential to re-emphasize those elements that retain the thread of unity throughout the work. As one might expect, Arthur views the events of the past few hours less in terms of the death of Gaheriet, himself, than in terms of his own personal loss. Still preoccupied with himself and his own dilemma, he considers Gaheriet's death an extension of his own problems. Since these problems, at least as far as he is concerned, find their origin in Lancelot, the King accuses him and holds him directly responsible. The inevitable confrontation has drawn closer; there can be no turning back once the oath of vengeance has been sworn from his followers. Thus, at this most critical of moments, both Gauvain and the King are confronted by a choice and both are incapable of acting rationally. The former, blinded by his emotional shock and his desire for revenge, and the latter, obsessed by his fears that the end of the Round Table is in sight, both fail to distinguish reality from appearances.

If King Yon's pleas for moderation are readily discounted, in particular at the urging of Mordred whose own motives are suspect, it is hardly likely that Lancelot's offer of explanation and submission to the will of the court can be accepted either. Once again, men are deluded and deceived by the appearance of things and are therefore vulnerable to the baseness of such men as Mordred. Consequently, they reject truth

and reason. Repeated warnings have no effect: "□vos en seroiz destruiz er menez a mort, ou li sage home par maintes fois sont deceii" "You□will be destroyed and brought to death as a result of this war; you know that death often deceived wise men"; and Gauvain is admonished for his foolishness. Although the main thrust of the story is now, at least temporarily, carried by Gauvain, whose actions at times overshadow those of Arthur, the author of the *Mort Artu* never really loses sight of the King as the central figure in the story. Arthur continues to display the weakness that characterized him in the first half of the romance, wavering back and forth between love and hatred, admiration and contempt for Lancelot. Whenever the latter makes a chivalric gesture (quite in contrast to Gauvain's behaviour) by sparing Arthur's life or by willingly returning his Queen, Arthur's resolve begins to vacillate, much to the anger of his nephew. The King still hopes against hope that conflict can be avoided. Had he indeed the courage of his convictions, recognizing the senselessness of a war between his forces and Ban's kin, he would then reject those unreasonable demands that Gauvain is making upon him, but instead, he allows himself to be swayed by the apparent truth of Gauvain's arguments. "Puis que Gauvains le velt□il me plest bien" "Because that is what Gawain desires□it is what I want too"

Thus the human weakness inherent in his own character inevitably leads to the tragedy Arthur would avoid. Finding himself in a situation for which there is now no satisfactory solution, he is obviously aware of the consequences of continued confrontation with Lancelot, and yet, by refusing to draw the line, he brings about his own destruction and that of the Round Table with him. In this he parallels Gauvain who is also accused of pursuing his own death. By this time, Arthur's passive acceptance of the inevitability of the conflict becomes clearer and he becomes an almost pitiful figure. He has had several opportunities to make a clear decision, but he has failed to avail himself of them. Now he almost seems to believe that only death can relieve him of his burden and so he is no longer willing to struggle against a situation he thinks he cannot control. Perhaps he is right. The events which have been set in motion could have been stopped only by a firm stand by the King himself and this is something beyond the capabilities of the older Arthur of *La Mort le Roi Artu.*

In the scene involving Arthur and Gauvain and the old woman, the King and his nephew are both criticized for their foolishness. To the King she says: "Saches veraiement que c'est grant folie et que tu crois fol conseil□" "I can tell you truly that it is a great madness and that you are ill-advised". Gauvain, too, does not escape her remarks: "□vous porchaciez si durement vostre damage que vous jamais ne reverrés le roialme de Logres sains ne haitiés" "You are so resolutely pursuing your own destruction that you will never again in good health see the kingdom of Logres". Her warnings represent the reality, the truth, of the situation in which they find themselves, but Arthur's weakness, indeed by now the loss of his desire to live, coupled with Gauvain's stubbornness, close their ears to her words. Arthur is still unsure of himself and Gauvain continues to cling stubbornly to the apparent truth that Lancelot deliberately killed his brother. In his anger and grief, Gauvain is unable to distinguish between appearances and reality and pursues his foe to the end, dragging with him Arthur and the remnants of the Round Table to their destruction. Not even Lancelot's magnanimous offer of penance can

dissuade him. Thus "desmesure," "outrage," and "desreson" ("irrationality"), the most serious sins a knight could commit, bring about his death.

These are the root causes of the tragedy; man himself by his excesses, and not Fortune as an active force intervening in the affairs of men, is responsible. Although Gauvain blames his problems on Fortune, he does so mistakenly. It will be some time yet before he realizes that he does have a measure of control over his own destiny. But that moment will come and when it does, the moral lesson of the author will be clear: in spite of the seriousness of his sins, there is still hope for the true penitent which Gauvain ultimately becomes. Seeing the error of his ways, Gauvain recognizes his own guilt□not Fortune's□in this tragic situation. Rising above self-indulgence and ego, he soon attains the Kingdom of Heaven. When his quarrel with Lancelot is over, resulting as it does in the subsequent death of Gauvain, a man the King held most dear, there remains virtually nothing more for Arthur in this life. His loved ones and his Kingdom are gone. The fight with Mordred which must now follow serves only to wipe away the final remnants of a once glorious society.

It is significant at this point in the story that Arthur has not yet reached the level of awareness and understanding which Gauvain finally attains and still cannot recognize that the source of his problems lies within himself and his inability to see the reality of things. As Gauvain did before him, therefore, he, too, mistakenly shifts the blame for his own shortcomings upon the vicissitudes of Fortune:

Hé! Fortune, chose contrere et diverse, la plus desloial
chose qui soit el monde, por quoi me fus tu onques si
debonere ne si amiable por vendre le moi si chierement
au derrien? Tu me fus jadis mere, or m'ies tu devenue
marrastre, et por fere moi de duel morir as apelee avec
toi la Mort, si que tu en deus manieres m'as honni, de mes
amis et de ma terre. Hé! Mort vileinne, tu ne deüsses mie
avoir assailli tel home comme mes niés estoit qui de bonté
passoit tout le monde.

("Ah! Fortune, contrary and changeable, the most
faithless thing in the world, why were you ever
so courteous or so kind to me if you were to make
me pay so dearly for it in the end? You used to be
my mother; now you have become my stepmother, and
to make me die of grief you have brought Death
with you, in order to dishonour me in two ways at
once, through my friends and through my land. Ah!
base Death, you should not have attacked a man such
as my nephew, who surpassed the whole world in goodness."

Arthur, to whom the weight of the plot now shifts, still must learn that Fortune, whom he blames for his predicament, is only the manifestation, the apparent cause of his troubles. In a sense, Fortune functions as a kind of symbol here. This becomes

adequately clear in the scene in which she takes Arthur up on her wheel and tells him the real reason for his impending downfall. Arthur has just been admonished in another dream by the crowd following Gauvain. They tell the King that his nephew, as a true penitent, has indeed attained the Kingdom of Heaven: "□et fei aussi comme il a fet□" "follow his example". In other words, overcome foolish earthly pride, and salvation will be guaranteed. But Arthur does not. Instead, he commits himself even more completely to the inevitable battle on Salis-bury Plain. Lifting him up on her wheel, Fortune warns him of the consequences of his actions, the direct result of his own unwillingness to see the truth: "Mes tel sont li orgueil terrien qu'il n'i a nul si haut assiz qu'il ne le coviegne cheoir de la poesté del monde" "But such is earthly pride that no one is seated so high that he can avoid having to fall from power in the world". The baseness of human actions, then, which overwhelms knightly virtue, and not the whimsical intervention of blind fate, leads to the rude awakening that Arthur experiences in his dream. There is no suggestion that the King could not have retained his lofty position even longer if he had acted in accordance with the chivalric code of behaviour. Arthur's worst fears, the final destruction of his Round Table, are about to be realized; the climax has been reached. He knows this but he also believes that he has come too far to turn back. Like Gauvain immediately before his fateful battle with Lancelot, he continues to deceive himself by trying to convince himself that victory is possible and that there is an apparent hope for him. The Battle of Salisbury Plain puts an end to these illusions.

From the initial scenes of the *Mort Artu*, the main thread of this story has dealt with the downfall of Arthur and with him the destruction of the Round Table. The events which began with Merlin, his prophecies and his relationship to Arthur at the beginning of the Vulgate Cycle (Sommer: Vol. II) have now come full circle. But it is important to stress that the prophecies that Merlin makes there are inevitable only insofar as Arthur's own behaviour makes them so. These events are destined to occur because they must, for after all, they are a part of the traditional story which the mediaeval author has inherited from his predecessors; but with a remarkable degree of sophistication, that same author has introduced a tangible motivation beyond that of Fate or Fortune to justify their occurrence. Arthur's own weakness and unwillingness to see the truth provide the story with another dimension□another of the "branches" to which Vinaver refers. When he finally does realize that the tragic end is near, he cannot go back. It is too late.

Source: Donald C. MacRae, "Appearances and Reality in *La Mort le Roi Artu*," in *King Arthur: A Casebook*, edited by Edward Donald Kennedy, Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996, pp. 105-19.

Critical Essay #4

In their joint article, Lynette R. Muir and Howard Bloch focus on the duel between Lancelot and Gauvain in La Mort le roi Artur, *offering their separate interpretations of the oaths sworn by the combatants before that duel and how each pertains to judicial law in the Arthurian court.*

Critical Essay #5

In his recent article, 'From Grail Quest to Inquest', Professor Bloch has analysed the legal aspects of the two trials by combat described in the *Mort Artu* with special reference to the picture they give of the workings of feudal justice in the early thirteenth century. Professor Bloch has earned the gratitude of all Arthurians by his sensitive and minute analysis of the legal background and implications of these two duels which provide a major part of the structural framework of the romance. In his discussion of the second duel, however, that between Lancelot and Gauvain, there seems to me to be some misinterpretation of the French text in the matter of the exact form of the oaths sworn by the combatants before the battle so that it seems worth looking at this particular question in more detail.

