My Lief Is Faren in Londe

My lief is faren in londe[9]—
Allas, why is she so?
And I am so sore bonde° *bound*
I may nat come her to.
She hath myn herte in holde
Wherever she ride or go°— *walk*
With trewe love a thousand folde.

Western Wind

Westron wind, when will thou blow?
The small rain down can rain.
Christ, that my love were in my arms,
And I in my bed again.

I Am of Ireland

Ich am of Irlonde,
And of the holy londe
Of Irlonde.
Goode sire, praye ich thee,
For of° sainte charitee, *sake of*
Com and dance with me
In Irlonde.

9. My beloved has gone away.

SIR THOMAS MALORY
ca. 1415–1471

Morte Darthur (Death of Arthur) is the title that William Caxton, the first English printer, gave to Malory's volume, which Caxton described more accurately in his Preface as "the noble histories of King Arthur and of certain of his knights." The volume begins with the mythical story of Arthur's birth. King Uther Pendragon falls in love with the wife of one of his barons. Merlin's magic transforms Uther into the likeness of her husband, and Arthur is born of this union. The volume ends with

the destruction of the Round Table and the deaths of Arthur, Queen Guinevere, and Sir Lancelot, who is Arthur's best knight and the queen's lover. The bulk of the work is taken up with the separate adventures of the knights of the Round Table.

On the evolution of the Arthurian legend, see the headnote to "The Myth of Arthur's Return," p. 136. During the thirteenth century, the stories about Arthur and his knights had been turned into a series of enormously long prose romances in French, and it was these that, as Caxton informed his readers, "Sir Thomas Malory did take out of certain books of French and reduced into English." For Caxton's Preface, see "King Arthur" in the NAEL Archive.

Little was known about the author until the early twentieth century when scholars began to unearth the criminal record of a Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revell in Warwickshire. In 1451 he was arrested for the first time to prevent his doing injury—presumably further injury—to a priory in Lincolnshire, and shortly thereafter he was accused of a number of criminal acts. These included escaping from prison after his first arrest, twice breaking into and plundering the Abbey of Coombe, extorting money from various persons, and committing rape. Malory pleaded innocent of all charges. The Wars of the Roses—in which Malory, like the formidable earl of Warwick (the "kingmaker"), whom he seems to have followed, switched sides from Lancaster to York and back again—may account for some of his troubles with the law. After a failed Lancastrian revolt, the Yorkist king, Edward IV, specifically excluded Malory from four amnesties he granted to the Lancastrians.

The identification of this Sir Thomas Malory (there is another candidate with the same name) as the author of the *Morte* was strengthened by the discovery in 1934 of a manuscript that differed from Caxton's text, the only version previously known. The manuscript contained eight separate romances. Caxton, in order to give the impression of a continuous narrative, had welded these together into twenty-one books, subdivided into short chapters with summary chapter headings. Caxton suppressed all but the last of the personal remarks the author had appended to individual tales in the manuscript. At the very end of the book Malory asks "all gentlemen and gentlewomen that readeth this book pray for me while I am alive that God send me good deliverance." The discovery of the manuscript revealed that at the close of the first tale he had written: "this was drawyn by a knight presoner Sir Thomas Malleoré, that God sende him good recover." There is strong circumstantial evidence, therefore, that the book from which the Arthurian legends were passed on to future generations to be adapted in literature, art, and film was written in prison by a man whose violent career might seem at odds with the chivalric ideals he professes.

Such a contradiction—if it really is one—should not be surprising. Nostalgia for an ideal past that never truly existed is typical of much historical romance. Like the slave-owning plantation society of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, whose southern gentlemen cultivate chivalrous manners and respect for gentlewomen, Malory's Arthurian world is a fiction. In our terms, it cannot even be labeled "historical," although the distinction between romance and history is not one that Malory would have made. Only rarely does he voice skepticism about the historicity of his tale; one such example is his questioning of the myth of Arthur's return. Much of the tragic power of his romance lies in his sense of the irretrievability of past glory in comparison with the sordidness of his own age.

The success of Malory's retelling owes much to his development of a terse and direct prose style, especially the naturalistic dialogue that keeps his narrative close to earth. And both he and many of his characters are masters of understatement who express themselves, in moments of great emotional tension, with a bare minimum of words.

In spite of its professed dedication to service of women, Malory's chivalry is primarily devoted to the fellowship and competitions of aristocratic men. Fighting consists mainly of single combats in tournaments, chance encounters, and battles, which

Malory never tires of describing in professional detail. Commoners rarely come into view; when they do, the effect can be chilling—as when pillagers by moonlight plunder the corpses of the knights left on the field of Arthur's last battle. Above all, Malory cherishes an aristocratic male code of honor for which his favorite word is "worship." Men win or lose "worship" through their actions in war and love.

The most "worshipful" of Arthur's knights is Sir Lancelot, the "head of all Christian knights," as he is called in a moving eulogy by his brother, Sir Ector. But Lancelot is compromised by his fatal liaison with Arthur's queen and torn between the incompatible loyalties that bind him as an honorable knight, on the one hand, to his lord Arthur and, on the other, to his lady Guinevere. Malory loves his character Lancelot even to the point of indulging in the fleeting speculation, after Lancelot has been admitted to the queen's chamber, that their activities might have been innocent, "for love that time was not as love is nowadays." But when the jealousy and malice of two wicked knights force the affair into the open, nothing can avert a mighty civil war; the breaking up of the fellowship of the Round Table; and the death of Arthur himself, which Malory relates with somber magnificence as the passing of a great era.

From Morte Darthur[1]

[THE CONSPIRACY AGAINST LANCELOT AND GUINEVERE]

In May, when every lusty[2] heart flourisheth and burgeoneth, for as the season is lusty to behold and comfortable,[3] so man and woman rejoiceth and gladdeth of summer coming with his fresh flowers; for winter with his rough winds and blasts causeth lusty men and women to cower and to sit fast by the fire—so this season it befell in the month of May a great anger and unhap that stinted not[4] till the flower of chivalry of all the world was destroyed and slain. And all was long upon two unhappy[5] knights which were named Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred that were brethren unto Sir Gawain.[6] For this Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred had ever a privy[7] hate unto the Queen, Dame Guinevere, and to Sir Lancelot, and daily and nightly they ever watched upon Sir Lancelot.

So it misfortuned Sir Gawain and all his brethren were in King Arthur's chamber, and then Sir Agravain said thus openly, and not in no counsel,[8] that many knights might hear: "I marvel that we all be not ashamed both to see and to know how Sir Lancelot lieth daily and nightly by the Queen. And all we know well that it is so, and it is shamefully suffered of us all[9] that we should suffer so noble a king as King Arthur is to be shamed."

Then spoke Sir Gawain and said, "Brother, Sir Agravain, I pray you and charge you, move no such matters no more afore[1] me, for wit you well, I will not be of your counsel."[2]

1. The selections here are from the section that Caxton called book 20, chaps. 1–4, 8–10, and book 21, chaps. 3–7, 10–12, with omissions. In the Winchester manuscript this section is titled "The Most Piteous Tale of the Morte Arthur Saunz Guerdon" (i.e., the death of Arthur without reward or compensation). The text is based on Winchester, with some readings introduced from the Caxton edition; spelling has been modernized and modern punctuation added.
2. Merry.
3. Pleasant.
4. Misfortune that ceased not.
5. On account of two ill-fated.
6. Gawain and Agravain are sons of King Lot of Orkney and his wife, Arthur's half-sister Morgause. Mordred is the illegitimate son of Arthur and Morgause.
7. Secret.
8. Secret manner.
9. Put up with by all of us.
1. Before. "Move": propose.
2. On your side. "Wit you well": know well, i.e., give you to understand.

"So God me help," said Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth,[3] "we will not be known of your deeds."[4]

"Then will I!" said Sir Mordred.

"I lieve[5] you well," said Sir Gawain, "for ever unto all unhappiness, sir, ye will grant.[6] And I would that ye left all this and make you not so busy, for I know," said Sir Gawain, "what will fall of it."[7]

"Fall whatsoever fall may," said Sir Agravain, "I will disclose it to the King."

"Not by my counsel," said Sir Gawain, "for and[8] there arise war and wrack betwixt[9] Sir Lancelot and us, wit you well, brother, there will many kings and great lords hold with Sir Lancelot. Also, brother, Sir Agravain," said Sir Gawain, "ye must remember how often times Sir Lancelot hath rescued the King and the Queen. And the best of us all had been full cold at the heart-root[1] had not Sir Lancelot been better than we, and that has he proved himself full oft. And as for my part," said Sir Gawain, "I will never be against Sir Lancelot for[2] one day's deed, when he rescued me from King Carados of the Dolorous[3] Tower and slew him and saved my life. Also, brother, Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred, in like wise Sir Lancelot rescued you both and three score and two[4] from Sir Tarquin. And therefore, brother, methinks such noble deeds and kindness should be remembered."

