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  THE PORTRAIT OF ARTHUR IN THE ALLITERATIVE
  MORTE ARTHURE.

  Lehigh University, Ph.D., 1971
  Language and Literature, general

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THE PORTRAIT OF ARTHUR

IN THE ALLITERATIVE MORTE ARTHURE

by

George Robert Keiser

A Dissertation

Presented to the Graduate Committee

of Lehigh University

in candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

Lehigh University

1971

Approved and recommended for acceptance as a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 18, 1971
(date)

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(date)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to express my gratitude for the courteous help by the staffs of the Henry M. Huntington, University of Toronto, and Canisius College libraries. I am especially grateful to Mrs. Adelaide Schroeder of the Canisius library for her cheerful and inexhaustible patience.

To many of my other colleagues and associates at Canisius College, I am deeply obliged for assistance and encouragement. A grant from the Committee on Faculty Research and Publication permitted me to finish the research and complete most of the writing during the summer of 1970. Professor Raymond L. Girard, chairman of the Department of Modern Languages, offered aid in reading the Old French sources. Professor Elizabeth A. Greaves of the Department of Modern Languages supervised my feeble attempts to read the German scholarship and, more than once, kindly saved me from utter desperation. Mrs. Gretchen Boulaine, secretary to the Department of English, typed a major portion of the final draft in her spare moments.

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The Portrait of Arthur in the Alliterative <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u>
George Robert Keiser

ABSTRACT

In his treatment of Arthur, the poet of the Alliterative
<u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u> created a hero who is more complex and sympa-
thetic than the corresponding figure in the chronicle tradi-
tion from which he derived his story. The primary purpose
of this paper is to examine closely the poet's adaptation
of the chronicle account of the Arthurian legend in order
to understand the heroic and tragic portrait of Arthur that
emerges in the <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u>. The secondary purpose is to
show the difficulties and shortcomings of the traditional
association of Edward III and the hero of the <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u>.

The first chapter is a consideration of the unique
version of the poem which appears in the Thornton manuscript
and the related problems of authorship, provenance, date,
and sources. The features of this version and its presence
in the Thornton MS. suggest that it enjoyed great popularity
among the people of the northern counties. It was the work
of an unknown but very skillful author, possibly a court
poet, probably writing somewhere in the North Midlands,
sometime between 1350-60 and 1450. His primary source was
probably Wace's <u>Brut</u>, which he may have supplemented with
material from Alexander and Charlemagne romances.

The second chapter explores the heroic dimensions of
Arthur as they are set forth in the first 720 lines of the
poem. With his description of the reception of the Roman

messengers and the council in the Giant's Tower, the poet attempts to impress us with the strength of Arthur and, more important, the wisdom with which he uses this strength, especially in dealing with his nobles and vassals. After convincing us of Arthur's heroic strength and wisdom, the poet then introduces us to the more human and personal qualities of the British king in the scenes with Mordred and Guenevere.

The third chapter examines the poet's treatment of Arthur's continental adventures, up to the victory over Lucius (721-2385). In this section of the <u>Morte Arthure</u>, the poet emphasizes Arthur's role as protector of Christians in the battle with the Giant of St. Michael's Mount and his war with Lucius, who is equated with the giant by the philosopher's interpretation of Arthur's first prophetic dream. At the same time, through such details as Arthur's rash and angry treatment of Cador, the poet keeps us aware of his hero's human weakness so that his ultimate fall is not merely another medieval tale of a sudden fall from joy to woe, but, rather, tied to considerations of human character.

The fourth chapter offers a brief consideration of the medieval concept of tragedy and then examines the tragic implications of Arthur's fall. His successive victories over the duke of Lorraine and the Italian cities bring Arthur to his political zenith and also to his moral nadir,

as he prepares to receive the imperial crown from the pope. With the dream of fortune Arthur receives a warning of his imminent fall. An act of divine mercy, the dream is intended to remind him of his own mortality and to urge him to penitence and reconciliation with God. In the remainder of the poem, we see Arthur coming finally to accept the fact that he is not master of his own destiny, until at the end he dies with _In manus_ on his lips.

The final chapter is an examination of the theories that the portrait of Arthur represents a political comment on the conduct of Edward III. A review of the evidence for the supposed historical allusions indicates that the _Morte Arthure_ does not contain a series of specific and detailed references to the reign of Edward III. Consideration of the nature of 14th century political conditions in England suggests that if the poet wished to remind his contemporary audience of Edward in some very general way, the effect of the association was simply to reinforce poignantly and dramatically the view of the temporality of human greatness embodied in the _Morte Arthure_.

Introduction

Near the end of the Alliterative <u>Morte Arthure</u>, having brought almost all of western Europe under his sway, an exultant Arthur meets "one a Seterdaye at none"[1] with a cardinal of Rome and makes plans for his coronation "In the cete of Rome, as soueraynge and lorde" (3184). That night "bot be ane aftyre mydnyghte alle his mode changede" (3222) because of a prophetic dream-vision or "schewynge" (3401) which foretells the imminent end to his glory. Arthur's only consolation for the unhappy news of this eventuality is that he will be numbered among the Nine Worthies by all men of the future. As the "philosophre" who interprets the dream tells Arthur,

> ffore-thy ffortune the fetches to fulfille the
>   nowmbyre,
> Alls nynne of the nobileste namede in erthe;
> This salle in romance be redde with ryalle
>   knyghttes,
> Rekkenede and renownde with ryotous kynges,
> And demyd one domesday, for dedis of armes,
> ffor the doughtyeste that euer was duelland in
>   erthe:
> So many clerkis and kynges salle karpe of ȝoure
>   dedis,
> And kepe ȝoure conquestez in cronycle for euer!
>   (3438 - 45)

With this use of the Nine Worthies, whom he describes as "conquerours kydde" (3407), the poet of the <u>Morte Arthure</u> leaves no doubt that we should regard Arthur as a figure of the same stature as Alexander, Julius Caesar, and Charlemagne. This view of Arthur is of course neither unique nor original with the <u>Morte Arthure</u> poet; as early as 1310, in Jacques de

Longuyon's <u>Les</u> <u>Voeux</u> <u>du</u> <u>Paon</u>, which contains the first known treatment of the Nine Worthies as a group, Arthur appears in the company of these heroes.[2] Nevertheless, that the poet chooses to use the Nine Worthies motif in the <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u>, undoubtedly its first appearance in Arthurian literature, is of considerable importance for understanding his portrait of Arthur. As we explore the details of this portrait later in this study, we may wish to qualify the idea more carefully, but for the moment we can begin our study with the assumption that Arthur, his individual complexities notwithstanding, is for the poet a supreme embodiment of the imperial glory that was one of the favorite obsessions of the Middle Ages.