When the terms of the battle are discussed outside Gaunes, Gauvain reminds Lancelot that: 'vos savez bien que entre moi et vos avons enprise une bataille si grant comme de traïson mortel por la mort de mes freres que vos oceïstes en traïson, desloiaument, ce savons nous bien tuit; et si en sui apelerres et vous deffenderres'. The use of the past tense indicates that Gauvain is here referring back to his original challenge to Lancelot, after the reconciliation between Arthur and Guinevere. On that occasion however, the term *traïson* was not used: 'A la guerre ne poez vos faillir tant que Gahereiz mes freres, que vos oceïstes malvaisement, sera vengiez de vostre cors meïsmes', Lancelot did not reply to this first attack but the challenge was taken up by Bors: 'Si avez dit que messires ocist desloiaument vostre frere je deffendroie mon seigneur encontre vostre cors, si que, se g'estoie veincuz en champ, que messires Lancelos fust honniz, et se ge vos pooie recreant fere, que vos fussiez maubailliz comme faus apelerres'. Gauvain accepted Bors's challenge but the king 'refusa d'ambes deus les gages et dist que ceste bataille ne seroit otroiee en nule maniere'. In this original challenge, then, the point at issue was the killing of Gaheriet only, but in the confrontation near Gaunes, Gauvain talks of the death of 'mes freres', that is Agravain *and* Gaheriet. Gauvain adds on this latter occasion an offer that if he be defeated, Arthur will swear not to continue the siege: 'einz leront del tout le siege et s'en iront arriere en leur païs?' Lancelot's answer is, firstly, to try to forgo the battle even if he were judged a coward thereby: 'tout soit il ore issi que ge ne la porroie lessier que la honte n'en fust moie et que l'en nel me tornast a coardise'. Secondly, Lancelot offers reparation on a noble scale: he and all his kin, save the two kings, Lionel and Bors, will swear fealty to Gauvain; in addition Lancelot himself will set off alone, barefoot and in rags, for an exile of ten years, and should he die during that time, his kin will hold Gauvain innocent of his death. Lastly, Lancelot is ready to swear an oath 'seur seinz que onques au mien escient n'ocis Gaheriet vostre frere et que plus m'en pesa qu'il ne fu bel'. The crux of this last oath is that it does not raise *at all* the question of the death of Agravain. Gauvain mentions brothers, *mes freres*, Lancelot mentions one brother, *vostre frere*. (It is surely significant in considering this whole quarrel, that Gauvain never attacks Bors for having killed his third brother Guerres.) Gauvain refuses Lancelot's offer completely and repeats his accusation, this time formally: 'Lors tent son gaje et dist au roi: "Sire, veez me ci prest de prouver que Lancelos ocist desloiaument mes freres"'. Lancelot does not formulate

his reply in legal terms, he merely accepts the battle: '"Vez ci mon gage por moi deffendre" □ et li rois reçoit les gages d'ambedous'. Gauvain's own cousin Yvain claims that Gauvain is in the wrong: 'Sire, pour coi avés vous emprise ceste bataille, et encore a tort, car il se deffendra a son droit', and later he and the king agree that right is not on their side: 'ci ot si grant offre [that made by Lancelot] qu'aprés ceste chose je ne puis veoir par devers nos se desreson non □ por ce que je voi par dela le droit et par deça le tort'. Lancelot himself is uneasy and makes his confession: 'car moult doutoit qu'il ne li mescheïst envers monseigneur Gauvain por la mort de ses freres qu'il avoit ocis'. Lancelot does not, however, even here admit the accusation of *traïson*.

In the light of these quotations, it is surely not possible to accept that in this battle 'Gauvain's accusation, unlike that of Mador, has a strong basis in fact. Lancelot did kill his brother *with harmful intent and in a deceitful manner*' (my italics). The brother referred to here, is Agravain, whom, Bloch claims, Lancelot slew in a premeditated attack from ambush. Bors, at the time, declared it was an open attack after challenge: 'onques en traïson n'oceïstes ses freres, mes en apert, en tel leu ou il avoit plus de cent chevaliers'. Bloch may be right in claiming premeditation since Lancelot certainly declares his intention of killing Agravain if he can, but it seems arguable if an attack that can be seen coming, can be considered legally a secret and therefore treacherous killing: 'chascuns monte seur son cheval, et pranent escuz et lances; si tornent cele part ou il voient le feu. Et quant cil qui es prez estoient *les virent venir*, si s'escrierent tuit ensemble: "Veez ci Lancelot! fuiez! fuiez!"' (my italics). If the killing of Agravain is only possibly treachery, there can be no doubt at all that the killing of Gaheriet was not merely not premeditated, it was quite unintentional: 'Lancelot, qui aloit les rens cerchant, *nel connut mie*' (my italics). Indeed, Lancelot is deeply distressed when he learns what he has done: 'Moult fu Lancelos courrouciez por la mort de Gaheriet, car ce estoit uns des chevaliers del monde que il plus amoit'. It is, therefore, incorrect to claim that 'Lancelot killed Gaheriet with evil intent according to the medieval formula of *traison*'.

Professor Bloch deduces from this battle that 'the combatants' fatigue at the end of this second struggle reflects an exhausted method of ascertaining judicial truth' but it seems rather that the whole incident represents an excellent example of the *duel judicaire*. Gauvain's cause is bad, but he genuinely believes it good, and this gives him the power to prolong the battle for a full day against the hitherto invincible Lancelot:

> Si te di bien que, se je n'i veïsse mon droit apertement,
> je n'assamblasse oan a lui por la meillor cité del monde,
> □ Mes ce sevent bien tuit que torz et desloiautez feroit
> del meillor chevalier del monde mauvés □ et ce est la
> chose par coi je douteroie moins Lancelot, car je sai bien
> que li tors en est siens et li drois en est miens; par coi
> ne toi ne autres ne devez avoir poor de moi, car en toz leus
> aïde Nostre Sires au droit: c'est ma fiance et ma creance.

After such a declaration it seems unreasonable to claim that: 'Mador's and Gauvain's accusations engender a crisis of belief in the efficacy of the *Dei judicio*'. It is true that this form of trial only proves the point made on oath, but that after all was what it was

intended to do. It would be wrong to criticise or to hold that the author of the *Mort Artu* wanted to criticise the system of judicial combats for not doing something it was never designed to do. Gauvain, believing he was right, attacked Lancelot and was defeated because he was, in fact, wrong. He, himself, admitted this on his death-bed: 'Se ge veïsse celui que ge sei au meilleur chevalier del monde et au plus cortois et ge li peüsse crier merci de ce que ge li ai esté si vilains au derrien, il m'est avis que m'ame en fust plus a ese aprés ma mort'.

The changing attitude of the thirteenth century towards judicial combat is indeed reflected in Ar-thurian romance, though not, I would suggest, in this combat. In the prose *Tristan*, however, there is an example of a trial by battle in which the winner is later proved to have been in the wrong. King Arthur is deeply distressed when this discovery is made and we are told that after this battle the combatants in future duels had to swear an oath *sur seinz* that their cause was good: a manifest attempt to prop up what had been shown to be an inadequate method of achieving justice, 'car devant ce que cele aventure avint n'avoit l'en fet nul serement, ne il n'en fesoient nul se il ne leur plesoit'. The incident is summed up by the author in terms that could not have been used in the *Mort Artu:* 'et cil qui por Dieu et por droit se combatoit i fu ocis; ainssi ala li tort devant le droit en l'ostel le roi A. en la plus loial cort et en le plus droituriere qui a celui tens fust en tot le monde'.

Critical Essay #6

In response to Dr Muir's remarks I should like to make the following points. First of all, in contracting the battle outside Gaunes, Gauvain refers not to 'his original challenge to Lancelot, after the reconciliation between Arthur and Guinevere', but to his challenge of the preceding day: 'Va t'en leanz en la cité de Gaunes et di a Lancelot del Lac, s'il a tant de hardement en soi qu'il ost deffendre que il mon frere n'oceïst en traïson, je sui prez del prouver encontre son cors que il desloiaument et en traïson l'ocist'. Although Dr Muir is correct in assuming that the word *traïson* is not used in the original defiance some months prior to the eventual trial by combat, she fails to point out that Gauvain twice repeats the accusal of *traïson* in establishing the wagers of battle on the day before actual confrontation. Again, Dr Muir is right in observing that Gauvain speaks at the time of his brothers' death of only one brother, but the fact that he also speaks in the encounter near Gaunes of 'mes freres' serves to support the contention that Gauvain's challenge harks back to the self-contained episode of Gaunes and not to the peace concluded before the walls of 'La Joyeuse Garde'.

Second, the fact that Lancelot, in responding to the challenge, only claims to have slain Gaheriet unwittingly□'vos jurai seur seinz que onques au mien escient n'ocis Gaheriet vostre frere'□does not mean that he did not kill Agravain intentionally. In fact, the evidence at the time of slaying is just the opposite, and Lancelot's response may be a shrewd verbal manoeuvre to avoid the issue of intent altogether. His subsequent uneasiness when praying for God's help may be caused by his own sense of guilt, for he includes in his prayers reference to the death of Gauvain's three brothers and not just Gaheriet. In any case, the use of verbal trickery within the judicial ordeal is an increasingly common theme in twelfth-century and thirteenth-century literature; see, for example, *Le Roman de Renart* and Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*.