"Do as ye list,"[5] said Sir Agravain, "for I will layne[6] it no longer."

So with these words came in Sir Arthur.

"Now, brother," said Sir Gawain, "stint your noise."[7]

"That will I not," said Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred.

"Well, will ye so?" said Sir Gawain. "Then God speed you, for I will not hear of your tales, neither be of your counsel."

"No more will I," said Sir Gaheris.

"Neither I," said Sir Gareth, "for I shall never say evil by[8] that man that made me knight." And therewithal they three departed making great dole.[9]

"Alas!" said Sir Gawain and Sir Gareth, "now is this realm wholly destroyed and mischieved,[1] and the noble fellowship of the Round Table shall be disparbeled."[2]

So they departed, and then King Arthur asked them what noise[3] they made. "My lord," said Sir Agravain, "I shall tell you, for I may keep[4] it no longer. Here is I and my brother Sir Mordred broke[5] unto my brother Sir Gawain, Sir Gaheris, and to Sir Gareth—for this is all, to make it short—how that we know all that Sir Lancelot holdeth your queen, and hath done long; and we be your sister[6] sons, we may suffer it no longer. And all we woot[7] that ye should be above Sir Lancelot, and ye are the king that made him knight, and therefore we will prove it that he is a traitor to your person."

3. Sons of King Lot and Gawain's brothers.
4. A party to your doings.
5. Believe.
6. You will consent to all mischief.
7. Come of it.
8. If.
9. Strife between.
1. Would have been dead.
2. On account of.
3. Dismal.
4. I.e., sixty-two.
5. You please.
6. Conceal.
7. Stop making scandal.
8. About.
9. Lamentation.
1. Put to shame.
2. Dispersed.
3. Rumor.
4. Conceal.
5. Revealed.
6. Sister's.
7. Know.

"If it be so," said the King, "wit[8] you well, he is none other. But I would be loath to begin such a thing but[9] I might have proofs of it, for Sir Lancelot is an hardy knight, and all ye know that he is the best knight among us all. And but if he be taken with the deed,[1] he will fight with him that bringeth up the noise, and I know no knight that is able to match him. Therefore, and[2] it be sooth as ye say, I would that he were taken with the deed."

For, as the French book saith, the King was full loath that such a noise should be upon Sir Lancelot and his queen. For the King had a deeming[3] of it, but he would not hear of it, for Sir Lancelot had done so much for him and for the Queen so many times that, wit you well, the King loved him passingly[4] well.

"My lord," said Sir Agravain, "ye shall ride tomorn[5] on hunting, and doubt ye not, Sir Lancelot will not go with you. And so when it draweth toward night, ye may send the Queen word that ye will lie out all that night, and so may ye send for your cooks. And then, upon pain of death, that night we shall take him with the Queen, and we shall bring him unto you, quick[6] or dead."

"I will well,"[7] said the King. "Then I counsel you to take with you sure fellowship."

"Sir," said Sir Agravain, "my brother, Sir Mordred, and I will take with us twelve knights of the Round Table."

"Beware," said King Arthur, "for I warn you, ye shall find him wight."[8]

"Let us deal!"[9] said Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred.

So on the morn King Arthur rode on hunting and sent word to the Queen that he would be out all that night. Then Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred got to them[1] twelve knights and hid themself in a chamber in the castle of Carlisle. And these were their names: Sir Colgrevance, Sir Mador de la Porte, Sir Guingalen, Sir Meliot de Logres, Sir Petipace of Winchelsea, Sir Galeron of Galway, Sir Melion de la Mountain, Sir Ascamore, Sir Gromore Somyr Jour, Sir Curselayne, Sir Florence, and Sir Lovell. So these twelve knights were with Sir Mordred and Sir Agravain, and all they were of Scotland, or else of Sir Gawain's kin, or well-willers[2] to his brother.

So when the night came, Sir Lancelot told Sir Bors[3] how he would go that night and speak with the Queen.

"Sir," said Sir Bors, "ye shall not go this night by my counsel."

"Why?" said Sir Lancelot.

"Sir," said Sir Bors, "I dread me[4] ever of Sir Agravain that waiteth upon[5] you daily to do you shame and us all. And never gave my heart against no going that ever ye went[6] to the queen so much as now, for I mistrust[7] that the King is out this night from the Queen because peradventure he hath lain[8] some watch for you and the Queen. Therefore, I dread me sore of some treason."

"Have ye no dread," said Sir Lancelot, "for I shall go and come again and make no tarrying."

8. Know.
9. Unless
1. Unless he is caught in the act.
2. If.
3. Suspicion.
4. Exceedingly.
5. Tomorrow.
6. Alive.
7. Readily agree.
8. Strong.

9. Leave it to us.
1. Gathered to themselves.
2. Partisans.
3. Nephew and confidant of Sir Lancelot.
4. I am afraid.
5. Lies in wait.
6. Never misgave my heart against any visit you made.
7. Suspect.
8. Perhaps he has set.

"Sir," said Sir Bor
this night shall wrat
"Fair nephew," sa
sithen[2] the Queen h
a coward, but she sh
"God speed you w
So Sir Lancelot d
walked in his mantel
And so he passed on
was had[5] into the ch
and Sir Lancelot we
manner of disports, n
was not as love is nov
But thus as they w
with twelve knights w
crying and scaring[8] v
And thus they cried wi
fourteen knights all w
"Alas!" said Queen
"Madam," said Sir
ber that I might cover
I shall soon stint[2] thei
"Now, truly," said t
sword, neither spear,
mischievous end. For
well I woot they be su
tance. Wherefore ye a
and[4] ye might escape t
would rescue me in wh
"Alas!" said Sir Lanc
should be thus shamef
But ever in one[6] Si
come out of the Queer
thou shalt not escape."
"Ah, Jesu mercy!" sa
not suffer, for better
Then he took the Quee
Christian queen, I bes
and I at all times your
failed you in right nor
knight, that ye will pra
that Sir Bors, my neph
and Sir Urry,[8] that the

9. I regret.
1. Cause injury to.
2. Since.
3. Wish to.
4. Cloak. Lancelot goes without
5. Quickly he was received.
6. I care. "Disports": pastimes.
7. At that time.
8. Terrifying.
9. Completely, as if.

"Sir," said Sir Bors, "that me repents,[9] for I dread me sore that your going this night shall wrath[1] us all."

"Fair nephew," said Sir Lancelot, "I marvel me much why ye say thus, sithen[2] the Queen hath sent for me. And wit you well, I will not be so much a coward, but she shall understand I will[3] see her good grace."

"God speed you well," said Sir Bors, "and send you sound and safe again!"

So Sir Lancelot departed and took his sword under his arm, and so he walked in his mantel,[4] that noble knight, and put himself in great jeopardy. And so he passed on till he came to the Queen's chamber, and so lightly he was had[5] into the chamber. And then, as the French book saith, the Queen and Sir Lancelot were together. And whether they were abed or at other manner of disports, me list[6] not thereof make no mention, for love that time[7] was not as love is nowadays.

But thus as they were together there came Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred with twelve knights with them of the Round Table, and they said with great crying and scaring[8] voice: "Thou traitor, Sir Lancelot, now are thou taken!" And thus they cried with a loud voice that all the court might hear it. And these fourteen knights all were armed at all points, as[9] they should fight in a battle.

"Alas!" said Queen Guinevere, "now are we mischieved[1] both!"

"Madam," said Sir Lancelot, "is there here any armor within your chamber that I might cover my body withal? And if there be any, give it me, and I shall soon stint[2] their malice, by the grace of God!"

"Now, truly," said the Queen, "I have none armor neither helm, shield, sword, neither spear, wherefore I dread me sore our long love is come to a mischievous end. For I hear by their noise there be many noble knights, and well I woot they be surely[3] armed, and against them ye may make no resistance. Wherefore ye are likely to be slain, and then shall I be burned! For and[4] ye might escape them," said the Queen, "I would not doubt but that ye would rescue me in what danger that ever I stood in."

"Alas!" said Sir Lancelot, "in all my life thus was I never bestead[5] that I should be thus shamefully slain for lack of mine armor."

But ever in one[6] Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred cried: "Traitor knight, come out of the Queen's chamber! For wit thou well thou art beset so that thou shalt not escape."