Indeed, the development of the Arthurian legend--not to mention the popularity of the Charlemagne and Alexander stories--is powerful testimony to this obsession. Unlike the other figures of the Nine Worthies, Arthur has almost no claim to an historical existence. "The most one can say with confidence is that there was probably a Celtic chief called Arthur, who met his death in battle against the Saxons."[3] Though he receives a brief notice, which may be a later interpolation, in the Welsh poetry known as <u>Gododdin</u> (c. 600),[4] "our fullest apparently historical reference to Arthur" comes in the early ninth century <u>Historia</u> <u>Brittonum</u>, a work compiled from earlier materials by the Welshman Nennius.[5] In a phrase whose meaning is not at all clear, Nennius tells us Arthur was <u>dux</u> <u>bellorum</u> in a series of

twelve British victories over the Saxons.[6] The most im-
portant of these victories is Mons Badonis,[7] the last and
most spectacular of the series.

To understand the importance of Mons Badonis, we must
turn briefly to the De Excidio Brittaniae, a lengthy tract
by the pious monk Gildas, who was writing sometime close to
547.[8] In an account of the struggles between his countrymen
and the Saxons, Gildas mentions a great British victory at
Mons Badonicus,[9] apparently some forty-four years in the
past, which ushered in a period of ordered calm. Gildas
has little to say about this victory, for his work is not
an objective historical account, but a warning--virtually
an apocalyptic prophecy to his contemporaries. His partic-
ular homiletic approach does not admit room for any exposi-
tion of British glories. We can only regret that he had no
more to say of this victory that brought a period, perhaps
as long as seventy-five years, "of equilibrium, if not of
British supremacy over the attackers."[10] It would be most
agreeable to have Gildas' testimony on such matters as the
commander at the victory that was evidently the last moment
of British glory in England.

When Nennius was compiling his work, British supremacy
over the lands east of Offa's Dyke had of course long since
given way to English. Mons Badonis by this time "seems to
have been a triumph which impressed itself deeply upon the
minds of the Britons," [11] undoubtedly as a symbol of their

lost glory. Whether Arthur, if he did exist, was responsible for this victory is an unanswerable question. All we need observe is that Nennius, probably drawing on a Welsh heroic poem for his information, seems to be reporting an established tradition that associates Arthur with the glory of Mons Badonis.[12] It should come as no surprise then that by the early twelfth century Arthur represents for the Welsh a "Messianic hope" of their eventual recovery of England from the Normans.[13] In these beginnings of the Arthur legend we can perhaps see an indication of one direction it will take in the ensuing centuries when Arthur moves beyond the confines of British national hero[14] and, thanks to Geoffrey of Monmouth, he becomes a national hero for the English.

Geoffrey had read, no doubt with great avidity, in the works of Livy and Virgil, as well as the tales of Alexander and Charlemagne.[15] His reading apparently made him sensitive to the potential of the Arthurian legends with which he was familiar. Inspired also by the imperial ambitions of the Norman kings,[16] Geoffrey (or his British book, if we believe his unlikely claim) made of Arthur a figure deserving of his place among the Nine Worthies. The motive for this portrayal of Arthur and, in fact, for the whole Historia appears to be as much racial and political as esthetic.

> Just as certainly Geoffrey's motive was racial patriotism, he being a Briton in race. A splendid picture of events in the island for many centuries back would also gratify its actual rulers, since patriotism attaches to the land as well as the race.[17]

Mindful of his own personal ambition in the church, as the various dedications to his work show, Geoffrey was intent on flattering the royal family of Norman England. Moreover, in his history Geoffrey offered several instances of British supremacy over France and thereby aided the Norman kings in "their effort to assert their independence of the kings of Frande."[18]

Though even some of Geoffrey's contemporaries scoffed at his Historia and regarded it as a pack of lies, generations of Plantagenet,Lancastrian, and Tudor kings accepted it, especially the Arthurian sections, as at worst a convenient historical fiction.[19] Edward I, Edward III, and Henry VII clearly recognized and exploited its potential as historical propaganda. Considering that for many Englishmen in the middle ages and afterwards the Arthurian legend and politics were inextricably bound up together, there is a certain inevitable temptation to look for political statements or even historical allegory in English Arthurian literature. Anyone familiar with the study of Spenser will recall the abundance of scholars who have succumbed to this temptation "And found no end, in wand'ring mazes lost." Readily understandable then is the tendency to look for allusions to contemporary politics in the imperial ambitions of Arthur in the Alliterative Morte Arthure, the creation of a man who may have known at first hand the imperial wars of Edward III.

In the case of the _Morte Arthure_, the belief that the portrait of Arthur contains a comment on contemporary politics has had a long and vigorous tradition. Writing at the beginning of the 20th century, George Neilson, the earliest critic to publish detailed interpretations of the work, saw in the _Morte Arthure_ a glorification of Edward III.