Third, Yvain claims that Gauvain is wrong not because of the righteousness or weakness of his case, as Dr Muir maintains, but because Lancelot is the stronger knight: 'Haés vous si durement vostre vie, qui avez emprise bataille encontre le meillour chevalier del monde vers qui nus Hom ne pot onques durer en bataille qui ne fust honis au daerrain?'. Yvain's recrimination is a cynical recognition, in contrast with Gauvain's belief in the efficacy of the *judicium Dei,* that might makes right. Like the Lancelot of the first battle, Yvain perceives the extent to which an ordeal of immanence can be manipulated by human intention. Yvain's and Arthur's recognition that 'right is not on their side' does not refer to the question under judicial dispute, but to Gauvain's stubborn refusal to accept Lancelot's magnanimous offers of compromise. The expiatory pilgrimage and homage were, incidentally, standard means of reconciliation without recourse to the duel.

Fourth, Bors's claim that the death of Gauvain's brothers is justifiable because it was witnessed 'by more than a hundred knights' represents an attempt to stretch the definition of justifiable homicide; it is yet another instance of the manipulation of judicial institutions through the clever use of language. The essential distinction between manslaughter and murder (*traïson*), under feudal law, centres around the issue of

challenge. I refer the reader to the following passages from thirteenth-century customals not cited in my article:

Murtres si est quant aucuns tue ou fet tuer autrui en *aguet apensé* □ (Beaumanoir, *Coutumes*) Et murtre si est, quant home est ocis nuitantre, porquoi il ne viegne apenséement à la meslée, ou en trives ou en *agait de chemin*, ou en menière que il ne voie le cop venir, ou quant il est sorpris que il n'a poer de soi deffendre. (*Li Livre de Fostice et de Pletz*)

Ironically, the Gauvain of Chrétien's *Perceval* finds himself accused of treacherous homicide for having slain without challenge':

Ainz l'apele de felonnie
Et dist: "Gauvains, tu oceïs
Mon seignor, et si le feïs
Issi que tu nel desfïas.
Honte et reproce et blasme i as,
Si t'en apele de traïson.

Ganelon, accused of treason at the end of *La Chanson de Roland*, denies the charge on the grounds that he challenged Roland publicly and not in secret.

Thus, Agravain's death is not 'possibly treachery', as Dr Muir contends: the circumstances of its enactment□a premeditated attack without challenge from a hidden location□make it morally and materially an act of murder. This is all the more significant because the circumstances surrounding criminal wrongdoing matter much more, under feudal law, than the question of criminal intent. It mattered not *why* one killed another, but *how* he did it. Premeditation was deduced in an *a posteriori* fashion from the character of the crime. In other words, Gauvain's cause is not 'bad', as Dr Muir asserts; it is an essentially justifiable cause. His deathbed confession harks back to his earlier refusal of Lancelot's offers of peace and compromise rather than to the legality of his suit: 'Sire (Arthur), se vos avez perdu Lancelot par ma folie, si le recouvrez par vostre savoir'.

Finally, though Gauvain does manage to 'prolong the battle for a whole day against the hitherto invincible Lancelot', he does eventually lose. Moreover, he is only able to sustain the fight as long as he does because his opponent refuses to exert his full martial strength and because of the solar myth attached to Gauvain's prowess but irrelevant with respect to judicial right.

In conclusion, I do not reproach the author of *La Mort le roi Artu* for 'criticizing the system of judicial combats for not doing something it was never designed to do'. Rather, I credit him, along with Chrétien, Béroul, Marie de France, the authors f *Perlesvaus*, *Le Roman de Renart*, and the prose *Tristan*, for his awareness of the insufficiencies,

pitfalls, and paradoxes of feudal judicial procedure during a period of profound legal transformation.

Source: Lynette R. Muir and R. Howard Bloch, "Further Thoughts on the 'Mort Artu,'" in *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 71, Issue 1, January, 1976, pp. 26-30.

Critical Essay #7

In this essay, R. Howard Bloch draws a parallel between the collapse of the Arthurian world and the decline of feudalism in France in the years after La Mort le roi Artu was composed, arguing that both were brought about by the "crisis of values and institutions."

For a novel which begins in earthly splendour and spiritual plenitude *La Mort le roi Artu* ends in a curious spectacle of chaos and decline. This final sequel of the enormous thirteenth-century Lancelot-prose cycle contains what should have been the golden age of Arthur's court, knighthood having returned to the native soil of Camelot after the distant Grail quest. Instead, it proclaims the twilight of the Arthurian world, the steady disintegration of the courtly and chivalric ideals which are the very stuff of romance. Of the hundred thousand knights who gather for the last battle of Arthur's reign□'la derreniere qui i sera au tens le roi Artu'□only four survive the end of an empire and the end of an age: 'Einsi commença la bataille es pleines de Salesbieres dont li roiaumes de Logres fu tornez a destrucion, et ausi furent meint autre, car puis n'i ot autant de preudomes comme il i avoit eü devant; si en remestrent aprés leur mort les terres gastes et essilliees, et soufreteuses de bons seigneurs, car il furent trestout ocis a grant douleur et a grant haschiee' The wasting of Logres and the depletion of its ruling class of 'preudomes' and 'bons seigneurs' is, to a limited extent, attributable to those who least desire it. Lancelot's adultery with the Queen, Gauvain's thirst for vengeance, Arthur's blindness and weakness all contribute to the chain of catastrophe that drives the novel towards its apocalyptic finale. And yet none justifies, ultimately, the collapse of a kingdom, its noble families, ruler and all that surrounds them. Rooted far deeper than personal foible or folly, the decline of Arthur's world reflects a crisis of values and institutions□in particular judicial procedures□that is traceable to the decline of feudalism in France in the century and a half that preceded the poem's composition. The kingdom of Logres is, in its form, a mirror-image of the feudal world: a collection of independent political states structured around ties of fealty, clannish loyalty to family as part of the vendetta ethic, archaic practices of private war and trial by battle. A system that offers no distinction between private and public domains, Arthurian kingship resembles the feudal monarchies of the late Carolingians and early Capetians as seen from the increasingly national perspective of a Philippe-Auguste or Saint Louis. From this point of view, the death of Arthur and destruction of the Round Table along with its baronage of 'bons seigneurs' looks like the failure of feudal organization to deal with the problems of a new more centrally oriented era.

The first real test of the strength of the realm comes about quite unexpectedly. At dinner one evening Gauvain's enemy Arvalan prepares a piece of poisoned fruit which he offers to Guinevere, believing that she will, in turn, offer it to Gauvain. To Arvalan's surprise the Queen hands the fatal dessert to a third knight, Gaheris de Karaheu, who dies 'as soon as it passes his neck': 'La reïne prist le fruit qui de la traïson ne se gardoit; si en dona a un chevalier qui estoit compains de la Table Reonde et avoit non Gaheris de Karaheu; □ et si tost comme il en ot le col passé, il chaï morz erranment voiant la reïne et touz cels qui furent a la table'. Arthur reacts to Gaheris's death with

astonishment and sadness but takes no cognizance of the event in terms of criminal action. Arvalan disappears entirely from the author's tale. The Queen, in spite of the fact that many have witnessed her part in the deed, is not indicted; and Gaheris, after an honourable burial, is soon forgotten. Forgotten, that is, by all except his brother Mador de la Porte. Upon arrival in Camelot for the next assembly, Mador learns of Gaheris's death and proceeds to Arthur's court where, long after the infraction has taken place, redress is first mentioned in connexion with Guinevere's crime. He pronounces publicly the formal accusation of murder: 'Sire, or vos requier ge comme a roi que vos me faciez droit de la reïne qui en traïson a ocis mon frere; et se ele velt noier et mesconoistre, que ele traïson n'ait fete et desloiauté, je seroie prez del prouver contre le meilleur chevalier que ele i vodra metre'. Arthur warns the defendant that if convicted she will be in sorry straits□'vos est alee'□then adjourns for a period of forty days during which time she will be free to seek a champion: 'aucun prudome qui por vos entrast en champ et qui vos deffendist'.

The criminal procedure under which Guinevere is indicted for the murder of Gaheris is not unknown within the Western legal tradition. Prevalent in Greece and Rome, it disappeared during the latter days of the Empire and reappeared in Germanic feudal custom; portions are preserved in the judicial institutions of England and the United States. According to this and similar 'accusatory' methods of legal process, a criminal action can only be initiated by the victim of an offence or, as under feudal law, the family or liege lord of the offended party. Every citizen is, under an accusatory mode of indictment, eligible to become the plaintiff in a judicial proceeding, but no action can be undertaken independently of private pleas for recognition. In other words, neither the civil apparatus of the state nor its representative agent, the judge, has the power to proceed against offenders like Guinevere without the formal appeal of a Mador to the justice of Arthur's court.

For the well-armed and well-trained warrior aristocracy of the feudal era trial automatically implied physical combat. Almost any accusation punishable by mutilation or death featured the judicial duel as its primary mode of proof. Even in minor actions, where testimony is sometimes permitted, the only means by which testimonial evidence might be contested is by challenging the witness to battle. In both cases the burden of proof rests upon the shoulders of the defendant, who is forced either to accept the challenge or stand guilty as accused. Arthur explains the situation to Mador and the Queen: 'Mador, la querele la reïne doit estre menee a fin par tel maniere que, s'cle en ce jor d'ui ne treuve qui la vueitle deffendre, l'en fera de son corps ce que la cort esgardera. Or remanez ceanz jusques a eure de vespres; etse dedenz celui terme ne vient avant qui por lui empraigne ceste bataille vos est quires de l'apel et ele est encolpee'. As far as Guinevere is concerned the absence of a defender is tantamount to conviction. Mador's charge□'apel'□which works by definition against the accused, conforms historically to the procedure of indictment in use well after the novel's composition. Beaumanoir outlines in the *Coutumes de Beauvaisis* the correct method of accusal: 'De tous cas de crime l'en puet apeler ou venir a gages se l'acuseres en veut fere droit acusacion selonc ce qu'apeaus se doit fere, car il convient que cil qui est apelés s'en defendre ou qu'il demeurt atains du fet duquel il est apelés'. For Beaumanoir as for Arthur, accusation□'apeler'□is equivalent to a wager of

battle□'gages'□as long as the proper judicial formula□'droite acusacion'□has been observed. Failure to defend oneself or to provide for representation carries the force of confession.