"Ah, Jesu mercy!" said Sir Lancelot, "this shameful cry and noise I may not suffer, for better were death at once than thus to endure this pain." Then he took the Queen in his arms and kissed her and said, "Most noblest Christian queen, I beseech you, as ye have been ever my special good lady, and I at all times your poor knight and true unto[7] my power, and as I never failed you in right nor in wrong sithen the first day King Arthur made me knight, that ye will pray for my soul if that I be slain. For well I am assured that Sir Bors, my nephew, and all the remnant of my kin, with Sir Lavain and Sir Urry,[8] that they will not fail you to rescue you from the fire. And

9. I regret.
1. Cause injury to.
2. Since.
3. Wish to.
4. Cloak. Lancelot goes without armor.
5. Quickly he was received.
6. I care. "Disports": pastimes.
7. At that time.
8. Terrifying.
9. Completely, as if.

1. Come to grief.
2. Stop.
3. Securely.
4. If.
5. Beset.
6. In unison.
7. To the utmost of.
8. The brother of Elaine, the Fair Maid of Astolat, and a knight miraculously healed of his wound by Sir Lancelot. "Remnant": rest.

therefore, mine own lady, recomfort yourself,[9] whatsoever come of me, that ye go with Sir Bors, my nephew, and Sir Urry and they all will do you all the pleasure that they may, and ye shall live like a queen upon my lands."

"Nay, Sir Lancelot, nay!" said the Queen. "Wit thou well that I will not live long after thy days. But and[1] ye be slain I will take my death as meekly as ever did martyr take his death for Jesu Christ's sake."

"Well, Madam," said Sir Lancelot, "sith it is so that the day is come that our love must depart,[2] wit you well I shall sell my life as dear as I may. And a thousandfold," said Sir Lancelot, "I am more heavier[3] for you than for myself! And now I had liefer[4] than to be lord of all Christendom that I had sure armor upon me, that men might speak of my deeds ere ever I were slain."

"Truly," said the Queen, "and[5] it might please God, I would that they would take me and slay me and suffer[6] you to escape."

"That shall never be," said Sir Lancelot. "God defend me from such a shame! But, Jesu Christ, be Thou my shield and mine armor!" And therewith Sir Lancelot wrapped his mantel about his arm well and surely; and by then they had gotten a great form[7] out of the hall, and therewith they all rushed at the door. "Now, fair lords," said Sir Lancelot, "leave[8] your noise and your rushing, and I shall set open this door, and then may ye do with me what it liketh you."[9]

"Come off,[1] then," said they all, "and do it, for it availeth thee not to strive against us all. And therefore let us into this chamber, and we shall save thy life until thou come to King Arthur."

Then Sir Lancelot unbarred the door, and with his left hand he held it open a little, that but one man might come in at once. And so there came striding a good knight, a much[2] man and a large, and his name was called Sir Colgrevance of Gore. And he with a sword struck at Sir Lancelot mightily. And he put aside[3] the stroke and gave him such a buffet[4] upon the helmet that he fell groveling dead within the chamber door. Then Sir Lancelot with great might drew the knight within[5] the chamber door. And then Sir Lancelot, with help of the Queen and her ladies, he was lightly[6] armed in Colgrevance's armor. And ever stood Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred, crying, "Traitor knight! Come forth out of the Queen's chamber!"

"Sirs, leave[7] your noise," said Sir Lancelot, "for wit you well, Sir Agravain, ye shall not prison me this night. And therefore, and[8] ye do by my counsel, go ye all from this chamber door and make you no such crying and such manner of slander as ye do. For I promise you by my knighthood, and ye will depart and make no more noise, I shall as tomorn appear afore you all and before the King, and then let it be seen which of you all, other else ye all,[9] that will deprove[1] me of treason. And there shall I answer you, as a knight should, that hither I came to the Queen for no manner of mal engine,[2] and that will I prove and make it good upon you with my hands."

9. Take heart again.
1. If.
2. Come to an end.
3. More grieved.
4. Rather.
5. If.
6. Allow.
7. Bench.
8. Stop.
9. Pleases you.
1. Go ahead.
2. Big.
3. Fended off.
4. Blow.
5. Inside.
6. Quickly.
7. Stop.
8. If.
9. Or else all of you.
1. Accuse.
2. Evil design.

"Fie upon thee,
have thee malgré t
we have the choice
"Ah, sirs," said S
keep[6] yourself!" Ar
mightily and knight
he slew Sir Agravai
he had laid them d
knights might stand
dred, and therewith
And then Sir Lan
now wit you well, a
Arthur ever be my f
have you with me, I
"Sir, that is not be
so much harm, it wi
that as tomorn they
think best."
"I will well,"[3] said
living I shall rescue
other a ring, and so t

[WAR BREA

Then said King Arth
ready in your best arn
bring my Queen to t
death."
"Nay, my most nobl
you well I will never
Dame Guinevere shal
Gawain, "my heart wi
said that ever I was of
"Then," said the Kin
and Sir Gareth to be t
"My lord," said Sir
present because of ma
and full unable to say
Then spake Sir Ga
Arthur: "Sir, ye may w
be sore against our will

3. In spite of you.
4. If we please.
5. From.
6. Defend.
7. Right away.
8. I.e., withstand (even) one
Lancelot.
9. If it please you.
1. Perilous.
2. Because.
3. Agree.
4. To.

"Fie upon thee, traitor," said Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred, "for we will have thee malgré thine head[3] and slay thee, and we list.[4] For we let thee wit we have the choice of[5] King Arthur to save thee other slay thee."

"Ah, sirs," said Sir Lancelot, "is there none other grace with you? Then keep[6] yourself!" And then Sir Lancelot set all open the chamber door and mightily and knightly he strode in among them. And anon[7] at the first stroke he slew Sir Agravain, and after twelve of his fellows. Within a little while he had laid them down cold to the earth, for there was none of the twelve knights might stand Sir Lancelot one buffet.[8] And also he wounded Sir Mordred, and therewithal he fled with all his might.

And then Sir Lancelot returned again unto the Queen and said, "Madam, now wit you well, all our true love is brought to an end, for now will King Arthur ever be my foe. And therefore, Madam, and it like you[9] that I may have you with me, I shall save you from all manner adventurous[1] dangers."

"Sir, that is not best," said the Queen, "me seemeth, for[2] now ye have done so much harm, it will be best that ye hold you still with this. And if ye see that as tomorn they will put me unto death, then may ye rescue me as ye think best."

"I will well,"[3] said Sir Lancelot, "for have ye no doubt, while I am a man living I shall rescue you." And then he kissed her, and either of them gave other a ring, and so there he left the Queen and went until[4] his lodging.

[WAR BREAKS OUT BETWEEN ARTHUR AND LANCELOT][5]

Then said King Arthur unto Sir Gawain, "Dear nephew, I pray you make ready in your best armor with your brethren, Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, to bring my Queen to the fire, there to have her judgment and receive the death."

"Nay, my most noble king," said Sir Gawain, "that will I never do, for wit you well I will never be in that place where so noble a queen as is my lady Dame Guinevere shall take such a shameful end. For wit you well," said Sir Gawain, "my heart will not serve me for to see her die, and it shall never be said that ever I was of your counsel for her death."

"Then," said the King unto Sir Gawain, "suffer[6] your brethren Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth to be there."

"My lord," said Sir Gawain, "wit you well they will be loath to be there present because of many adventures[7] that is like to fall, but they are young and full unable to say you nay."

Then spake Sir Gaheris and the good knight Sir Gareth unto King Arthur: "Sir, ye may well command us to be there, but wit you well it shall be sore against our will. But and[8] we be there by your strait commandment,

3. In spite of you.
4. If we please.
5. From.
6. Defend.
7. Right away.
8. I.e., withstand (even) one blow (from) Sir Lancelot.
9. If it please you.
1. Perilous.
2. Because.
3. Agree.
4. To.
5. Lancelot and Sir Bors mobilize their friends for the rescue of Guinevere. In the morning Mordred reports the events of the night to Arthur who, against Gawain's strong opposition, condemns the queen to be burned, for "the law was such in those days that whatsoever they were, of what estate or degree, if they were found guilty of treason there should be none other remedy but death."
6. Allow.
7. Chance occurrences.
8. If.

ye shall plainly[9] hold us there excused—we will be there in peaceable wise and bear none harness of war[1] upon us."

"In the name of God," said the King, "then make you ready, for she shall have soon[2] her judgment."

"Alas," said Sir Gawain, "that ever I should endure[3] to see this woeful day." So Sir Gawain turned him and wept heartily, and so he went into his chamber.

And then the Queen was led forth without[4] Carlisle, and anon she was dispoiled into[5] her smock. And then her ghostly father[6] was brought to her to be shriven of her misdeeds.[7] Then was there weeping and wailing and wringing of hands of many lords and ladies, but there were but few in comparison that would bear any armor for to strengthen[8] the death of the Queen.