> [O]f the chronicles of the Edwardian epoch none was so singularly to commemorate the conquests of its hero as this poem by its very indirectness does, weaving the victories of Edward III. into the fabric of literature with an art at once so courtly and so cryptic that the glory of the compliment to Edward is only revealed in the fulness of its lustre by intent scrutiny of the pattern of the romance.[20]

In his lengthy and repetitious analyses of the poem, Neilson with intent scrutiny found a parallel in Edward's reign for virtually every major and minor character and event in the _Morte Arthure_. More than a half century after Neilson had published his findings, William Matthews, in the first book-length study of the poem, accepted at least the major historical identifications the earlier scholar suggested. Surprisingly, however, he found in the poem a "protest against the folly and unchristian cruelty of unjustified wars of the kind conducted by Alexander, Edward, and Arthur of Britain."[21]

Because of this enduring tradition of historical interpretation of the _Morte Arthure_, as well as the political heritage of the Arthurian legend in England, our study of the portrait of Arthur in this poem must take into account the possibility that the poem offers some comment on 14th century

political conditions. However, the questions of whether the poet's view of Arthur as one of the world's "conquerours kydde" implies a comment on the wickedness or glories of imperial wars and whether Edward III's French campaigns are the motive, direct or indirect, of that comment must wait our attention until we have answers to other, more immediate questions. A valid interpretation of Arthur's portrait must begin with the assumption that the Morte Arthure is first a poem and only secondarily, if at all, a social comment or political tractate. We must read it as a poem, not over-looking the possibility of a political statement, yet not allowing that possibility to direct our reading. As we have already suggested, the poet's use of the Nine Worthies motif makes clear that imperialism is one of the central themes of the Morte Arthure. How the poet treats this theme in his portrait of Arthur will be a primary concern. Only when we have explored this question thoroughly can we turn to a consideration of topical or contemporary comment.

To begin our study we shall look first at such external problems as the manuscript conditions, authorship, date, provenance, and sources of the Morte Arthure. Some of the earlier interpretations of the poem depend at least in part on assumptions about these problems; we shall therefore examine their nature and the special difficulties these problems involve. Turning to the work itself, we shall attempt to establish an interpretation of Arthur's portrait

by a seriatim analysis of the contents of the poem, taking
into account the poet's adaptation of his Arthurian ante-
cedents. As most readers would agree, the poet uses
primarily dramatic rather than expository techniques of
characterization. Thus, a seriatim analysis seems the best
method for examining Arthur's portrait because it will allow
us to take up in their proper context the words and actions
of Arthur and to consider their cumulative effect as the
poem moves toward its end.

NOTES

[1] *Morte Arthure*, ed. Edmund Brock, E. E. T. S., 8 (1865; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 93, l. 3176. Hereafter, citations from the poem refer to this edition. (Brock's conservative edition of the poem is still superior to the later editions by M. M. Banks [London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900] and Erik Björkman [New York: G. E. Stechert & Co., 1915].)

[2] "The impression, however, given by the passage in Longuyon tends to suggest that its introduction into the *Voeux du Paon* was due to an already existing 'device' or 'ballad,'" Israel Gollancz, ed., *Parlement of the Three Ages* (London: Nichols and Sons, 1897), p. xviii.

[3] Nora K. Chadwick, *Celtic Britain* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), p. 47.

[4] Chadwick, p. 47.

[5] Kenneth H. Jackson, "The Arthur of History," in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 4-8. (The general work is hereafter cited as *ALMA*.) See also H. M. Chadwick and N. K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), pp. 114-5.

[6]"Tunc Arthur pugnabat contra illos in illis diebus cum regibus Brittonum, sed ipse dux erat bellorum;" from Nennius, Historia Britonum [sic], ed. T. Mommsen in Chronica minora Saeculorum, iv-vii (Monumenta Germaniae Historica), quoted by E. K. Chambers, Arthur of Britain (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd., 1927), p. 238.

[7]"Duodecim fuit bellum in Monte Badonis, in quo corruerunt in uno die nongenti sexaginta viri de uno impetu Arthur" Chambers, p. 239.

[8]In this discussion of De Excidio, we shall accept the dates and reading of Gildas' obscurities offered by Sir Frank Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England, 2nd ed. (1947; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 2-6.

[9]"Ex eo tempore nunc cives, nunc hostes vincebant . . . usque ad annum obsessionis Badonici montis, novissimaeque ferme de furciferis non minimae stragis, quique quadragesimus quartus ut novi orditur annus mense iam uno emenso, qui et meae nativitatis est" from Gildas, De Excidio et Conquesto Brittaniae, ed. T. Mommsen, Chronica minora Saeculorum iv-vii, quoted by Chambers, p. 237.

[10]Peter Hunter Blair, An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 30.

[11]Jackson, ALMA, p. 11.

[12]"The _Annales Cambriae_, which were put together in their present form in the middle of the tenth century but may have been first compiled early in the ninth" (Jackson, p.4), also assign the victory to Arthur. Like Nennius, the _Annales_ "drew on Welsh traditions of a semi-historical nature, closely connected with but already divergent from Nennius" (Jackson, p. 11).

[13]Roger Sherman Loomis, "The Legend of Arthur's Survival," in _ALMA_, pp. 64-5.

[14]Strictly speaking, even by Nennius' time, as E. K. Chambers notes, "Arthur was not merely a national British hero; he was also the centre of popular aetiological myths. . ." (p. 7). Here I am concerned only with the political dimensions of the legend.

[15]John J. Parry and Robert A. Caldwell, "Geoffrey of Monmouth," in _ALMA_, pp. 82-85; J. S. P. Tatlock, _The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Brittaniae and Its Early Vernacular Versions_ (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), pp. 305-20.

[16]Tatlock, pp. 306-10.

[17]Tatlock, p. 427.

[18]Parry and Caldwell, p. 86. Frederick Heer, _The Medieval World_, trans. Janet Sondheimer (New York: New American Library, 1963), pp. 167-9, offers a concise explanation of the political importance of Geoffrey's work to the Angevin monarchs.

[19]See M. Powicke, _The Thirteenth Century_ (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp. 515-6; Laura Keeler, _Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Late Latin Chroniclers, 1300-1500_ (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946), pp. 47-75; Parry and Caldwell, _ALMA_, p. 89. Interestingly, _Debrett's Peerage_ traces the present queen's ancestry to Arthur.