Despite the obvious seriousness of arriving for trial without a defender, Guinevere nonetheless experiences a great deal of difficulty in locating a champion. Because of the clear and evident nature of her offence none of the knights who would have ordinarily undertaken her cause will do so against Mador. Lancelot's clan is absent from court. Arthur is prohibited by his role as justiciar from openly advocating the Queen's defence, although he does later seek without success a supporter on her behalf. Both Arthur and Guinevere have lost all hope of finding an advocate by trial time, when Lancelot, who has heard meantime of the Queen's predicament, arrives at court, defeats Mador and simultaneously redeems the defendant's honour and her favour. Lancelot's victory and vindication of his mistress corresponds generally to our own ideas of justice. The passage from false accusation to ultimate acquittal serves to reaffirm the efficacy of a judicial system in which the innocent are cleared in the end despite intervening moments of hesitation or doubt. Yet the seemingly just correlation of innocence and acquittal obscures a number of logical dilemmas concerning Arthur's support of the Queen, Lancelot's espousal of her cause and the impunity with which the true culprit escapes. Instead of assuring the integrity of the feudal mode of justice, Guinevere's exculpation calls into question the philosophic and pragmatic bases of trial by battle.

The *duel judiciaire* belongs to the series of ordeals common to any primitive sense of justice in which legal process remains indistinguishable from divine process, human will from godly will, positive law from divine law. Historically, it came to France from the Germanic tribes mentioned by Tacitus and Caesar though there is some evidence of its practice by the Gauls before the northern invasions. The efficacy of the *Deo judicio* rests upon a belief in the immanence of supernatural powers within the natural sphere. As in the *Chanson de Roland* where the contests between Charlemagne and Baligant, Thierry and Pinabel, are clearly linked to a transcendent contest between good and evil, all physical combats between mortal opponents reflect a superhuman struggle. For Homer the immanence of justice was often the result of capricious disputes between semi-human divinities; medieval man was much more likely to picture the judicial duel in terms of a conflict between the forces of Satan and those of a Christian God. Underlying both outlooks is the assumption that nature remains incapable of indifference to the outcome of earthly events and that the judicial process represents but one expression of a constant dialogue between nature and man.

The role of human judgement in criminal actions, is, under an immanent legal mode, reduced to a bare minimum, the assumption being that God alone judges and that men, having acted either innocently or with guilt, then become the passive objects of divine scrutiny. The cognitive decisions that we associate with the active binding judgeship of the Roman *praetor* or modern magistrate have little meaning for the feudal judge. Unable to disregard the law and unable to indict of his own accord, he presides to pronounce sentence and ensure the fairness of the proceedings. Much like the referee in a sporting event, he possesses sufficient discretionary power to apply the rules that

have applied in the past without the authority to change them through the precedent of his decisions. Free to fix the fine details of Guinevere's trial, the forty day adjournment to find a champion, Arthur is nonetheless obliged to establish the conditions under which a direct encounter between plaintiff and defendant can take place. That encounter, the judicial ordeal, represents an attempt to elicit supernatural intervention in human affairs. Both the unilateral ordeals of trial by fire, water, burning oil, or coal and the bilateral 'ordeal of the cross' and combat seek to force God to show his hand in cases where the righteousness or the culpability of the parties is not apparent. Justice becomes manifest through the burns that either heal or fester, the bearers of the cross who endure or falter, the combatants who kill or are killed, the entire process dependent upon the theoretical premise that the Lord does not abandon the just man and that he punishes those who have failed him. Before facing Lancelot in battle Gauvain professes his faith in the unerring justness of the *duel judiciaire*: 'Mes ce sevent bien tuit que torz et desloiautez feroit del meillor chevalier del monde mauvés, et droiz et loiautez feroit del plus mauvés et seür et preu'. Whether or not Gauvain's cause is, in fact, just, he believes that right and force are suffi-ciently allied to insure judicial fairness.

The strictness of the rules governing combat and the obligation on the justiciar's part to apply them are meant to facilitate God's work in making his judgement evident. The accusation and denial, acceptance of the wagers of battle, swearing of oaths that accompany the actual physical match are conducted according to precise formulas whose slightest infraction can invalidate the entire proceeding. By the twelfth century the rituals have been christianized to such an extent that trial has become a sacrament. At the end of *Roland* Thierry and Pinabel visit church, hear mass, take confession and offer pious gifts before battle. Lancelot too confesses his sins in an all night vigil before meeting Gauvain (p. 184.11). The premise that God judges according to the comparative moral status of the two contestants makes it a matter of utmost importance to enter combat as free as possible from any trace of lingering sin. Ritualization□blessing of relics and arms, swearing of oaths, hearing of mass and confession□is aimed at establishing a direct rapport between the divine judge and the human instruments of his judgement. Cases are submitted to God for his decision, *per duelli probationem*; the ceremonial trappings ensure his participation. Thierry declares to Pinabel, 'Deus facet hoi entre nus dous le dreit!' Harold decrees before the Battle of Hastings, 'Dominus inter me et Willelmum hodie quod justum est descernat'. Both are aware that God alone judges the petty quarrels of men and that his judgement often surpasses their understanding.

Representation in battle by a champion was an ancient Germanic prerogative (*sunnis* or *avoué*) by which direct participation of the parties involved in litigation can, under certain circumstances, be waived. Mentioned in the Frankish capitularies and the sixth-century *Lex Burgondionem*, provisions for substitution in the judicial duel are a constant feature of medieval procedure. In *Roland* representation is automatic: Ganelon's trial hinges upon the appearance of Thierry to substantiate Charlemagne's accusation. According to Beaumanoir, if a defendant is missing a limb, is over sixty years of age, has a sickness that prevents excitement or a chronic illness (*quartaine* or *tierçaine*), he has the right to find a champion to fight in his place. The *Coutumes de Beauvaisis* also contains a specific proviso for women: 'li quins essoines, si est se fame apele ou est apelee, car

fame ne se combat pas'. Hence, Arthur, as judge, is perfectly warranted in permitting Guinevere a stand-in for the actual trial by battle. His position becomes considerably less tenable through his active solicitation of support. Where the Queen acquiesces to the lack of champion Arthur first turns to the knights of the Round Table who baulk at the idea of defending a cause in which defeat is a foregone conclusion: 'car il sevent bien que la reine a tort et Mador a droit'. He next approaches Gauvain who refuses on the grounds that no loyal knight would enter combat with the knowledge of his party's fault, not even if the party were his own mother: 'car nos savons bien que la reïne ocist le chevalier dont ele est apelee'.

What stands out most clearly in Arthur's attempt to find a champion for Guinevere is his hesitancy to let the process of divine justice run its natural course. The king is not content to trust the matter of God's judgement to the invisible mechanism of infallible providence, but feels compelled to hasten the progress of providence with his own interventions. Nor is he secretive about his reasons for wanting to protect the Queen: Arthur's personal commitment to the woman he loves leads him to disregard her evident guilt. And whereas the judge within an immanent accusatory system should remain neutral once he has established a direct confrontation between parties, Arthur confuses his public role as justiciar with his private role as husband. Mador accuses him after the trial of having manipulated the proceedings: 'Sire, vos m'avez deceü qui encontre moi avez mis monseigneur Lancelot'.

In the long run, the efficacy of the judicial duel depends upon the faith of those who participate in it, a faith that God's will ultimately protects the innocent and punishes those who perjure themselves in his presence. The fear of perjury in the name of a bad cause explains Gauvain's and the other knights' reluctance to respond to Arthur's call for help. Lancelot, however, reacts differently to the news of the Queen's dilemma. Fully aware of her guilt, he nonetheless consents to champion what is commonly acknowledged to be a faulty cause:

Certes, fet Lancelos, s'ele me devoit haïr a touz jorz
en tel maniere que ge ne trouvasse jamés pes a li, si
ne voudroie ge pas qu'ele fust deshonoree a mon vivant;
car c'est la dame del monde qui plus m'a fet d'enneur
puis que ge portai armes; si me metrai en aventure por
li deffendre, non mie si hardiement come j'ai fet en
autre bataille, car ge sei bien veraiement, a ce que g'en
ai oï dire, que li torz en sera meins et li droiz Mador.

Lancelot's acceptance has been attributed by some to shock and momentary weakness. Be that as it may, his decision seems more conscious than a transitory slip. He states explicitly that he will defend the Queen not because he believes in her essential righteousness, but because of her past reputation. In reflecting upon his decision Lancelot accepts the prospect of entering battle 'half-heartedly' due to the certainty of her guilt: 'car ge set bien veraiement □ que li torz en sera meins et li droiz Mador'. And in so doing, the greatest knight of Logres shows himself clearly willing to undertake what amounts to an adequate but not wholly valid judicial cause. His readiness to

perjure himself and thus to compromise with the *sine qua non* of feudal justice, a belief in the omnipotence of the divine judge, has far-reaching implications. For Lancelot the absolute certainty of God's vengeance no longer poses a serious threat. His attitude is much closer to an Aristotelian vision of a universe created by God but existing apart from his continual presence than to an immanent universe in which the divine being penetrates every object and events. Lancelot's action implies a world in which human and divine will function independently of each other, a world from which the gods have withdrawn, leaving humans responsible for the consequences of their deeds.