Then was there one that Sir Lancelot had sent unto that place, which went to espy what time the Queen should go unto her death. And anon as[9] he saw the Queen dispoiled into her smock and shriven, then he gave Sir Lancelot warning. Then was there but spurring and plucking up[1] of horses, and right so they came unto the fire. And who[2] that stood against them, there were they slain—there might none withstand Sir Lancelot. So all that bore arms and withstood them, there were they slain, full many a noble knight. * * * And so in this rushing and hurling, as Sir Lancelot thrang[3] here and there, it misfortuned him[4] to slay Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, the noble knight, for they were unarmed and unwares.[5] As the French book saith, Sir Lancelot smote Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth upon the brain-pans, wherethrough[6] that they were slain in the field, howbeit[7] Sir Lancelot saw them not. And so were they found dead among the thickest of the press.[8]

Then when Sir Lancelot had thus done, and slain and put to flight all that would withstand him, then he rode straight unto Queen Guinevere and made a kirtle[9] and a gown to be cast upon her, and then he made her to be set behind him and prayed her to be of good cheer. Now wit you well the Queen was glad that she was escaped from death, and then she thanked God and Sir Lancelot.

And so he rode his way with the Queen, as the French book saith, unto Joyous Garde,[1] and there he kept her as a noble knight should. And many great lords and many good knights were sent him, and many full noble knights drew unto him. When they heard that King Arthur and Sir Lancelot were at debate,[2] many knights were glad, and many were sorry of their debate.

Now turn we again unto King Arthur, that when it was told him how and in what manner the Queen was taken away from the fire, and when he heard of the death of his noble knights, and in especial Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, then he swooned for very pure[3] sorrow. And when he awoke of his swoon, then he said: "Alas, that ever I bore crown upon my head! For now

9. Openly; "strait": strict.
1. Armor.
2. Right away.
3. Live.
4. Outside.
5. Undressed down to.
6. Spiritual father, i.e., her priest.
7. For her to be confessed of her sins.
8. Secure.
9. As soon as.
1. Urging forward.
2. Whoever.
3. Pressed. "Hurling": turmoil.
4. He had the misfortune.
5. Unaware.
6. Through which.
7. Although.
8. Crowd.
9. Petticoat.
1. Lancelot's castle in England.
2. Strife.
3. Sheer.

have I lost the faire
king[4] together. Alas,
within these two da
lowship of Sir Lance
together with my wo
"Now, fair fellows,'
of the death of his
heareth tell that Sir
Jesu," said the King,
as for Sir Gareth, he
"That is truth," sai
Sir Lancelot thrang i
he smote them and
were slain."
"Well," said Arthu
that ever was, for I a
Gareth is slain, I shal
lot's kin and himself
the King, "wit you we
more I am sorrier for
for queens I might ha
never be together in
"there was never Ch
And alas, that ever S
Agravain!" said the Ki
and thy brother Sir M
sorrow." And ever amo
Then came there o
away with[4] Sir Lancel
save me my two breth
Gawain, "that Sir Lan
field. And to say the t
Queen, insomuch as
that," said Sir Gawain,
myself and I had stoo
Gawain. "I marvel that
Then said that man
"Jesu defend!"[6] said
were slain, and in espe
"Sir," said the man,
"Who slew him?" sa
"Sir Lancelot," said
"That may I not be
brother Sir Gareth, for

4. That Christian king ever he
5. Kin.
6. Keep both them and my dig
7. Earthly men.
8. Turmoil.
9. Knew.

have I lost the fairest fellowship of noble knights that ever held Christian king[4] together. Alas, my good knights be slain and gone away from me. Now within these two days I have lost nigh forty knights and also the noble fellowship of Sir Lancelot and his blood,[5] for now I may nevermore hold them together with my worship.[6] Alas, that ever this war began!

"Now, fair fellows," said the King, "I charge you that no man tell Sir Gawain of the death of his two brethren, for I am sure," said the King, "when he heareth tell that Sir Gareth is dead, he will go nigh out of his mind. Mercy Jesu," said the King, "why slew he Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth? For I dare say, as for Sir Gareth, he loved Sir Lancelot above all men earthly."[7]

"That is truth," said some knights, "but they were slain in the hurling,[8] as Sir Lancelot thrang in the thickest of the press. And as they were unarmed, he smote them and wist[9] not whom that he smote, and so unhappily[1] they were slain."

"Well," said Arthur, "the death of them will cause the greatest mortal war that ever was, for I am sure that when Sir Gawain knoweth hereof that Sir Gareth is slain, I shall never have rest of him[2] till I have destroyed Sir Lancelot's kin and himself both, other else he to destroy me. And therefore," said the King, "wit you well, my heart was never so heavy as it is now. And much more I am sorrier for my good knights' loss[3] than for the loss of my fair queen; for queens I might have enough, but such a fellowship of good knights shall never be together in no company. And now I dare say," said King Arthur, "there was never Christian king that ever held such a fellowship together. And alas, that ever Sir Lancelot and I should be at debate. Ah, Agravain, Agravain!" said the King, "Jesu forgive it thy soul, for thine evil will that thou and thy brother Sir Mordred haddest unto Sir Lancelot hath caused all this sorrow." And ever among these complaints the King wept and swooned.

Then came there one to Sir Gawain and told him how the Queen was led away with[4] Sir Lancelot, and nigh a four-and-twenty knights slain. "Ah, Jesu, save me my two brethren!" said Sir Gawain. "For full well wist I," said Sir Gawain, "that Sir Lancelot would rescue her, other else he would die in that field. And to say the truth he were not of worship but if he had[5] rescued the Queen, insomuch as she should have been burned for his sake. And as in that," said Sir Gawain, "he hath done but knightly, and as I would have done myself and I had stood in like case. But where are my brethren?" said Sir Gawain. "I marvel that I hear not of them."

Then said that man, "Truly, Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth be slain."

"Jesu defend!"[6] said Sir Gawain. "For all this world I would not that they were slain, and in especial my good brother Sir Gareth."

"Sir," said the man, "he is slain, and that is great pity."

"Who slew him?" said Sir Gawain.

"Sir Lancelot," said the man, "slew them both."

"That may I not believe," said Sir Gawain, "that ever he slew my good brother Sir Gareth, for I dare say my brother loved him better than me and all

4. That Christian king ever held.
5. Kin.
6. Keep both them and my dignity.
7. Earthly men.
8. Turmoil.
9. Knew.

1. Unluckily.
2. He will never give me any peace.
3. The loss of my good knights.
4. By.
5. Of honor if he had not.
6. Forbid.

his brethren and the King both. Also I dare say, an[7] Sir Lancelot had desired my brother Sir Gareth with him, he would have been with him against the King and us all. And therefore I may never believe that Sir Lancelot slew my brethren."

"Verily, sir," said the man, "it is noised[8] that he slew him."

"Alas," said Sir Gawain, "now is my joy gone." And then he fell down and swooned, and long he lay there as he had been dead. And when he arose out of his swoon, he cried out sorrowfully and said, "Alas!" And forthwith he ran unto the King, crying and weeping, and said, "Ah, mine uncle King Arthur! My good brother Sir Gareth is slain, and so is my brother Sir Gaheris, which were two noble knights."

Then the King wept and he both, and so they fell on swooning. And when they were revived, then spake Sir Gawain and said, "Sir, I will go and see my brother Sir Gareth."

"Sir, ye may not see him," said the King, "for I caused him to be interred and Sir Gaheris both, for I well understood that ye would make overmuch sorrow, and the sight of Sir Gareth should have caused your double sorrow."

"Alas, my lord," said Sir Gawain, "how slew he my brother Sir Gareth? Mine own good lord, I pray you tell me."

"Truly," said the King, "I shall tell you as it hath been told me—Sir Lancelot slew him and Sir Gaheris both."

"Alas," said Sir Gawain, "they bore none arms against him, neither of them both."

"I woot not how it was," said the King, "but as it is said, Sir Lancelot slew them in the thickest of the press and knew them not. And therefore let us shape a remedy for to revenge their deaths."

"My king, my lord, and mine uncle," said Sir Gawain, "wit you well, now I shall make you a promise which I shall hold by my knighthood, that from this day forward I shall never fail[9] Sir Lancelot until that one of us have slain the other. And therefore I require you, my lord and king, dress[1] you unto the wars, for wit you well, I will be revenged upon Sir Lancelot; and therefore, as ye will have my service and my love, now haste you thereto and assay[2] your friends. For I promise unto God," said Sir Gawain, "for the death of my brother Sir Gareth I shall seek Sir Lancelot throughout seven kings' realms, but I shall slay him, other else he shall slay me."

"Sir, ye shall not need to seek him so far," said the King, "for as I hear say, Sir Lancelot will abide me and us all within the castle of Joyous Garde. And much people draweth unto him, as I hear say."

"That may I right well believe," said Sir Gawain, "but my lord," he said, "assay your friends and I will assay mine."

"It shall be done," said the King, "and as I suppose I shall be big[3] enough to drive him out of the biggest tower of his castle."