[20]George Neilson, "The Baulked Coronation of Arthur in 'Morte Arthure,'" _N&Q_, 9th ser., 10 (1902), 404. See also his _'Huchown of the Awle Ryale' the Alliterative Poet_ (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1902), pp. 40-66.

[21]William Matthews, _The Tragedy of Arthur_ (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 192.

Chapter 1

The Thornton Text

The unique version of the _Morte_ _Arthure_ is found in the Thornton MS., Lincoln Cathedral Library 91 (olim A. 5. 2, olim A. 1. 17). This volume of 314 folios is noteworthy for preserving not only the _Morte_ _Arthure_, but also the unique versions of the _Prose_ _Alexander_ and _Sir_ _Perceval_ _of_ _Galles_. Obviously "the product of a gentleman amateur,"[1] the manuscript reflects a hearty taste for the entertaining, the pious, and the practical. In the words of its earliest editor, James Orchard Halliwell, it is "a goodly volume of English treatises or translations, embracing the various subjects of history, romance, religion, and medicine, . . . which could afford amusement in hall, instruction at other times, religious information and perhaps consolation to the sick, and withall be produced as a medical authority for nearly every ill 'that flesh is heir to.'"[2] Though our knowledge of the manuscript is rather tentative, we shall examine the information we have for what it may tell us about the audience of the _Morte_ _Arthure_. We shall also want to examine the nature of the version of the _Morte_ _Arthure_ that appears in the manuscript to learn what we can about its origin, provenance, authorship, and date. This examination will inevitably lead us to consider the sources the author may have used in creating his poem. While these

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problems may appear only indirectly related to a critical analysis of the poem, an awareness of the baffling uncertainties and controversies involved with these problems will prove useful in our reading of the poem and in estimating the worth of earlier readings.

At the end of the <u>Morte Arthure</u> in the manuscript is this notation: "Here endes Morte Arthure, writene by Robert of Thorntone."[3] The name is apparently that of Robert Thornton of East Newton in the wapentake of Ryedale, North Riding of Yorkshire, who seems to have compiled and copied most, if not all, of the contents of the volume. The old idea, introduced by G. G. Perry and repeated by Edmund Brock in their E.E.T.S. editions of the poem, identifying the scribe with a Robert Thornton who was archdeacon of East Bedford, has been set aside by Margaret S. Ogden.[4] In her study of the manuscript and its scribe, Ogden tells us Thornton was a country gentleman "who became lord of East Newton on the death of his father in 1418."[5] The documents she cites in connection with the Thornton family suggest they were of the minor gentry and of substantial means, both before and after the fifteenth century.[6]

Regarding the date of the manuscript, Ogden offers the following conclusions:

> The Lincoln MS. seems to have been written sometime after 1422, the date assigned to a holy woman's visions of purgatory in one of the prose pieces, and before 1453-1454, the date given in the note recording the birth of Robert Thornton at Ryedale

[probably the scribe's grandson]. This dating is
confirmed by the water-marks on the paper of the
manuscript. Documentary material early as 1413 and
as late as 1461 has been found bearing the same
water-marks as those in the paper of which the
Lincoln MS. is composed.[7]

The woman's vision, according to Halliwell's description

of the manuscript is the sixty-third item and begins on

folio 250v.[8] Since we have no notion of the process of

compilation of the manuscript, the work might have been long

underway by 1422. The birth notice appears on folio 49v,

which is otherwise blank except for the words "Wylliam

Thornton his Boke" and what Ogden describes as "scribbles

which seem to be in the same hand" as the name and birth

notice.[9] Curiously, the following folios (50, 51, 52) con-

tain works in a much later hand.[10] If these pages were

simply left blank for some reason by Robert Thornton, he

might have finished with the manuscript well before 1453 and

turned the book over to his son. An earlier date has been

proposed by J. L. N. O'Loughlin who argues that notes

accompanying The New Palaeographical Society facsimile of

folio 93v "confirm by watermark evidence the dating 1430-

1440 made on palaeographical grounds."[11] Actually, the

notes propose a date of 1430-50, and they offer a series

of watermark dates, ranging from 1413 to 1472.[12]

The contents of the Thornton manuscript are an interest-

ing study in the taste for delight and instruction. By

Ogden's count, 116 of the 314 folios contain religious

material,[13] which is for the most part gathered together in

a body (folios 176-279). Included among these prayers,
charms, meditations, religious poems and tracts are several
works "by Richerde [Rolle] the hermyte off Hampulle." The
first 176 folios contain mostly romances and other narratives,
secular and religious. At the end of the manuscript, folios
279-314, is a series of medicinal recipes that comprise a
treatise entitled "liber de diversis medicinis." The
collection of romances and narratives, which will be our
main concern, reminds us of Sisam's "fair closet copies that
would enable well-to-do admirers to renew their pleasure
when no skilled minstrel was by."[14] Certainly most of the
works in this collection bear such distinguishing character-
istics of oral delivery as frequent appeals to listeners. In
the case of Sir Degrevant, for example, the "Thornton version
gives more evidence of minstrel origins and oral transmission
and is closer to the original dialect" than the other versions
of the romance.[15] That Thornton actually copied his romances
from minstrel texts is possible but very difficult to prove.
If he were using a collection of texts borne by a minstrel,
we could easily explain how he came to collect together in
the first 176 folios eight romances in verse (including the
Morte Arthure) and one in prose, not to mention a saint's life
that shows characteristics of oral delivery and a ballad. We
should of course not overlook the possibility that Thornton
was borrowing manuscripts from friends. In his examination
of the Findern Anthology, Rossell H. Robbins has found

evidence suggesting that such borrowing of manuscripts may lie behind the compilation of that particular family anthology.[16] In support of such a possibility is an anonymous letter Angus McIntosh prints, which seems to contain instructions for the return of "ane Inglische buke es cald Mort Arthur" to its original copyist.[17] Another possibility is that Thornton carried paper with him to visit friends who kept their own manuscripts. However, any final conclusions as to how Thornton may have acquired his texts must await a fuller study of the relations among these works, particularly the romances, some of which share special stylistic affinities,[18] some of which share story motifs,[19] some of which appear together in other manuscripts,[20] and some of which seem to originate in the same dialect area.[21]