Further doubt concerning the efficacy of the immanent legal system emanates from the trial itself. According to the *Deo judico*, every effort is made not only to force the parties into a situation of direct confrontation, but to establish a clear-cut contradiction between their respective allegations, the assumption being that one of the two will, of necessity, be guilty of perjury. Accusations are therefore repeated orally, publicly and according to set formula. Denial also takes place in accordance with a fixed pattern requiring verbatum□*verbo ad verbum*□refutation of the charges.

At Guinevere's trial Mador repeats the allegation originally pronounced upon arrival in Camelot. Lancelot refutes it word for word: 'Sire chevaliers, ge sui prez de prouver qu'ele desloiaument et en traïson a ocis mon frere.□Et ge sui prez, fit Lancelos del deffendre qu'ele n'i pensa onques desloiauté ne traison'. Mador's accusal and Lancelot's denial carry us a long way from Gaheris's death and the common knowledge of the Queen's part in it. Mador maintains that Guinevere not only killed his brother, she did so knowingly and treacherously: 'desloiaument et en traïson a ocis mon frere'. In fact, the accused at no point denies having handed the fatal piece of fruit to Gaheris despite her disavowal of any knowledge of the poison. Yet the formulary accusation opens the delicate question of intention behind criminal behaviour. The Queen's case hinges upon a subtle distinction between intentional misdeed and the absence of intent, a difference that often escapes the ken of primitive legal methods and that becomes especially muddled in the judicial apparatus of Arthur's court.

In spite of his initial concern about the motive surrounding Guinevere's act, Arthur seems to be singularly indifferent to the notion of intention. He says nothing when Mador first accuses her of wilful murder, nor when she questions her accuser's use of the words 'treason' and 'disloyalty', nor at the time of the acceptance of the wagers of battle along with the repetition of the original charge. It is not until the final accusation has been pronounced and the combatants have left for the battlefield that the error becomes apparent. Gauvain points out to Arthur the weakness of the plaintiff's allegation: 'Or creroie ge bien que Mador fust en mauvese querele; car comment que ses freres moreust, je jurroie seur seinz au miens escient qu'onques la reïne n'i pensa desloiauté ne traïson; si l'en porroit tost max avenir, se li chevaliers avoit en lui point de proesce'. With Gauvain's sudden awareness of the inaccuracy of Mador's charge the Queen's originally indefensible position becomes justifiable once again. Lancelot's cause, through the unconscious mishandling of judicial formula, unexpectedly becomes the right cause, as Mador's carelessness with words during the proceedings neutralizes Arthur's clumsiness prior to trial.

The outcome of Guinevere's case points to a judicial system that succeeds despite itself. Its fragile triumph, coming as it does after a series of fortunate errors of judgement and procedure, can be attributed to Lancelot's willingness to risk perjuring himself and to Mador's misconception of the events surrounding Gaheris's death. At root, the weakest point in the entire process centres around the issue of criminal intent. Arthur's court, like most feudal courts, does not possess the investigatory apparatus□system of inquest, testimony, witnesses, written proof and documentary evidence□to determine the motivation behind wrong-doing, much less to apprehend the offender when his action is not apparent.

In many ways, Guinevere's offence constitutes what in modern jurisprudence is a case of accident or neglect, a special category of infraction under medieval law. For the jurist of the Middle Ages the perpetrator of a criminal act, however innocent his intentions, was nonetheless liable for his misdeed. Negligence as we know it did not enter the picture. Harm done a stranger with unguarded weapons was, under Anglo-Saxon law, attributable to the owner of the arms. Borrowing or stealing arms was a frequent means of obscuring evidence and thereby deflecting guilt. The medieval law of *deodand*, showing traces of the Roman noxal actions, specifies that where injury is inflicted the nearest object□animate or inanimate□bears the responsibility and should by rights be handed over to those obliged to avenge the crime. Damage done to humans by dogs or other animals is ascribable to the owner 'according to a scale of compensation increasing after the first bite' The *Coutume de Tourraine et Anjou* prescribes a fine of 100s. Id. payable by the master of an animal that causes the death of a man. And in England, if two men are at work in a forest and one lets a tree accidentally fall upon the other, the tree belongs to the victim's kin. When injury occurs under the jurisdiction or protection of the king's forest the blameworthy object is automatically transmitted to the royal agent of justice. Both instances acknowledge that where one brings about the death of another he is, like Guinevere, liable regardless of intent.

Pragmatic to an extreme degree, feudal law offers solutions to obvious situations and punishes misdeeds of a general kind without regard to the motivation or circumstances surrounding the crime. Harm inflicted upon one's fellow man constitutes criminal action, but where no harm is done no crime has been committed. The thoughts of a man were not to be tried, nor was attempted offence any offence at all. For medieval man the idea of guilt does not exist apart from actual infractions against specific individuals. He possesses no concept equivalent to the Roman *culpa* or the modern sense of negligence within the criminal sphere. On the contrary, feudal justice had no use for such abstract precepts, its immediate goal being the cessation of hostilities between private parties, its long range aim the prescription of indemnities to be paid the injured party or his family. Without injury there is no need for reparation; and when retribution is required, the amount of compensation is determined by the victim's social status and the fixed tables of payment, the *wergeld* or *relief d'homme*. At no stage does the need arise to consider the offender's motive or intent.

Although archaic Germanic law provided for only one degree of homicidal guilt, with little distinction between premeditated and accidental manslaughter, it did possess limited means of differentiating a few cases of aggravated slaying known as *morth* (Latin

murdrum, Old French *murdre*). The term *morth* designated an unemendable crime involving concealment of the victim's body. Salic law, for example, specifies that if a dead man's corpse has been hidden in a well or in the branches of a tree, the deed falls into the category of *morth*, or *homicide odieux.* Otherwise, it constitutes plain manslaughter, *homicide simple*, for which the tariff of compensation is considerably lower. Allemand and Frisian law set the price of murder at nine times the figure set for an ordinary slaying.

The essential distinction between homicide and murder hinges, throughout the Middle Ages and up until the fourteenth century, upon the idea of open as opposed to hidden misdeed. Glanvill defines *murdum* as a 'killing seen by none'□'Dou autem genera homicidii. Unum est quod dicitur murdrem, quod nullo vidente'. The *Très Ancien Coutumier de Normandie*, written about ten years after Glanvill's death in 1190, classifies murder among the irreparable crimes occurring under the cover of darkness. The thirteenth-century *Livre de Fostice et de Plet* is even more precise: slayings carried out at night automatically constitute murder: 'homicide fet nuitantre fet murtre'. Thus for Germanic custom, Glanvill, the *Très Ancien Coutumier*, and the *Fostice et Plet* the notion of murder necessarily implies treachery, or killing in which the guilty party, through ruse or surprise, takes unfair advantage of his victim.

Treacherous homicide comprises, on the one hand, any slaying not enacted openly, that is not the result of direct conflict between the slain man and his slayer. Saint Louis incorporates both the concept of night-time deed and that of unfair advantage in the definition of murder found in the *Établissements*. For Louis, murder was synonymous with death in bed, or in any way that does not involve a fight: 'Murtres si est d'ome ou de fame quant l'en la tue en son lit, ou en aucune meniere por coi ce ne soit en mellée'. Murder implies trickery, the denial of a fair chance at self-defence. As such, it entails an automatic death sentence without the obvious benefit to the killer of trial. All that Louis required to admit the possibility of legal process was that the slayer show by the presence of scars inflicted prior to the victim's death proof that open conflict did, in fact, occur.

The notion of murder comprehends, on the other hand, the idea not only of treachery, but of surprise. A murdered man has been taken unawares either in his sleep or in a contest without formal challenge or equality in the means of confrontation. When Charlemagne accuses Ganelon of treason the defendant denies the charges on the grounds that his defiance of Roland was made publicly and not in secret:

Jo desfiai Rollant le poigneor
Et Oliver e tuiz lur compaignun
Carles l'oïd e si nobilie baron.
Venget m'en sui, mais n'i ad traïsun.
(*Roland*)

Ganelon's distinction between treason, a punishable misdeed, and vengeance, a justifiable one□'Venget m'en sui, mais n'i ad traïsun'□centres around the visible nature of his action. The challenge to the emperor's nephew took place in the open, that is to

say within the hearing range of all concerned: 'Carles l'oïd e si nobilie baron'. Instead of denying the accusation Ganelon makes a virtue of the openness of the deed which, by feudal standards, did not constitute criminal offence. Feudal law recognizes only two sorts of homicide, vengeance and treason, overt and covert slaying. The fine distinctions that Bracton later draws between killing in self-defence, in execution of a death sentence or in apprehending a man who is himself a criminal, in short, the circumstances that give each act its particular character, are completely ignored. It matters little why one man kills another, but how he does it. Abidance by the rules of public challenge suffices to render homicide legal, and all killings conducted properly are essentially justifiable.