So then the King sent letters and writs throughout all England, both the length and the breadth, for to summon all his knights. And so unto King Arthur drew many knights, dukes, and earls, that he had a great host, and when they were assembled the King informed them how Sir Lancelot had

7. If.
8. Reported.
9. Give up the pursuit of.

1. Prepare.
2. Appeal to.
3. Strong.

bereft him his Queen. The
lay siege about Sir Lancelot

[T

So upon Trinity Sunday at
and in his dream him seem
chair was fast to a wheel, a
of gold that might be made.
from him, an hideous deep
pents, and worms, and wild
thought that the wheel turn
and every beast took him by
bed, "Help, help!"

And then knights, squires
so amazed[6] that he wist[7] no
was nigh day, and then he
oughly waking. So the King
him with a number of fair l
he said, "Welcome, my siste
see thee on-live, much am I
and my sister's son, what be

"Sir," said Sir Gawain, "al
when I was man living. And
quarrels, and God hath give
I did battle for them for the
you. Thus much hath given
and ye fight as tomorn[2] with
not ye must be slain, and the
for the great grace and good
pity of you and many mo oth
me to you of his special grace
as tomorn, but that ye take
largely,[6] so that tomorn ye p
Lancelot with all his noble k
Mordred and all that ever wi

Then Sir Gawain and all
upon his knights, squires, a
his noble lords and wise bis
King told them of his avisio
him that, and he fought on

4. The pope arranges a truce, Gui
returned to Arthur, and Lancelot and his
England to become rulers of France. A
instigation Arthur invades France to re
war against Lancelot. Word comes to
that Mordred has seized the kingdom, a
leads his forces back to England. Mordr
them upon their landing, and Gawain is
wounded and dies, although not befo
repented for insisting that Arthur fight
and has written Lancelot to come to the
former lord.
5. Scaffold. "Him seemed": it seemed t

bereft him his Queen. Then the King and all his host made them ready to lay siege about Sir Lancelot where he lay within Joyous Garde.

[THE DEATH OF ARTHUR][4]

So upon Trinity Sunday at night King Arthur dreamed a wonderful dream, and in his dream him seemed that he saw upon a chafflet[5] a chair, and the chair was fast to a wheel, and thereupon sat King Arthur in the richest cloth of gold that might be made. And the King thought there was under him, far from him, an hideous deep black water, and therein was all manner of serpents, and worms, and wild beasts, foul and horrible. And suddenly the King thought that the wheel turned upside down, and he fell among the serpents, and every beast took him by a limb. And then the King cried as he lay in his bed, "Help, help!"

And then knights, squires, and yeomen awaked the King, and then he was so amazed[6] that he wist[7] not where he was. And then so he awaked[8] until it was nigh day, and then he fell on slumbering again, not sleeping nor thoroughly waking. So the King seemed[9] verily that there came Sir Gawain unto him with a number of fair ladies with him. So when King Arthur saw him, he said, "Welcome, my sister's son. I weened ye had been dead. And now I see thee on-live, much am I beholden unto Almighty Jesu. Ah, fair nephew and my sister's son, what been these ladies that hither be come with you?"

"Sir," said Sir Gawain, "all these be ladies for whom I have foughten for when I was man living. And all these are tho[1] that I did battle for in righteous quarrels, and God hath given them that grace, at their great prayer, because I did battle for them for their right, that they should bring me hither unto you. Thus much hath given me leave God, for to warn you of your death. For and ye fight as tomorn[2] with Sir Mordred, as ye both have assigned,[3] doubt ye not ye must be slain, and the most party of your people on both parties. And for the great grace and goodness that Almighty Jesu hath unto you, and for pity of you and many mo other good men there[4] shall be slain, God hath sent me to you of his special grace to give you warning that in no wise ye do battle as tomorn, but that ye take a treatise for a month-day.[5] And proffer you largely,[6] so that tomorn ye put in a delay. For within a month shall come Sir Lancelot with all his noble knights and rescue you worshipfully and slay Sir Mordred and all that ever will hold with him."

Then Sir Gawain and all the ladies vanished. And anon the King called upon his knights, squires, and yeomen, and charged them wightly[7] to fetch his noble lords and wise bishops unto him. And when they were come the King told them of his avision,[8] that Sir Gawain had told him and warned him that, and he fought on the morn, he should be slain. Then the King

4. The pope arranges a truce, Guinevere is returned to Arthur, and Lancelot and his kin leave England to become rulers of France. At Gawain's instigation Arthur invades France to resume the war against Lancelot. Word comes to the king that Mordred has seized the kingdom, and Arthur leads his forces back to England. Mordred attacks them upon their landing, and Gawain is mortally wounded and dies, although not before he has repented for insisting that Arthur fight Lancelot and has written Lancelot to come to the aid of his former lord.
5. Scaffold. "Him seemed": it seemed to him.
6. Confused.
7. Knew.
8. Lay awake.
9. It seemed to the king.
1. Those.
2. If you fight tomorrow.
3. Decided.
4. I.e., who there. "Mo": more.
5. For a month from today. "Treatise": treaty, truce.
6. Make generous offers.
7. Quickly.
8. Dream.

commanded Sir Lucan the Butler[9] and his brother Sir Bedivere the Bold, with two bishops with them, and charged them in any wise to take a treatise for a month-day[1] with Sir Mordred. "And spare not: proffer him lands and goods as much as ye think reasonable."

So then they departed and came to Sir Mordred where he had a grim host of an hundred thousand, and there they entreated[2] Sir Mordred long time. And at the last Sir Mordred was agreed for to have Cornwall and Kent by King Arthur's days,[3] and after that, all England, after the days of King Arthur.

Then were they condescended[4] that King Arthur and Sir Mordred should meet betwixt both their hosts, and everich[5] of them should bring fourteen persons. And so they came with this word unto Arthur. Then said he, "I am glad that this is done," and so he went into the field.

And when King Arthur should depart, he warned all his host that, and[6] they see any sword drawn, "Look ye come on fiercely and slay that traitor Sir Mordred, for I in no wise trust him." In like wise Sir Mordred warned his host that "And ye see any manner of sword drawn, look that ye come on fiercely, and so slay all that ever before you standeth, for in no wise I will not trust for this treatise." And in the same wise said Sir Mordred unto his host, "For I know well my father will be avenged upon me."

And so they met as their pointment[7] was and were agreed and accorded thoroughly. And wine was fetched and they drank together. Right so came an adder out of a little heath-bush, and it stung a knight in the foot. And so when the knight felt him so stung, he looked down and saw the adder. And anon he drew his sword to slay the adder, and thought[8] none other harm. And when the host on both parties saw that sword drawn, then they blew beams,[9] trumpets, and horns, and shouted grimly. And so both hosts dressed them[1] together. And King Arthur took his horse and said, "Alas, this unhappy day!" and so rode to his party, and Sir Mordred in like wise.

And never since was there never seen a more dolefuller battle in no Christian land, for there was but rushing and riding, foining[2] and striking; and many a grim word was there spoken of either to other, and many a deadly stroke. But ever King Arthur rode throughout the battle[3] of Sir Mordred many times and did full nobly, as a noble king should do, and at all times he fainted[4] never. And Sir Mordred did his devoir[5] that day and put himself in great peril.

And thus they fought all the long day, and never stinted[6] till the noble knights were laid to the cold earth. And ever they fought still till it was near night, and by then was there an hundred thousand laid dead upon the down.[7] Then was King Arthur wood-wroth[8] out of measure when he saw his people so slain from him. And so he looked about him and could see no mo[9] of all

9. "Butler" here is probably only a title of high rank, although it was originally used to designate the officer who had charge of wine for the king's table.
1. By any means necessary to make a treaty for the period of a month.
2. Dealt with.
3. During King Arthur's lifetime.
4. Agreed.
5. Each.
6. If.
7. Arrangement.
8. Meant.
9. A kind of trumpet.
1. Prepared to come.
2. Lunging.
3. Battalion.
4. Lost heart.
5. Knightly duty.
6. Stopped.
7. Upland.
8. Mad with rage.
9. Others.

his host, and good kr
Sir Lucan the Butler
were full sore wound

"Jesu, mercy," saic
Alas that ever I sho
"I am come to mine
where were that trai

Then King Arthur
leaning upon his swo

"Now give me my
have espied the traito

"Sir, let him be," s
unhappy day ye sha
remember ye of your
tonight, and yet God
for God's sake, my lo
the field: for yet we b
on-live. And therefor

"Now, tide[6] me dea
alone, he shall never
have him."