Whatever the process by which he acquired them, Thornton was copying romances that were at some point part of minstrels' repertoires intended for performance in hall before such families as the Thorntons and their social betters. The Morte Arthure, for example, although probably not composed by a minstrel, may well have been composed for minstrel recitation. The textual problems in the poem-- such as the duplication of Lucius' death (2073-80, 2251-6)-- suggest a period of oral transmission, undoubtedly by minstrels. The Noble Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius in the Winchester manuscript, in which Malory followed very closely a version of the Morte Arthure no longer extant,

is of considerable value here. However, one must exercise extreme caution in comparing Malory's work and the Thornton version not only because Malory was consciously reshaping his material to fit his own artistic ends, but also because he was using a manuscript that may have been fairly corrupt.[22] Nevertheless, some of the differences between the Thornton Morte Arthure and Malory, as A. C. Baugh has said of such differences in other romances, clearly "reflect the recitations of minstrels who substitute and improvise when the memory fails to produce the exact words of a line or couplet, and who for whatever reason are led to put down the story in writing, or assist in its recording."[23] Perhaps as O'Loughlin has suggested, the Thornton Morte Arthure was at some time in its past reconstructed from memory by a minstrel.[24]

That Thornton was actually copying from a minstrel's recitation is out of the question. All the romances in his manuscript, including the Morte Arthure, show evidence of dialect mixture which indicates some history of textual transmission. A recent editor of The Awntyrs off Arthure says that the Thornton text of that romance "is apparently in the same dialect as the original, but . . . numerous Midland forms indicate that it derives from a MS copied in another dialect."[25] Angus McIntosh, presently one of the most eminent scholars of Middle English dialects, argues that beneath Thornton's text of the Morte Arthure lie two other versions from the Northeast Midlands. This theory, which

seems to set aside the traditional belief that the poem "was written in a North-West Midland dialect,"[26] suggests that Thornton derived his text from a version of the poem (M_1) written in the dialect of "south-west Lincolnshire, . . . somewhere between Sleaford and Grantham."[27] This version is, in turn, derived from another (M_2) which McIntosh associates with Lindsey. He comments, "I myself would regard the general neighborhood of Louth as being that with which the features of M_2 most satisfactorily square."[28] If McIntosh's theory fits with what we have said earlier, we have a history of oral transmission followed by a history of textual transmission--indicating an extremely popular poem and a fair distance between the original and the text we have.[29]

These considerations increase our desire to know about the author of the Morte Arthure and the date at which he composed his work. Unfortunately, despite elaborate attempts to unmask him, the poet has maintained his anonymity and will probably continue to do so. There seems little reason to review the protracted studies asserting that the poem is the work of a poet known only as Huchown of the Awle Ryale; this sterile controversy was successfully laid to rest in a very thorough analysis of the arguments by H. N. McCracken in 1910.[30] We should, however, take note of A. C. Baugh's recent studies of the origins of the Middle English romances. Arguing against a general assumption that they are of minstrel creation, Baugh examines the romances for internal evidence of their authorship. In the Morte Arthure he finds

"a strongly clerical tone" in the prologue and at the end of the poem.[31] A clerical author is an interesting, though not a compelling possibility. The intricate and not very successful arguments for clerical authorship of _Pearl_ should make us reluctant to begin such a debate about the _Morte Arthure_. One might argue with equal force that the author's skill in handling the formulaic alliterative style and his knowledge of Arthurian and romance materials suggest a provincial court poet who was a very pious layman.

The date at which this anonymous author composed his poem is very uncertain. The manuscript of course provides the latest limit, probably 1450. For the earliest limit our only clues are the literary and historical sources the poet may have used. We shall look very carefully at the evidence adduced to support the various arguments concerning this limit because a knowledge of the date might be helpful in corroborating an interpretation of the poem. To begin, we might observe that the very earliest possible limit would seem to be 1310 if, as many readers believe, the poet used _Les Voeux du Paon_.[32] Few, if any, students of the poem would argue for such an early date. In fact, the weight of critical opinion has always been in favor of a date in the latter half of the fourteenth century.

George Neilson, in his search for historical allusions in the poem, has offered numerous possibilities for dating, some reasonable and some rather farfetched. For Neilson

himself the cumulative effect of these allusions, most of
which compliment Edward III, was to set the date of the poem
in 1364-5.[33] In one of his more convincing arguments for an
historical allusion useful for dating the poem Neilson notes
the unusual reference to "Spanyolis" (3700) in the sea
battle between Arthur's British and Mordred's Danish fleets,
an incident the poet adds to his chronicle source; this
reference, he asserts, indicates that this passage was in-
spired by Edward III's victory over the Spaniards at the
Battle of Winchelsea or Espagnols-sur-Mer in 1350.[34] John
Finlayson, with obvious reluctance, accepts the association,
but he points out that "there is no need to assume, as does
Neilson, that the poem reflects events still fresh in the
mind of the contemporaries. The influence could as easily
have come from a chronicle, and the details are not those
of a particular battle, but of the literary topos of sea-
battles."[35] If we accept the idea that the poet was merely
borrowing generic elements of a sea-battle and probably not
intending an allusion to a specific event, another possibility
for explaining the awkward intrusion of "Spanyolis" does
exist: the poet may have been borrowing from a chronicle
account of the unsuccessful English sea-battle with the
Spanish off La Rochelle in 1372. This explanation might of
course suggest a much later date than Neilson's explanation
does.[36]

Arthur's journey to Rome is a possible clue to the date

of the poem. Neilson believes the poet is alluding to the journey of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV to Rome for his coronation in 1355.[37] Within the period of a century, however, three other Holy Roman Emperors also made the journey to Rome: Henry VII in 1310, Lewis IV in 1327-8, and Rupert III in 1401.[38] Another theory based on Arthur's route to Rome is advanced by G. B. Parks. "Nearly all the place names assigned to his journey," Parks observes, "are indeed strung along the continuous road from Germany to Rome." The exceptional names, however, suggest to Parks first hand experience or a first hand account rather than maps, itineraries or literary sources.[39] He suggests that the poet may have known or been among "some 400 Englishmen . . . licensed to go to Rome" late in 1350.