When Mador accuses Guinevere of having killed his brother 'treacherously' he is, in effect, accusing her of premeditated murder. She must have, according to his allegation, been aware of the poison hidden in the piece of fruit and intended to trap Gaheris with her gastronomic deceit. Yet the reader knows what Lancelot only suspects: that the Queen is completely innocent of any premeditation and that her part in the slaying is the product of accident. Not even a case of the old Germanic *homicide simple*, Guinevere's crime constitutes what today is considered involuntary manslaughter, an ambiguous mixture of guilt in deed and innocence of intent that defies the legal mechanism of Arthur's court. Structured around a well-defined and undeviating series of binary options, feudal procedure has no means of assimilating events like Gaheris's murder that cannot be reduced to a strict *either/or* proposition. In the first place, there exists no regularized method of prosecution, a fault shared by all purely accusatory systems. Guinevere's act either escapes any sort of public notice, as during the period prior to Mador's arrival in Camelot, or she finds herself charged with intentional wrongdoing; the Queen either eludes prosecution altogether, or is indicted for murder with evil intent. And whereas the author of *La Mort* possesses a language in which to recount such ambiguous happenings as accidental death, Arthur's court has no legal language in which to couch such equivocal phenomena. The formula of accusation together with the inflexible contradictory response disclose the insufficiency of a judicial process that has no way of affirming the reality of an event, its simple occurrence, without at the same time confirming conscious motivation, an act of will on the part of those involved. The failure of the justice of the Round Table reaches far beyond a mere lack of familiarity with problematic criminal action to a lack of discourse by which to assimilate partial, relative, non-exclusive truths and therefore to give adequate legal meaning to Guinevere's misdeed.

The breakdown of procedure during the Queen's trial would not offer such incontrovertible evidence of a more general crisis of legal institutions were it not for the novel's second judicial combat, that which pits Lancelot against Gauvain before the walls of Gaunes. Here, trial by battle has been agreed upon as a suitable means of resolving the blood-feud following the death of Gauvain's three brothers, in particular Gaheriet. Gauvain, like Mador, adopts the standard accusatory formula under which all homicide becomes premeditated homicide: 'Lancelot, fet messire Gauvains, messires le rois est ci venuz por fere ce que vos m'avez requis; vos savez bien que entre moi et vos avons emprise une bataille si grant comme de traïson por la mort de mes freres que vos oceïstes en traïson, desloiaument, ce savons nos bien tuit; si en sui apelerres et vos

deffenderres'. Lancelot responds in the appropriate manner, with a direct denial of the charges: 'vos jurai sur seinz que onques du mien escient n'ocis Gaheriet vostre frere'. Once again the question put to legal test is not whether the accused did, in reality, perpetrate the act of which he stands accused, but whether his actions were intentional. Gauvain insists upon the premeditated quality of the deed□'vos oceïstes en traïson'□while Lancelot disavows any conscious intent□'du mien escient n'ocis vostre frere'.

The issue under judicial dispute occurs during the quarrel over Guinevere's execution after her capture in *flagrante delicto*. In the struggle to save her Lancelot's men kill Gauvain's brothers. Boort maintains that the original conflict took place openly, in an area where there were more than one hundred knights, and that the resulting deaths were therefore justified: 'onques en traïson n'occeïstes ses freres, mes en apert, en tel leu ou il avoit plus de cent chevaliers'. Lancelot's cousin thus establishes the traditional opposition between treacherous and overt wrongdoing. In looking back at the actual incident being judged, however, it seems clear that Lancelot did, in fact, literally ambush the party accompanying Guinevere to the stake. As the Queen's escort approaches the place of execution he waits, hidden in the woods, for a message from court: 'Tant alerent parlant entre Agravain et Gaheriet qu'il aprouchierent del feu. Et Lancelos, qui fu enbuschiez a l'entree de la forest a toute sa gent□'. When Lancelot hears that his mistress has been condemned to die he singles out Agravain, the man responsible for the entrapment of the lovers, as the prime target of attack: 'Or doint Dex que, si onques oi priere de pecheeur, que ge truisse premierement Agravain qui m'a cest plet basti'. Lancelot's lying in wait at the entrance to the forest□'embuchiez a l'entree de la forest'□bears the mark of the original sense of ambush (Latin *am-busca*) implying a concealed attack 'from the woods'. His designation of Agravain as the object of assault reveals a degree of premeditation that cannot be denied. The crime of which Gauvain accuses Lancelot combines the Roman notion of aforethought with the germanic concept of surprise attack or *guet-apens*.

Thus Gauvain's accusation, unlike that of Mador, has a strong basis in fact. Lancelot did kill his brother with harmful intent and in a deceitful manner. The episode in question reveals none of the uncertainty that surrounds Guinevere's case; and yet the outcome is even more ambiguous. Lancelot wins the judicial duel, but he wins on the grounds of a technicality long after his opponent has been, for all intents and purposes, physically vanquished. Arthur, acting in his capacity as judge and upon an appeal from the defendant, puts an end to the fight: 'Lancelot, Gauvains ne lera pas la bataille, s'il ne li plest; mes vos la poez lessier, se vos voulez, car ja est eure passee; si avez bien fet ce que vos devez'. Through his reference to the hour that has come□'ja est eure passee'□Arthur invokes the medieval judicial custom according to which any defendant who manages to fend off his accuser until evening stands acquitted. The *Grand Coutumier de Normandie* defines the *terminus ad quem* of judicial battle with the appearance of stars in the sky. Lancelot sets the limit at the hour of vespers in a last-minute plea to end the struggle: 'et dedenz vespres qui apele home de traïson doit avoir sa querele desresniee et sa bataille veincue, ou il a perdue sa querele par droit' (p. 201.12). Lancelot scores, then, what amounts to a technical knockout in a present-day prizefight. His victory is neither complete, as against Mador, nor the product of his

efforts alone; for with Arthur's intervention the application of human procedure, positive law, succeeds where divine justice has failed.

Having undertaken what was a dubious cause in Guinevere's defence and a patently poor cause in his own case, Lancelot emerges victorious from both encounters. The first can be justified in terms of a sudden reversal due to inappropriate judicial formula; the second, however, can only be explained as the triumph of superior physical force. Unlike the *Chanson de Roland*, where God intervenes at crucial moments to save the hero and thus reaffirm men's faith in his abiding presence, the two trials of *La Mort* only serve to undermine credence in the fundamental tenets of feudal justice: that the righteous, though not necessarily the most powerful, man emerges victorious and that human error and chance play no part in the functioning of the legal process. The *Deo judicio* no longer punishes wrongdoing, nor does it vindicate injury swiftly and clearly. It has failed in its chief capacity, which is the designation of intrinsic but unobvious guilt through an irreducible contradiction of parties. Trial by combat has ceased, even, to distribute justice fairly. Arvalan and Lancelot, the guilty parties in the two legal actions, elude prosecution; Mador and Gauvain fail to obtain redress.

The ineffectiveness of trial by battle can, in Mador's case, be ascribed to the formulary weakness of the system, and in Gauvain's to the substantive failing of the duel itself. A more inherent defect lies at the epistemological root of immanent justice. Stated simply, the outcome of the ordeal by battle exists independently of the notion of cognitive truth. The justice of Arthur's court depends upon the observance or non-observance of a series of fixed rules□formulas of accusation and denial, adjournment, representation, wagers and termination of combat□that matter much more than the collection and assessment of information concerning the criminal act. In fact, within a feudal accusatory system the only means of challenging the truthfulness of the proceedings is to prove that the rules have not been applied with sufficient rigour, that the judge has either refused to hear a case brought before him or that he has mishandled the precepts at his disposal. Both require an additional wager of battle, tendered this time against the judge by the party that questions his probity. Neither involves reference to the original deed whose truthfulness or falsity is never really tested. Arthur initiates no investigation at the time of Guinevere's crime, he calls no witnesses and holds no inquest during her trial; nor does anyone present at the original accusation raise the question of what, in point of fact, occurred at the time of Gaheris's death. The attempt to recreate faithfully the reality of past events remains a non-essential concept within the feudal legal system, whose only concern is the prevention of their recurrence. At best a means of regularizing and codifying single hand-to-hand con-flicts, the *duel judiciaire* represents a symbolic reenactment of the original deed brought before the court. It can in no way be confused with the endeavour to recapture the basic truth of the crime: the coherence of its etiology, strategy, and resolution.

Founded upon the weakest of fragmentary evidence, the truth of events stands, under the procedure at Arthur's disposal, only loosely bound to the process of rational human thought. Judicial truth, that involved in the trial itself, is witnessed by the presence of the barons at court, affirmed by the judge, who receives the accusations and pronounces sentence, and risked by the parties who expose themselves to divine wrath. The barons

are, in this respect, the repository of collective truth, the customs of the community as expressed by the judge. The memory of the latter represents, in turn, a storehouse of appropriate rules intended to provoke a manifestation of higher truth. Logically, an accusal and wager of battle, once pronounced, can either be accepted or refused; if rejected, the accused stands guilty as charged; if accepted, the allegation may still be either true or false. Assuming that it were true, then the defendant would supposedly lose the judicial duel; and if false, then and only then would the judgement of the gods fall upon the accuser. As is evident, the act of accusal coupled with the agreed upon conditions of confrontation occupy the centre of the trial. It is only at the final stage of arbitration that a distinction is theoretically drawn between innocence and guilt and that divine wrath punishes the offender. Until the conclusion of battle the opposition between falsehood and truth plays a relatively minor role in the proceedings.

In Guinevere's case the deed of which she is accused did take place, although her indictment is, strictly speaking, false because of the innocence of her intentions. The wager of battle is accepted by Lancelot who, as defendant, defeats Mador. In the second judicial test the infraction did again occur, but the accusal is essentially true this time, since Lancelot killed Gaheriet with evil intent according to the medieval formula of *traïson*. Once more the defendant, Lancelot again wins the *duel judiciaire*. Thus both trials of *La Mort* begin from the same initial premise: the occurrence of the act submitted to the court. Yet in both cases the link between the truth of the misdeed and the outcome of the *Deo judicio* is at some point severed. Mador disturbs the progression at the outset through the inaccuracy of his accusal; from that moment on it is no longer a question of the veracity of the events surrounding the Queen's wrongdoing. With Gauvain's suit the alliance of justice and truth is not disrupted until the battle itself when the plaintiff loses despite the truth of his allegations. Here, the victory of a defendant faced with a true accusation can only be taken as a failure of divine judgement and hence of the entire set of assumptions underlying immanent justice. The combatants' fatigue at the end of this second struggle reflects an exhausted method of ascertaining judicial truth.