"God speed you wo

Then the King got
dred, crying and sayi

And when Sir Mor
drawn in his hand,
shield, with a foin[8] o
And when Sir Mordr
with the might that h
so he smote his fathe
upon the side of the
the brain. And therev

And noble King A
swooned oftentimes,
up. And so, weakly be
the seaside, and whe
eased. Then heard th
said the King, "and d

So Sir Lucan depar
so as he yede[5] he saw
robbers were come in
brooches and bees[7] a

1. That one, i.e., the first.
2. What has become of all m
3. Knew.
4. I.e., unlucky for you.
5. I.e., with this much accon
6. Betide.
7. Advantage.
8. Thrust.

his host, and good knights left no mo on-live, but two knights: the t'one[1] was Sir Lucan the Butler and [the other] his brother Sir Bedivere. And yet they were full sore wounded.

"Jesu, mercy," said the King, "where are all my noble knights become?[2] Alas that ever I should see this doleful day! For now," said King Arthur, "I am come to mine end. But would to God," said he, "that I wist[3] now where were that traitor Sir Mordred that has caused all this mischief."

Then King Arthur looked about and was ware where stood Sir Mordred leaning upon his sword among a great heap of dead men.

"Now give me my spear," said King Arthur unto Sir Lucan, "for yonder I have espied the traitor that all this woe hath wrought."

"Sir, let him be," said Sir Lucan, "for he is unhappy.[4] And if ye pass this unhappy day ye shall be right well revenged upon him. And, good lord, remember ye of your night's dream, and what the spirit of Sir Gawain told you tonight, and yet God of his great goodness hath preserved you hitherto. And for God's sake, my lord, leave off by this,[5] for, blessed be God, ye have won the field: for yet we been here three on-live, and with Sir Mordred is not one on-live. And therefore if ye leave off now, this wicked day of destiny is past."

"Now, tide[6] me death, tide me life," said the King, "now I see him yonder alone, he shall never escape mine hands. For at a better avail[7] shall I never have him."

"God speed you well!" said Sir Bedivere.

Then the King got his spear in both his hands and ran toward Sir Mordred, crying and saying, "Traitor, now is thy deathday come!"

And when Sir Mordred saw King Arthur he ran until him with his sword drawn in his hand, and there King Arthur smote Sir Mordred under the shield, with a foin[8] of his spear, throughout the body more than a fathom.[9] And when Sir Mordred felt that he had his death's wound, he thrust himself with the might that he had up to the burr[1] of King Arthur's spear, and right so he smote his father King Arthur with his sword holden in both his hands, upon the side of the head, that the sword pierced the helmet and the tay[2] of the brain. And therewith Sir Mordred dashed down stark dead to the earth.

And noble King Arthur fell in a swough[3] to the earth, and there he swooned oftentimes, and Sir Lucan and Sir Bedivere ofttimes heaved him up. And so, weakly betwixt them, they led him to a little chapel not far from the seaside, and when the King was there, him thought him reasonably eased. Then heard they people cry in the field. "Now go thou, Sir Lucan," said the King, "and do me to wit[4] what betokens that noise in the field."

So Sir Lucan departed, for he was grievously wounded in many places. And so as he yede[5] he saw and harkened by the moonlight how that pillers[6] and robbers were come into the field to pill and to rob many a full noble knight of brooches and bees[7] and of many a good ring and many a rich jewel. And who

1. That one, i.e., the first.
2. What has become of all my noble knights?
3. Knew.
4. I.e., unlucky for you.
5. I.e., with this much accomplished.
6. Betide.
7. Advantage.
8. Thrust.
9. I.e., six feet.
1. Hand guard.
2. Outer membrane.
3. Swoon.
4. Let me know.
5. Walked.
6. Plunderers.
7. Bracelets.

that were not dead all out there they slew them for their harness[8] and their riches. When Sir Lucan understood this work, he came to the King as soon as he might and told him all what he had heard and seen. "Therefore by my read,"[9] said Sir Lucan, "it is best that we bring you to some town."

"I would it were so," said the King, "but I may not stand, my head works[1] so. Ah, Sir Lancelot," said King Arthur, "this day have I sore missed thee. And alas that ever I was against thee, for now have I my death, whereof Sir Gawain me warned in my dream."

Then Sir Lucan took up the King the t'one party[2] and Sir Bedivere the other party; and in the lifting up the King swooned and in the lifting Sir Lucan fell in a swoon that part of his guts fell out of his body, and therewith the noble knight's heart burst. And when the King awoke he beheld Sir Lucan how he lay foaming at the mouth and part of his guts lay at his feet.

"Alas," said the King, "this is to me a full heavy[3] sight to see this noble duke so die for my sake, for he would have holpen[4] me that had more need of help than I. Alas that he would not complain him for[5] his heart was so set to help me. Now Jesu have mercy upon his soul."

Then Sir Bedivere wept for the death of his brother.

"Now leave this mourning and weeping, gentle knight," said the King, "for all this will not avail me. For wit thou well, and[6] I might live myself, the death of Sir Lucan would grieve me evermore. But my time passeth on fast," said the King. "Therefore," said King Arthur unto Sir Bedivere, "take thou here Excalibur[7] my good sword and go with it to yonder water's side; and when thou comest there I charge thee throw my sword in that water and come again and tell me what thou sawest there."

"My lord," said Sir Bedivere, "your commandment shall be done, and [I shall] lightly[8] bring you word again."

So Sir Bedivere departed. And by the way he beheld that noble sword, that the pommel and the haft[9] was all precious stones. And then he said to himself, "If I throw this rich sword in the water, thereof shall never come good, but harm and loss." And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree. And so, as soon as he might, he came again unto the King and said he had been at the water and had thrown the sword into the water.

"What saw thou there?" said the King.

"Sir," he said, "I saw nothing but waves and winds."

"That is untruly said of thee," said the King. "And therefore go thou lightly again and do my commandment; as thou art to me lief[1] and dear, spare not, but throw it in."

Then Sir Bedivere returned again and took the sword in his hand. And yet him thought[2] sin and shame to throw away that noble sword. And so eft[3] he hid the sword and returned again and told the King that he had been at the water and done his commandment.

8. Armor. "All out": entirely.
9. Advice.
1. Aches.
2. On one side.
3. Sorrowful.
4. Helped.
5. Because.
6. If.
7. The sword that Arthur had received as a young man from the Lady of the Lake; it is presumably she who catches it when Bedivere finally throws it into the water.
8. Quickly.
9. Handle. "Pommel": rounded knob on the hilt.
1. Beloved.
2. It seemed to him.
3. Again.

"What sawest tho
"Sir," he said, "I s
"Ah, traitor unto
betrayed me twice.
lief and dear, and t
the riches of this sw
me in great jeopardy
as I bid thee, if ever
wouldest for my rich
Then Sir Bedivere
and so he went to th
hilts, and threw the
an arm and an hand
thrice and brandishe
the water. So Sir Bed
"Alas," said the K
overlong."
Then Sir Bedivere
that water's side. An
bank hoved[8] a little
was a queen; and all
when they saw King
"Now put me into
there received him t
down. And in one o
queen said, "Ah, my d
this wound on your h
fromward the land, a
Then Sir Bedivere
of me, now ye go fro
"Comfort thyself,"
me is no trust for to t
of my grievous wound
But ever the queen
And as soon as Sir B
wailed and so took th
he was ware betwixt t

4. The phrase seems to mean
shore and waves grow dark."
5. I.e., with mine.
6. Sword belt.
7. Close.
8. Waited.
9. I.e., they sat.
1. A legendary island, sometim
the earthly paradise.
2. Walked. "Took": took to.

"What sawest thou there?" said the King.

"Sir," he said, "I saw nothing but waters wap and waves wan."[4]

"Ah, traitor unto me and untrue," said King Arthur, "now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have weened that thou that has been to me so lief and dear, and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the riches of this sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee I shall slay thee mine[5] own hands, for thou wouldest for my rich sword see me dead."

Then Sir Bedivere departed and went to the sword and lightly took it up, and so he went to the water's side; and there he bound the girdle[6] about the hilts, and threw the sword as far into the water as he might. And there came an arm and an hand above the water and took it and clutched it, and shook it thrice and brandished; and then vanished away the hand with the sword into the water. So Sir Bedivere came again to the King and told him what he saw.

"Alas," said the King, "help me hence, for I dread me I have tarried overlong."

Then Sir Bedivere took the King upon his back and so went with him to that water's side. And when they were at the water's side, even fast[7] by the bank hoved[8] a little barge with 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.

"Now put me into that barge," said the King; and so he did softly. And there received him three ladies with great mourning, and so they set them[9] down. And in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head, and then the queen said, "Ah, my dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me? Alas, this wound on your head hath caught overmuch cold." And anon they rowed fromward the land, and Sir Bedivere beheld all tho ladies go froward him.

Then Sir Bedivere cried and said, "Ah, my lord Arthur, what shall become of me, now ye go from me and leave me here alone among mine enemies?"