> The poem was written before the sudden familiarity with Milan which began with the negotiation of a marriage between Prince Lionel and a Visconti in 1368, and could not therefore have drawn upon the knowledge of any of Lionel's messengers or retinue. Before that marriage, official travel to Italy was not extensive, because the papal court, the object of most such travel from England, was at Avignon. Military travel is in its turn unlikely, because the crusades were on the whole over, and English mercenaries had not yet come to achieve that familiarity with Italy which they were to gain under the leadership of Sir John Hawkwood and others after 1361. Altogether, room is left for only one kind of regular travel, that of the pilgrim.[40]

In this statement Parks unintentionally seems to offer good reason to place the date of the poem late in the fourteenth century when English knowledge of Italy might have been more

extensive that it was earlier in the century.

For a time Neilson's date of 1364-5 received support from a study that purported to date the poem on the basis of the "lappes" (3254) worn by the lady in Arthur's dream.[41] Recently John Finlayson has demonstrated that the theory involved a misreading of the description of the costume and that "descriptions of dress can do no more than confirm the supposed general date of a work in terms of decades and quarter-centuries, rather than in single years." The lady's costume, unfortunately, reveals little about the date of the poem: "'Lappes' understood as 'long sleeves' of some type were fashionable in one form or another . . . between 1337 and 1460."[42] A similar piece of evidence which might support a date after 1360 has been advanced cautiously by R. W. Ackerman. He notes that Morte Arthure 2565-70 may contain an allusion to the plate armor that came into use during the latter part of the fourteenth century. "This passage, it would seem, could refer only to the various parts of the sleeve of a plate hauberk. None of the other warriors in Morte Arthure, however, were clad in plate armor."[43]

John Finlayson has noted that the poem's possible relationship to The Life of the Black Prince by the Chandos Herald (circa 1385) and Sir Ferumbras (circa 1380) may suggest that Morte Arthure belongs to the last years of the fourteenth century, but this view, like all the others, cannot be proved conclusively."[44] So far Finlayson has not

published any argument to support a relationship between the
Morte Arthure and Sir Ferumbras. The most forceful evidence
he advances for a relation between Morte Arthure and The Life
of the Black Prince is that the scene in which Arthur parts
from Guenevere (695-712) may have its source in the Chandos
Herald's "description of the leave-taking of a weeping Joan by
her husband, the Black Prince, as he is about to embark on a
military expedition [CH 2050-71]." As Finlayson admits, "the
MA passage is not simply a translation of CH; the resemblance
is a generic one and could be attributed to the chivalric
atmosphere prevailing in England and France at this time."[45]

What emerges from these arguments concerning the date
of the poem is at best a general impression that the work
was composed between 1350-60 and 1450, although we cannot
with confidence assign the work to a particular decade or
even a particular quarter-century. As for Neilson's date,
which has only the force of a long tradition behind it, we
must agree with Finlayson that "there is no valid evidence
to suggest that Morte Arthure must have been written ca
1364-65 and nothing to prevent us assuming, as does an
earlier editor, Brock, that the poem belongs to the last
quarter of the fourteenth century, if not later."[46] Indeed,
for our purposes the chief value of the controversies
concerning the date is to cause us to look with suspicion at
any interpretation that depends on a specific dating of the
Morte Arthure.

To conclude our examination of the scholarship dealing with the external problems of the Morte Arthure, we shall now turn our attention to the studies of the sources of the poem. What we shall say about the sources will not be exhaustive, for we are not concerned with finding beneath every line of the Morte Arthure another line from French or Latin literature. Our main objective in this study is to understand the particular genius of the Morte Arthure poet in his adaptation of conventional Arthurian material to fit his own original vision of the legend. To do so, it is useful to inquire what he may have known of Arthurian literature and, where necessary, what he may have used from non-Arthurian sources.

For his main narrative line the poet is indebted to the story of Arthur from the chronicle tradition of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Brittaniae, Wace's Roman de Brut, and Layamon's Brut. Which of these works he may have known and used is still an uncertainty. So far only two major studies of the problem have been published, both by German scholars more than a half-century ago. In 1885 P. Branscheid concluded that the Morte Arthure poet relied on Geoffrey and Layamon and that he supplemented their works with the chronicles of Wace, Peter of Langtoft, and possibly Robert of Gloucester: "der verfasser von MA benutzte zu seinem werke die chroniken G und L und ausserdem noch mindestens zwei französische romane, von denen der eine in den kreis der Arthur sage gehört, der andere nicht."[47]

Branscheid's arguments are not very persuasive, especially

because of his failure to offer more than a few vague verbal

parallels.[48]

The second theory is that of Rudolf Imelmann, published

in 1906, which advances the idea that Layamon, the Morte

Arthure poet, and several other medieval authors had access

to an expanded version of Wace which has since been lost.