For the knight-warrior caste of the feudal era the judicial duel was a privilege of class, a symbolic means of terminating personal quarrels like that of Lancelot and Gauvain in the absence of any more effective civil mechanism. As such, the right to participate in the *duel judiciaire* was considered a seigneurial prerogative inseparable from the general maintenance of arms incumbent upon the holding of land in fief. With the reconstitution of the national monarchy of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, the archaic feudal mode of proof came under heavy attack from several quarters: the Church, the northern municipalities, and especially the late Capetian and Angevin kings of France. Suppression of the *Deo judicio* along with the appearance of a coherent system of judicial appeal stood at the heart of the royal programme of administrative centralization aimed at creating direct legal ties between king and subject; in this way, the crown hoped to undermine the local seigneurial jurisdiction of a former age. It was with this objective in mind that Saint Louis in the late 1250s prohibited the ordeal of battle within the royal domain. In its place he substituted the old Frankish practice preserved throughout the Middle Ages in canonical courts, the *enquête*: 'Nous deffendons les batailles partout nostre domoine en toutes quereles, mais nous n'ostons

mie les clains, les respons, les contremanz, ne touz autres erremanz qui ont esté accostumé en cort laie jusques à ores, selonc les usages de divers païs, fors tant que nos en ostons les batailles; et en leu de batailles nos metons *prueves de tesmoinz et de chartes*'. The proof by witnesses and written documents□'preuves de tesmoinz et de chartes'□that Louis prescribes as an alternative to trial by combat implies a radically different concept of the goals and methods of criminal procedure. Justice will henceforth focus not upon the payment of reparation to the injured party, but the establishment of legal truth. Intended to recreate the reality of past events as they actually happened, the inquest suddenly introduces the notion of rational truth, human rather than divine, into the centre of the judicial process. The pivotal position formerly occupied by customary rules of accusation and denial followed by divine intervention is now filled by the judge's obligation to render cognitive legal decisions independent of any system of higher causality. Under an inquisitional system man and not God determines innocence and guilt according to comprehensible logical criteria.

The primary basis for judgement by inquest is the collection of information regarding the act or issue in question through the sworn statements of witnesses. Normandy possessed an inquisitory procedure in use before the Conquest and certainly before the re-annexation of the Duchy in the early thirteenth century. As a matter of course a defendant had the right to refuse a wager of battle, insisting instead upon an examination of the merits of his case by loyal and credible men of the vicinage under oath to appraise the facts as objectively as possible. The presiding judge then transmitted their decision to the duke. Where a question of custom or possession arose the wise men of the community gathered to determine the precedent practice or title. In criminal cases a man arrested on suspicion of serious offence might be asked to submit to an inquiry into the deed of which he is accused. An *enquête du pays* would be ordered. Twenty-four neighbours likely to know about the infraction were summoned individually before four knights and a bailiff who questioned them and committed their testimony to writing. The resulting account of criminal action sworn to by many witnesses constituted an act of public notoriety equivalent to capture of the accused party in *flagrante delicto*.

The canonical inquest or *Inquisitio generalis* represented a standard principle of procedure long prior to its re-introduction within the public sphere. Throughout the Middle Ages the bishop or other high church official could force members of the clergy or laymen to disclose known ill-doers from among the populace; an indictment elicited in this manner automatically led to trial. The *visitatio* of the bishop for the purpose of hearing complaints from the community at large was reinforced by the presence of a permanent judicial officer, the *promotor* or prosecutor, charged, in addition to the general populace, with the denunciation of notorious offenders. The ideal method of *processus per inquisitionem* as outlined by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) first required the establishment of the *infamia* or infraction either by the *promotor* acting on his own or the judge acting upon the plea of a third party. Witnesses were then called and testimony recorded by a notary. At that point the defendant was summoned, informed of the charge against him and permitted to produce his own witnesses whose testimony was to be weighed against that of the opposing side. After hearing both depositions the judge decided between the two adversaries.

The differences between the feudal accusatory system of Arthur's court and the inquisitory system utilized by the Church and eventually adopted by the civil authorities are enormous. In the first place, the inquisitory judge or his affiliate has the power to proceed against offenders like Guinevere and Lancelot without the formal complaint of a Mador or Gauvain. The accused is, moreover, obliged to submit to the court's jurisdiction with no possibility of refusing the wager of battle tendered against him. The trial itself no longer implies a direct confrontation between opposing parties, but a mediated encounter through a third party who hears the testimony of both sides independently and thus arrives at a satisfactory solution. Finally, the inquest represents a secret judicial process conducted behind the closed doors of the judge's or *promotor*'s chambers. The oral public character of the feudal court, its authority conferred by the presence of the barons, gives way to a privately conducted investigation whose main objective is the constitution of a written dossier. In Paris an inquest directed by the highest court of the land, the *Parlement*, began with a written demand to the *Chambre des Enquêtes* which issued a letter of justice authorizing legal action; the court then summoned the adverse party whose deposition under oath (*serment de calomnie*) was recorded by the *greffier* . If the defendant could prove his innocence through existing documents, he was acquitted. If not, the court appointed trained commissioners to collect the information needed for the inquest and, where necessary, to travel to the place of infraction. This board of inquiry recorded the sworn testimony of witnesses, as in the *enquête du pays*, sealing their declarations along with any other relevant evidence in a sack to be returned to Paris. A dossier compiled in this fashion was expedited to the *Grand Chambre* of the *Parlement* where its contents were examined and an *arrêt* or decision finally pronounced.

The end product of the inquisitory system□the dossier□denotes an attempt to uncover the truth of a crime, to capture, in essence, the guilty party in the act of offence by assembling the facts surrounding the alleged wrongdoing. More importantly, the designation of guilt where infraction is not apparent is no longer a matter for God alone to judge according to an infallible logic invisible to humans and *a posteriori* to the deed in question, but a matter to be determined by the scrupulous ordering of past events into a coherent scenario of action. Justice, under this second mode of procedure, does not exist independently of the notion of truth, which constitutes its chief *raison d'être*. The *enquête* seeks to transcribe the memory of the crime into concrete intelligible form.

The author of *La Mort* offers no remedy for the failure of feudal judicial institutions□entrapment in *flagrante delicto*, vendetta, private war, and trial by combat□to resolve the disputes arising naturally between the members of any given social group. On the contrary, they complicate and extend them. Mador's and Gauvain's accusations engender a crisis of belief in the efficacy of the *Deo judicio*. The capture of Lancelot and Guinevere in the act of adultery provokes the gratuitous slaughter of Gauvain's three brothers. Their deaths initiate the endless cycle of vendetta and war that sets one half of the kingdom against the other and that leads, in the end, to the usurpation of kingship by Arthur's bastard son. At no point do the archaic legal mechanisms of immanent justice prevent the violence of private grievance from menacing and destroying the integrity of the realm. *La Mort Artu* represents, from this perspective, a declaration of bankruptcy of the most cherished values and institutions of

the feudal world two centuries after the beginning of the end of feudalism in France. Private war and its symbolic termination in trial by combat suffice within a society of small independent political units; they fail to provide adequate responses to the problems of a larger political body, the national monarchy of Saint Louis and his successors.

A novel without explicit resolution of the dilemma that it portrays, *La Mort* does contain, in the opening paragraph of the text, an implicit antidote to the drama of social decline:

1.'Aprés ce que mestres Gautiers Map ot mis en
escrit des *Aventures del Seint Graal* assez
soufisanment si com li sembloit, si fu avis au roi
Henri son seigneur que ce qu'il avoit fet ne devoit
pas soufire, s'il ne ramentevoit la fin de ceus dont
il avoit fet devant mention et conment cil morurent□;
et por ce commença il ceste derrienne partie. Et quant
il l'ot ensemble mise, si l'apela *La Mort le Roi Artu*.'2. 'Quant Boorz fu venuz a cort en la cité meïsmes
de Kamaalot de si lointeignes terres comme sont les
parties de Jerusalem, assez trouva a court qui grant
joie li fist;□ Et quant il ot aconté le trespassement
de Galaad et la mort Perceval, si en furent tuit moult
dolent a court;□ Lors fist li rois metre en escrit
toutes les aventures que li compaignon de la queste
del Seint Graal avoient racontees en sa court.

In Henry II's invitation to Walter Map to record the tragic 'end of those he has already mentioned' and in Arthur's command to put into writing the 'adventures recounted by the companions of the Holy Grail Quest', we detect the basic formula of inquest: the commission by the ruler in a position of legal authority to transcribe the reality of the past. Evoking the image of Henry II, the man responsible in large part for the transformation of English jurisprudence from a feudal to a national system, and Walter Map, himself a jurist and man of letters, the text itself can be regarded as the transcription of a legendary oral past into concrete written form. The author's effort to register the truth of the tale (*li contes*) that constantly escapes him□'Mes atant lesse ore li contes □ En ceste parti dit li contes'□coincides with Arthur's own search for the truth of the Queen's adultery. Both recognize the possibility of a logical ordering of objects and events, the existence of rational human truth separable from the immanence of divine truth, upon which the legal and literary discourse of the modern world depends.

Source: R. Howard Bloch, "From Grail Quest to Inquest: The Death of King Arthur and the Birth of France," in *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 69, Issue 1, January, 1974, pp. 40-55.

Adaptations

Knights of the Round Table, (1953 MGM, 106 min.) starring Robert Taylor, Ava Gardner, and Mel Ferrer and directed by Richard Thorpe, was nominated for Academy Awards in Best Art Direction/Set Direction and Best Sound.