"Comfort thyself," said the King, "and do as well as thou mayest, for in me is no trust for to trust in. For I must into the vale of Avilion[1] to heal me of my grievous wound. And if thou hear nevermore of me, pray for my soul."

But ever the queen and ladies wept and shrieked that it was pity to hear. And as soon as Sir Bedivere had lost the sight of the barge he wept and wailed and so took the forest, and went[2] all that night. And in the morning he was ware betwixt two holts hoar[3] of a chapel and an hermitage.[4]

* * *

4. The phrase seems to mean "waters wash the shore and waves grow dark."
5. I.e., with mine.
6. Sword belt.
7. Close.
8. Waited.
9. I.e., they sat.
1. A legendary island, sometimes identified with the earthly paradise.
2. Walked. "Took": took to.
3. Ancient thickets of small trees.
4. In the passage here omitted, Sir Bedivere meets the former bishop of Canterbury, now a hermit, who describes how on the previous night a company of ladies had brought to the chapel a dead body, asking that it be buried. Sir Bedivere exclaims that the dead man must have been King Arthur and vows to spend the rest of his life there in the chapel as a hermit.

Thus of Arthur I find no more written in books that been authorized,[5] neither more of the very certainty of his death heard I never read,[6] but thus was he led away in a ship wherein were three queens: that one was King Arthur's sister, Queen Morgan la Fée,[7] the t'other[8] was the Queen of North Wales, and the third was the Queen of the Waste Lands. * * *

Now more of the death of King Arthur could I never find but that these ladies brought him to his burials,[9] and such one was buried there that the hermit bore witness that sometime was Bishop of Canterbury.[1] But yet the hermit knew not in certain that he was verily the body of King Arthur, for this tale Sir Bedivere, a Knight of the Table Round, made it to be written. Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had[2] by the will of our Lord Jesu into another place. And men say that he shall come again and he shall win the Holy Cross. Yet I will not say that it shall be so, but rather I will say, Here in this world he changed his life. And many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse: *Hic iacet Arthurus, rex quondam, rexque futurus.*[3]

[THE DEATHS OF LANCELOT AND GUINEVERE][4]

And thus upon a night there came a vision to Sir Lancelot and charged him, in remission[5] of his sins, to haste him unto Amesbury: "And by then[6] thou come there, thou shalt find Queen Guinevere dead. And therefore take thy fellows with thee, and purvey them of an horse-bier,[7] and fetch thou the corse[8] of her, and bury her by her husband, the noble King Arthur. So this avision[9] came to Lancelot thrice in one night. Then Sir Lancelot rose up ere day and told the hermit.

"It were well done," said the hermit, "that ye made you ready and that ye disobey not the avision."

Then Sir Lancelot took his eight fellows with him, and on foot they yede[1] from Glastonbury to Amesbury, the which is little more than thirty mile, and thither they came within two days, for they were weak and feeble to go. And when Sir Lancelot was come to Amesbury within the nunnery, Queen Guinevere died but half an hour afore. And the ladies told Sir Lancelot that Queen Guinevere told them all ere she passed that Sir Lancelot had been priest near a twelve-month:[2] "and hither he cometh as fast as he may to fetch my corse, and beside my lord King Arthur he shall bury me." Wherefore the Queen said in hearing of them all, "I beseech Almighty God that I may never have power to see Sir Lancelot with my worldly eyes."

"And thus," said all the ladies, "was ever her prayer these two days till she was dead."

5. That have authority.
6. Tell.
7. The fairy.
8. The second.
9. Grave.
1. Of whom the hermit, who was formerly bishop of Canterbury, bore witness.
2. Conveyed.
3. "Here lies Arthur, who was once king and king will be again" (Latin).
4. Guinevere enters a convent at Amesbury, where Lancelot, returned with his companions to England, visits her, but she commands him never to see her again. Emulating her example, Lancelot joins the bishop of Canterbury and Bedivere in their hermitage, where he takes holy orders and is joined in turn by seven of his fellow knights.
5. For the remission.
6. By the time.
7. Provide them with a horse-drawn hearse.
8. Body.
9. Dream.
1. Went.
2. Nearly twelve months.

Then Sir Lancelot saw her visage, but he wept not greatly, but sighed. And so he did all the observance of the service himself, both the *dirige*[3] and on the morn he sang mass. And there was ordained[4] an horse-bier, and so with an hundred torches ever burning about the corse of the Queen, and ever Sir Lancelot with his eight fellows went about[5] the horse-bier, singing and reading many an holy orison,[6] and frankincense upon the corse incensed.[7]

Thus Sir Lancelot and his eight fellows went on foot from Amesbury unto Glastonbury, and when they were come to the chapel and the hermitage, there she had a *dirige* with great devotion.[8] And on the morn the hermit that sometime[9] was Bishop of Canterbury sang the mass of requiem with great devotion, and Sir Lancelot was the first that offered, and then als[1] his eight fellows. And then she was wrapped in cered cloth of Rennes, from the top[2] to the toe, in thirtyfold, and after she was put in a web[3] of lead, and then in a coffin of marble.

And when she was put in the earth Sir Lancelot swooned and lay long still, while[4] the hermit came and awaked him, and said, "Ye be to blame, for ye displease God with such manner of sorrow-making."

"Truly," said Sir Lancelot, "I trust I do not displease God, for He knoweth mine intent—for my sorrow was not, nor is not, for any rejoicing of sin, but my sorrow may never have end. For when I remember of her beaulté and of her noblesse[5] that was both with her king and with her,[6] so when I saw his corse and her corse so lie together, truly mine heart would not serve to sustain my careful[7] body. Also when I remember me how by my defaute and mine orgule[8] and my pride that they were both laid full low, that were peerless that ever was living of Christian people, wit you well," said Sir Lancelot, "this remembered, of their kindness and mine unkindness, sank so to mine heart that I might not sustain myself." So the French book maketh mention.

Then Sir Lancelot never after ate but little meat,[9] nor drank, till he was dead, for then he sickened more and more and dried and dwined[1] away. For the Bishop nor none of his fellows might not make him to eat, and little he drank, that he was waxen by a kibbet[2] shorter than he was, that the people could not know him. For evermore, day and night, he prayed, but sometime he slumbered a broken sleep. Ever he was lying groveling on the tomb of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere, and there was no comfort that the Bishop nor Sir Bors, nor none of his fellows could make him—it availed not.

So within six weeks after, Sir Lancelot fell sick and lay in his bed. And then he sent for the Bishop that there was hermit, and all his true fellows. Then Sir Lancelot said with dreary steven,[3] "Sir Bishop, I pray you give to me all my rights that longeth[4] to a Christian man."

3. *Dirige* (Latin source of modern "dirge"): the first word of the anthem beginning the funeral service.
4. Prepared.
5. Around.
6. Reciting many a prayer.
7. Burned frankincense over the body.
8. Earnest reverence.
9. Once.
1. Also. "Offered": made his donation.
2. Head. "Cloth of Rennes": A shroud made of fine linen smeared with wax, produced at Rennes.
3. Afterward she was put in a sheet.
4. Until.
5. Her beauty and nobility.
6. That she and her king both had.
7. Sorrowful.
8. My fault and my haughtiness.
9. Food.
1. Wasted.
2. Grown by a cubit.
3. Sad voice.
4. Pertains. "Rights": last sacrament of extreme unction.

"It shall not need you,"[5] said the hermit and all his fellows. "It is but heaviness of your blood. Ye shall be well mended by the grace of God tomorn."

"My fair lords," said Sir Lancelot, "wit you well my careful body will into the earth; I have warning more than now I will say. Therefore give me my rights."

So when he was houseled and annealed[6] and had all that a Christian man ought to have, he prayed the Bishop that his fellows might bear his body to Joyous Garde. (Some men say it was Alnwick, and some men say it was Bamborough.) "Howbeit," said Sir Lancelot, "me repenteth[7] sore, but I made mine avow sometime that in Joyous Garde I would be buried. And because of breaking[8] of mine avow, I pray you all, lead me thither." Then there was weeping and wringing of hands among his fellows.

So at a season of the night they all went to their beds, for they all lay in one chamber. And so after midnight, against[9] day, the Bishop that was hermit, as he lay in his bed asleep, he fell upon a great laughter. And therewith all the fellowship awoke and came to the Bishop and asked him what he ailed.[1]

"Ah, Jesu mercy," said the Bishop, "why did ye awake me? I was never in all my life so merry and so well at ease."

"Wherefore?" said Sir Bors.

"Truly," said the Bishop, "here was Sir Lancelot with me, with mo[2] angels than ever I saw men in one day. And I saw the angels heave[3] up Sir Lancelot unto heaven, and the gates of heaven opened against him."

"It is but dretching of swevens,"[4] said Sir Bors, "for I doubt not Sir Lancelot aileth nothing but good."[5]

"It may well be," said the Bishop. "Go ye to his bed and then shall ye prove the sooth."