According to Imelmann, this lost work incorporated details

from Gaimar's lost chronicle and had some relation to the

Vulgate La Mort le Roi Artu:

> [D]ass zwar Wace von ihm Layamon benutzt wurde,
> aber keine uns bekannte Version desselben, sondern
> eine jüngere, die kompilatorischen Charakters war;
> als ein neben Wace wesentlicher Faktor wurde die
> gleichzeitige Reimchronik des Gaimar bezeichnet.
> Sie wurde in einen Wace verarbeitet, und diese
> Bearbeitung erfuhr Einflüsse durch andere Dichtungen,
> wie den Lancelot und den Tristan.[49]

J. S. P. Tatlock has launched a most vigorous attack on

this rather extravagant theory:

> Mr. Imelmann's argument is abridged and incon-
> veniently framed, so difficult at times to follow,
> and so insufficiently documented, and leaves so
> much for the reader to do (to say nothing of various
> small errors), that one cannot but wonder how
> often it has received adequate examination, and
> whether sometimes a writer to whom it was a side
> issue did not prefer to give it guarded recogni-
> tion rather than to prove or disprove it. There
> is here a case of The Emperor's New Clothes, and
> it is time some simple soul cried "He has nothing
> on."[50]

Following a detailed and careful examination of Imelmann's

assumptions, techniques, and evidence, Tatlock concludes,

"One should reject Dr. Imelmann's argument and conlusions

in toto."[51]

In the years since Imelmann's work we have not been
without suggestions for the main source of the Morte Arthure.
After the discovery of the Winchester manuscript of Malory,
Tania Vorontzoff used it to construct an elaborate and
complex theory which asserted that the Morte Arthure and
Malory's work were derived not from Geoffrey, Wace, or
Layamon, but from an English translation of a French inter-
mediary between Wace and Geoffrey.[52] Ivor Arnold, Wace's
editor, has proved that the facts supporting this theory
are "neither substantial nor accurate."[53] Another sugges-
tion, advanced by J. L. N. O'Loughlin, is that the Morte
Arthure poet used Robert Mannyng of Brunne's Story of
England. Thus far O'Loughlin, who has been promising a new
edition of the Morte Arthure since 1935, has offered in
support of his idea only the "occurrence of the otherwise
unrecorded word lothyn, 'shaggy', in Morte Arthure, vs. 1095,
and at the corresponding point in Robert Mannyng's transla-
tion of Wace."[54] John Finlayson, though he has adduced no
evidence to support his belief, has suggested "that the most
probable source is Wace's Roman de Brut in its extant form,
without additions from lost chronicles or details from other
chronicles."[55]

Before leaving this discussion of the main source of the
Morte Arthure, we should take a close look at William
Matthews' recent contention that "the poem is founded upon
a fourteenth-century French version of the story." This

"purely conjectural" version, he argues,

> must have been somewhat akin to the version that
> appears in the French prose Merlin, combining the
> chronicle story that was related by Geoffrey of
> Monmouth with some elements of the romance tradi-
> tion that had been initiated by Chrétien de Troyes.
> Its basis, I should think, was Wace or Geoffrey,
> but it was embellished with themes and characters
> drawn from Arthurian and Alexandrian romance.[56]

Before looking at the evidence Matthews offers, we might
note that his theory is a new variation on Imelmann's
proposal that the source of the Morte Arthure is a lost
work based on Wace's Brut and related to the Vulgate Cycle.
Elsewhere in his book Matthews attempts to relate the Morte
Arthure to La Mort le Roi Artu: "In the Mort Artu, too,
there is a dream of fortune, Mordred is slain by Arthur
himself, and allusion is made to Mordred's sons and the
vengeance upon them."[57] With this statement Matthews becomes
the most recent in the long series of scholars who have over
the years given currency to the idea that the Morte Arthure
bears a close, yet still undefined relation to the Vulgate
and other French romances.[58]

Matthews offers little in the way of solid, objective
evidence to support his theory. What he does suggest is
that in the Morte Arthure, "some names appear in French form"
and that the poem uses "a scattering of French grammatical
constructions" and "an exceedingly large French vocabulary."[59]
It is only the last point--the "exceedingly large French
vocabulary" that Matthews attempts to document. First, he
offers statistics based on unidentified passages in the

Morte Arthure:

> Four passages, two or three hundred words each,
> yielded the following percentages of French words:
> 22, 15, 18, 15. When the many repetitions of
> native structural words is remembered and also the
> fact that many French words are not repeated,
> these percentages are very high indeed. Passages
> of six to nine hundred words each from other poems
> yielded much lower percentages, only one poem
> approaching the figures for Morte Arthure, namely,
> Gower's Confessio Amantis, 9; Barbour's Bruce, 14;
> Arthur and Merlin, 9; Avowing of Arthur, 9;
> Manning's Handlyng Synne, 9; the Chaucerian
> Romance of the Rose, 6, 11, 12.[60]

Unfortunately, Matthews gives no indication whatever of the

passages he examined, the criteria he used for selecting

the passages, the reason he chose to compare 200 to 300-word

passages from the Morte Arthure and 600 to 900-word passages

from the other works (not, it would seem, a particularly

sound statistical methodology), or the criteria he used to

decide which were "French words." Given his silence on

these matters, it is impossible to estimate the worth of his

theory; at best one is reduced to stale apophthegms about the

deceit of statistics and statisticians.

The additional documentation Matthews offers is a list

of some 45 words which he regards as rare and unusual in an

English poem of this period.[61] Of these 45 words, 28 begin

with letters from A to K, the present limits of the Middle

English Dictionary. One seems not to appear in the MED:

fforemaglede, 1534. Ten are recorded only from the Morte

Arthure, including avyede, 3716; avires, 3164; deffuse, 256;

ercheuesges, 67; genatours, 2897; hotchene, 3687. Four of

these ten appear to be cognates of words in somewhat common
use (four or more occurrences recorded before 1450):
encroyssede, 4112 (croisen); engowschede, 2053 ([?]read:
encowsched couchen); engyste, 445 (giste); jamby, 373
(jaumber, jaumbeux). For two of the 28--arborye, 3244;
enhorilde, 3244--the MED records only one other occurrence
before 1450; for one--jerownde, 2891--the MED records only
two other occurrences before 1450. For the remaining 16 the
MED records at least three other occurrences in Middle English
before 1350.[62] Matthews' word list, it would appear, leads
to no firm conclusions in any direction. It certainly does
not prove the poet was making a close translation of a French
work. It may indicate only a close familiarity with the
French language--certainly not surprising in a late fourteenth
century Englishman and poet, especially if he had read all
the French Alexander romances Matthews claims he has. That
the poet might have borrowed these words from Wace or any
of the French sources he proposes seems not to have been
considered by Matthews.