First Knight, (1995 Columbia, 134 min.) starring Sean Connery, Richard Gere, Julia Ormond, and John Gielgud and directed by Jerry Zucker was panned by the critics as unintentionally funny with a plot similar to a Harlequin Romance.

Camelot, (1967 Warner Brothers, 150 min.) starring Richard Harris, Vanessa Redgrave, David Hemmings, Franco Nero, and Lionel Jefferies and directed by Joshua Logan, received Academy Awards for Best Art Direction/Set Direction, Best Costume Design, and Best Score. This film also won Golden Globe Awards for Best Actor, Best Song, and Best Score.

King Arthur and His Knights, (1998 Greathall) narrated by Jim Weiss. Weiss is a storyteller whose work appeals to children. He uses song to tell several of the episodes from King Arthur's life.

Le Morte D' Arthur, (1998 Blackstone) narrated by Frederick Davidson, containing eleven (two-hour) cassettes, is a reading of selections from Malory's text.

Le Morte D' Arthur, (1997 Highbridge) narrated by Dereck Jacobi, contains six cassettes, and offers an abridgement of Malory's text.

Le Morte D' Arthur, (1963 Argo) is a dramatization starring Harry Andrews, William Squire, Joan Hart, and Tony White.

Le Morte D' Arthur: Launcelot and Guinevere, (1972 Caedmon) narrated by Siobhan McKenna, includes selections for Malory's story.

Topics for Further Study

Religion plays a significant role in Malory's epic, often as allegory. Discuss some of the images of Christianity that are present and explore their influences on Arthur's court and Round Table.

Contrast the images of legitimate love between Gareth and his wife and the adulterous love between Launcelot and Guinevere. What do you think Malory is saying about the role of legitimate love in his readers' lives?

Discuss Arthur's Round Table code to which his knights must adhere. Which knights do you think most closely follow Arthur's desires? And which knights most seriously deviate from these expectations?

Discuss the features of the epic genre, paying special attention to which features are present in Malory's text.

Explore the role of revenge in Malory's text and how this motif ultimately leads to the destruction of Arthur's Camelot.

Compare and Contrast

Fourteenth Century: In 1419, England's Henry V conquers all of Normandy, wining a battle at Agincourt, in which the heavily outnumbered English soldiers defeat the French. Henry's glorious win is considered as a sanction from God for having undertaken the war. Some scholars think that Henry's glorious exploits in battle serve for Malory's depiction of Arthur.

Late Twentieth Century: Neither the English or the French are seen as great military forces, and indeed, both have fought on the same side all during this century. The twentieth century has not witnessed a military hero of the stature of either Henry or Arthur, although General Eisenhower perhaps comes closest.

Fourteenth Century: In 1428, the University of Florence begins to teach Greek and Latin literature, as a way to emphasize moral values. When this occurs, the early Greek and Roman epics, *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid* are again taught. This results in a greater interest in the ancient epics and leads to the creation of many new epics within the next two hundred years, including Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. These authors were all interested in using the epic form to establish moral values and to promote the importance of religious faith as a positive influence.

Late Twentieth Century: Most modern authors have little interest in creating epics. Instead, many people use mass media as a moral compass and as a way to model behavior. However, the religious epics of Malory, Spenser, and Milton continue to be very popular as literature. In particular, sections from Malory's epic are often depicted on film as either romance or action entertainment.

Fourteenth Century: The Hundred Years War between England and France that began in 1377 continues throughout most of the century, only ending in 1453 with England's defeat. After the glorious victories of Henry V, there is little for the British to cheer about. In bringing a heroic figure such as Arthur to life, Malory once again offers the English a reason to remember their past glories and a reason to hope again that their country will find real glory on the battlefield.

Late Twentieth Century: During World War II, the British refuse to capitulate to the Germans, becoming one of the few European countries to withstand the force of the Axis. Although they are certainly outnumbered and suffer heavy losses during the Blitz, the British prove once again that they have the strength to survive, often calling upon a proud heritage to give the people continued hope for victory.

Fourteenth Century: Civil war, between the Yorkists (wearing white roses) and the Lancas-trians (wearing red roses) lasts for thirty years. The War of the Roses, as it is called, tears at the fabric of England, whose resources are directed toward war rather than the improvement of the country. The civil war is particularly destructive as English soldiers kill English soldiers. Meanwhile, many people are starving and little

developmental progress is made. Malory's epic clearly illustrates the destruction from murder and chaos that occurs when revenge and death take precedence over constructive actions.

Late Twentieth Century: Unlike England's experience with the War of the Roses, most nations have found that war is an economic boon, providing more employment and often leading to the development of technology that has peacetime applications. For instance, war has led to improvements in medicine and in airplane design. War also leads to increased production and an increase in the countries gross national product; accordingly, war can provide one way for a country to emerge from an economic depression.

What Do I Read Next?

Knighthood in the Morte d'Arthur, 1985, by Beverly Kennedy, examines knighthood as found in several medieval texts.

The Idylls of the King, 1833, by Tennyson, is a poetic presentation of the story of Arthur, from his meeting with Guinevere to the time of his death.

History of the Kings of Britain, 1136, by Geoffrey of Monmouth (reprinted in 1977 by Viking Penguin), is an epic work that begins with the founding of Britain. This book provides a history of Arthur, and may have served as one of Malory's sources.

The Evolution of Arthurian Romance: The Verse Tradition from Chretien to Froissart, 1998 by Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann (originally published in German in 1985), is a study of Arthurian verse romance. In it the author argues that scholars need to redraw the lines on the literary and linguistic map of medieval Britain and France.

Edmund Spenser's, *The Faerie Queene*, 1590- 1596, incorporates many of the ideas and characters from Malory's work, including King Arthur and the search for the ideal, in this case the Faerie Queene.

The Scolemaster, 1570, by Roger Ascham (reprinted in 1996 by Thoemmes Press) provides Ascham's theories on education and includes his concerns about the moral in.uences of some books.

The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England: Its Archaeology and literature, 1995, by Hilda Ellis Davidson, is a study of the archaeological evidence on the importance of the sword and of sword making in medieval literature. This book includes many illustrations.

Early Medieval, 1994, by George Henderson, explores the connections between art and civilization, covering the period from the .fth century to about the tenth.

Early Medieval Architecture, 1999, by Roger Stalley, examines the development of medieval architecture by exploring the social and religious influences of the period.

The Arthurian Legends: An Illustrated Anthology, 1992, by Richard Barber, contains a collection of all the many Arthurian legends, each set into its literary and historical context.

Further Study

Archibald, Elizabeth and A.S.G. Edwards, editors, *A Companion to Malory*, D. S. Brewer, 1996.

This book is a compilation of essays that focus on several of the themes and ideas present in Malory's text.

Benson, L.D., *Le Morte d'Arthur*, in *Critical Approaches to Six Major Works: Beowulf through Paradise Lost*, edited by R. M. Lumiansky and Hershel Baker, 1968, pp. 112-120.

This article is a discussion on the thematic unity of Malory's text, which uses as its example the story of Gareth.

Caxton, William, "Caxton's Preface," in *The Works of Thomas Malory, Vol. I*, edited by Eugene Vinaver, Clarendon Press, 1947.

This text is from the original preface that appeared in the 1485 publication of Malory's epic.

Cole, Harry, "'Forgiveness as Structure:" The Book of Launcelot and Queen Guinevere,'" in *Chaucer Review*, Vol. 31, No.1, 1996, pp. 36-44.

This article examines the purpose and function of the section of Malory's epic that focuses on the story of Launcelot and Guinevere.

Fenster, Thelma S., editor, *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, Garland, 1996.

This book is a compilation of essays that focus on the women in Malory's text.

Field, P. J. C., *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, D. S. Brewer, 1993.

Field's book is an attempt to understand Malory and to establish the real identity of the author of this epic.

Gaines, Barry, *Sir Thomas Malory: An Anecdotal Bibliography of Editions, 1485-1985*, AMS Press, 1990.

Gaines' book is a discussion of many of the different editions of Malory's text that have appeared over the years. Gaines' book also includes books based on the Arthurian legends, as well as children's editions.

Kennedy, Edward Donald, "Malory's Guinevere: 'A Woman Who Had Grown a Soul,'" in *Arthuriana*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Spring, 1999, pp. 37-45.

This article argues that Guinevere, who also led to Launcelot's failure in seeking the Grail, was ultimately the reason his soul was saved.

Lewis, C. S., "The English Prose 'Morte,'" in *Essays on Malory*, edited by Walter Oakeshott, et. al., Clarendon press, 1963, pp. 7-28.

This essay examines several of what Lewis claims are key paradoxes in Malory's text.

Lynch, Andrew, *Malory's Book of Arms*, D. S. Brewer, 1997.

Lynch's book provides a narration and discussion of the combat sequences in Malory's text.

Malory, Sir Thomas, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Bramwell House, 1962.

This edition of Malory's text has been translated into modern English, with the intent that the text be more accessible to the casual reader than previous editions.

Putter, Ad, "Finding Time for Romance: Medieval Arthurian Literary History," in *Medium Aevum*, Vol. 63, No.1, Spring, 1994, pp. 1-16.

Putter's article is a discussion of the historical basis of the Arthurian legend, using Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain.*

Saul, MaryLynn, "Courtly Love and the Patriarchal Marriage Practice in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*," *Fifteenth Century Studies*, Vol. 24, 1998, pp. 50-62.

This article explores the historical basis of medieval marriage as depicted in Malory's text.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Epics for Students (EfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, EfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of EfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of EfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in EfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by EfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

EfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Epics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the EfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the EfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Epics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Epics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from EfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Epics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from EfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Epics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of EfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Epics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of EfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Epics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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