So when Sir Bors and his fellows came to his bed, they found him stark dead. And he lay as he had smiled, and the sweetest savor[6] about him that ever they felt. Then was there weeping and wringing of hands, and the greatest dole they made that ever made men. And on the morn the Bishop did his mass of Requiem, and after the Bishop and all the nine knights put Sir Lancelot in the same horse-bier that Queen Guinevere was laid in tofore that she was buried. And so the Bishop and they all together went with the body of Sir Lancelot daily, till they came to Joyous Garde. And ever they had an hundred torches burning about him.

And so within fifteen days they came to Joyous Garde. And there they laid his corse in the body of the choir,[7] and sang and read many psalters[8] and prayers over him and about him. And ever his visage was laid open and naked, that all folks might behold him; for such was the custom in tho[9] days that all men of worship should so lie with open visage till that they were buried.

And right thus as they were at their service, there came Sir Ector de Maris that had seven year sought all England, Scotland, and Wales, seeking his

5. You shall not need it.
6. Given communion and extreme unction.
7. I am sorry.
8. In order not to break.
9. Toward.
1. Ailed him.
2. More.
3. Lift.
4. Illusion of dreams.
5. Has nothing wrong with him.
6. Odor. A sweet scent is a conventional sign in saints' lives of a sanctified death.
7. The center of the chancel, the place of honor.
8. Psalms.
9. Those.

brother, Sir Lancelot. And
choir of Joyous Garde, he
the choir. And there he sav
but he knew not them. The
there lay his brother, Sir La
sword, and helm from him,
down in a swoon. And wh
doleful complaints that he

"Ah, Lancelot!" he said,
now I dare say," said Sir Ec
were never matched of eart
knight that ever bore shield
ever bestrode horse, and th
ever loved woman, and th
sword. And thou were the
knights, and thou was the n
among ladies, and thou we
put spear in the rest."[3]

Then there was weeping

Thus they kept Sir Lance
ied it with great devotion. A
of Canterbury to his hermi
month.

Then Sir Constantine th
king of England, and he wa
this realm. And then this K
bury, for he heard say where
opric and left that hermitag
his life's end.

Then Sir Bors de Ganis, S
Sir Galihodin, Sir Blamour,
of Clermount, all these kn
King Constantine would hav
in this realm. And there the

And some English books
England after the death of S
For the French book maketh
Ector, Sir Blamour, and Sir
Christ was quick[7] and dead.
for the book saith so Sir La
passed out of this world. Th
the miscreaunts,[9] or Turks,
God's sake.

1. Most courteous.
2. Of any man born in original sin.
3. Support for the butt of the lance.
4. Withdrew themselves to their home
5. However.

brother, Sir Lancelot. And when Sir Ector heard such noise and light in the choir of Joyous Garde, he alight and put his horse from him and came into the choir. And there he saw men sing and weep, and all they knew Sir Ector, but he knew not them. Then went Sir Bors unto Sir Ector and told him how there lay his brother, Sir Lancelot, dead. And then Sir Ector threw his shield, sword, and helm from him, and when he beheld Sir Lancelot's visage, he fell down in a swoon. And when he waked, it were hard any tongue to tell the doleful complaints that he made for his brother.

"Ah, Lancelot!" he said, "thou were head of all Christian knights. And now I dare say," said Sir Ector, "thou Sir Lancelot, there thou liest, that thou were never matched of earthly knight's hand. And thou were the courteoust[1] knight that ever bore shield. And thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrode horse, and thou were the truest lover, of a sinful man,[2] that ever loved woman, and thou were the kindest man that ever struck with sword. And thou were the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights, and thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies, and thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest."[3]

Then there was weeping and dolor out of measure.

Thus they kept Sir Lancelot's corse aloft fifteen days, and then they buried it with great devotion. And then at leisure they went all with the Bishop of Canterbury to his hermitage, and there they were together more than a month.

Then Sir Constantine that was Sir Cador's son of Cornwall was chosen king of England, and he was a full noble knight, and worshipfully he ruled this realm. And then this King Constantine sent for the Bishop of Canterbury, for he heard say where he was. And so he was restored unto his bishopric and left that hermitage, and Sir Bedivere was there ever still hermit to his life's end.

Then Sir Bors de Ganis, Sir Ector de Maris, Sir Gahalantine, Sir Galihud, Sir Galihodin, Sir Blamour, Sir Bleoberis, Sir Villiars le Valiant, Sir Clarrus of Clermount, all these knights drew them to their countries.[4] Howbeit[5] King Constantine would have had them with him, but they would not abide in this realm. And there they all lived in their countries as holy men.

And some English books make mention that they went never out of England after the death of Sir Lancelot—but that was but favor of makers.[6] For the French book maketh mention—and is authorized—that Sir Bors, Sir Ector, Sir Blamour, and Sir Bleoberis went into the Holy Land, thereas Jesu Christ was quick[7] and dead, and anon as they had stablished their lands;[8] for the book saith so Sir Lancelot commanded them for to do ere ever he passed out of this world. There these four knights did many battles upon the miscreaunts,[9] or Turks, and there they died upon a Good Friday for God's sake.

1. Most courteous.
2. Of any man born in original sin.
3. Support for the butt of the lance.
4. Withdrew themselves to their home districts.
5. However.
6. The authors' bias.
7. Living. "Thereas": where.
8. As soon as they had put their lands in order.
9. Infidels.

Here is the end of the whole book of King Arthur and of his noble knights of the Round Table, that when they were whole together there was ever an hundred and forty. And here is the end of *The Death of Arthur.*[1]

I pray you all gentlemen and gentlewomen that readeth this book of Arthur and his knights from the beginning to the ending, pray for me while I am alive that God send me good deliverance. And when I am dead, I pray you all pray for my soul.

For this book was ended the ninth year of the reign of King Edward the Fourth, by Sir Thomas Malory, knight, as Jesu help him for His great might, as he is the servant of Jesu both day and night.

1469–70

1485

1. By the "whole book" Malory refers to the entire work; the *Death of Arthur,* which Caxton made the title of the entire work, refers to the last part of Malory's book.

ROBERT HENRYSON

ca. 1425–ca. 1490

Robert Henryson is perhaps the greatest of a set of exceptionally accomplished late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century Scots poets.

Little is known for certain about Henryson's life. Because he is spoken of as "master," he probably held a master's degree, and evidence points to his having been a schoolmaster in a grammar school founded by monks in the town of Dunfermline, just to the north of Edinburgh. He is the author of three major works: *Orpheus and Eurydice*, *Moral Fables*, and *The Testament of Cresseid*. Together, they reveal an author skilled in legal, literary, and philosophical traditions; they also reveal a great and ambitious literary artist capable of trenchant comedy within a larger vision that is dark, austere, and commanding. His intense poem *The Testament of Cresseid*, for example, is a sequel to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. It imagines the fate of Criseyde/Cresseid as she becomes a prostitute in the Greek camp, stricken with both venereal disease and, finally, remorse. In sixteenth-century editions of Chaucer's works, this text was routinely printed at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* as its sixth book.

As a schoolmaster, Henryson would have taught schoolboys how to read Latin; one of the texts would have been a collection of animal fables (probably the so-called late-twelfth-century elegiac *Romulus*) (see "Talking Animals," pp. 495–96). Henryson took up the challenge of these simple school texts to transform them into a work of extraordinary range, from the cute and comic, to the savagely satirical, to the philosophically dark and bleak. He drew on previous works of animal literature (especially Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*, in his *The Cock and the Fox*). His particular contribution, however, is to extend the philosophical and rhetorical range of the fables and to press their interpretive challenges to the limit. Fable traditions generally present animals as reduced and recognizable humans, designed to guide human behavior in simple ways. N
the collection, *The Cock an*

Fables can be thought of
and sweepings. Only the m
narrative, invests the low st
in precisely the locus of the
in fact hide rich literary trea
far from dismissing it, the
and what's not (a standard
even a rhetorical master in
have a complete fable here,
the narrative from within,
stanzas.

Animal stories are, howe
the human perspective. He
instead surprises us with ar
the apparently wise cock. As
point of fables.

T

A cock one time, wi
Canty° and bold, al
Rose and flew to a d
An early bird, alread
Scraping away, whe
He finds this gemst
Swept out by chance

Giddy young ones, v
But swanking in the
Have little interest i
They birl the brush°
So precious items d
Swept from the doo
Something like that

He marvels at the st
'O jewel rare, O rich
I may have found yo
You are a gemstone
For you to be interre
Is a great pity, down
And you so lovely ar

'And a pity I should
Make clear hues lik
Nor prove your grea

1. This translation is by Seamus H
stone, quartz or chalcedony, that n