Whatever may have been his main source, the Morte
Arthure poet probably embellished it with material drawn
from such other sources as the Alexander and Charlemagne
romances. In his study of the Morte Arthure Matthews
attempts to build a strong case for the poet's "firsthand
knowledge" and use of such Alexander works as Longuyon's
Les Voeux du Paon, Li Fuerres de Gadres, and "some Latin or

vernacular version of the story of Alexander related in Leo's Historia de Preliis."[63] Throughout the poem the borrowings from and allusions to the Alexander story are, according to Matthews, so extensive that the poem "views Arthur through spectacles commonly reserved for Alexander."[64]

Matthews is certainly not the first to suggest that the poet of the Morte Arthure borrowed from the Alexander romances; much earlier Neilson, R. L. Graeme Ritchie, M. M. Banks, and J. L. N. O'Loughlin advanced the possibility of such borrowings, though on a more modest scale than Matthews.[65] That an Arthurian poet might borrow from the Alexander story is certainly not surprising, especially if we consider Chaucer's testimony to the popularity and wide knowledge of Alexander and if we recall that the tradition of viewing Arthur and Alexander in the same perspective among the Nine Worthies goes back at least as far as 1310, when Longuyon recorded it in Les Voeux du Paon. Moreover, as Tatlock noted, Geoffrey of Monmouth probably "held in mind the silhouette of Alexander's career in sketching the silhouette of Arthur's."[66] Whether the borrowing has been as extensive and specific as Matthews maintains is, however, a highly debatable matter. In addition to those allusions to Alexander in the Nine Worthies passage, Matthews find three direct allusions to Alexander in the poem (2607, 2634, 4160) and "some obscured allusions that presume knowledge of his story on the part of the audience."[67] That the poet should want us to know he is viewing Arthur "through spectacles

commonly reserved for Alexander" and yet not mention
Alexander until well over halfway through the poem puts
considerable strain on our credulity. Moreover, "obscured
allusions" presuming knowledge on the part of the audience
is more akin to the techniques of an Alexander Pope or a
T. S. Eliot than the techniques of medieval poets, Chaucer's
subtle thrusts at courtly love and romance clichés notwith-
standing.

The direct indebtedness of the _Morte Arthure_ poet to
the Charlemagne story seems to be limited to some version
of the romance of Fierabras, either in its original French
form or in an English translation. This romance apparently
inspired the Gawain-Priamus episode (2501-3083), the poet's
longest addition to the conventional Arthurian narrative.
R. H. Griffith, the first scholar to observe the relation of
this passage and its probable source, argued that the _Morte
Arthure_ poet was using the French _Fierabras_.[68] However, the
mention of the passion lance (3427) in the lines describing
Charlemagne in the Nine Worthies passage has led Laura
Hibbard Loomis to argue that "in no Continental version of
Fierabras could he have found any mention of the Lance as
among the relics won by Charlemagne." Her suggestion is
that the poet may have used a translation of _Fierabras_,
related to the Fillingham _Firumbras_, which may have been
"one of 13 items known to have been lost from the Auchinleck
MS." and which may have been composed between 1327-8 and

1340.[69] Finally, John Finlayson has observed that "there is . . . evidence for Sir Ferumbras, a Middle English translation, written about 1380, which contains certain alterations reflected in Morte Arthure,"[70] though he does not offer any support for his statement.

From our survey of source studies we can see that this area of scholarship, like all the others we have examined, is beset with controversy and uncertainty. And it is likely to remain so indefinitely, barring discovery of one of the numerous "lost" manuscripts postulated by scholars. The probable reasons for the controversy and uncertainty are the freedom with which the poet handles his sources and the particular idiom of the alliterative style into which he translates these sources. As we shall see in succeeding chapters, the poet seems to have taken considerable liberties in adapting the conventional Arthurian story to suit his thematic and aesthetic purposes. Preserving only the main outlines of the conventional story, he treats the specific incidents with such originality that they bear only a very general resemblance to their counterparts in the chronicle version of the story. In addition, the specific demands of the alliterative style with its archaic diction and its formulaic patterns still further diminish any chance of finding a sufficient array of parallel passages to permit firm decisions about the sources.

Despite the uncertainties of the source studies, this

survey of major opinions on the subject does allow us to establish some bearings with which to approach the _Morte Arthure_. Our main purpose in this paper, as we stated earlier, is an interpretation of the portrait of Arthur in the poem. To achieve this purpose, we shall explore the poet's adaptation of the conventional Arthurian legend. The weight of opinion seems to allow Wace's _Roman de Brut_ the most important part in this convention on its way to the poet of the _Morte Arthure_. Even if the _Morte Arthure_ poet didn't know Wace--and it seems probable that he did--the _Roman de Brut_ still best represents the convention and therefore will serve as our point of departure. At points where Geoffrey or Layamon differs sharply with Wace and where a comparison serves some end, we shall take their versions into account. In examining a particular episode which may have been inspired by non-Arthurian literature, if it helps us to reach a better understanding of the episode, we shall of course look carefully at the arguments adduced in the relevant scholarship.

Finally, we should recognize that all we have said about sources and date and authorship and other so-called external problems of the _Morte Arthure_ must to some degree qualify our interpretation of the poem. Certainly we must depend on the poem alone in constructing an interpretation. As we have seen, the few facts we have about the external conditions of the poem can at best corroborate or refute that

interpretation; they cannot serve as its basis. We can say with certainty only that the poem is the product of an unknown but very skillful author, possibly a court poet, probably writing somewhere in the North Midlands, sometime between 1350-60 and 1450. His reason for composing the work was probably to provide entertainment and edification for a provincial audience who would have enjoyed his ability to "geeste 'rum, ram, ruf,' by lettre." (That he expected the poem to be recited before the king or the royal court at London seems out of the question.) His work, judging from evidence of its transmission, was popular with the men of the North and North Midlands. One at least thought enough of it to copy a version in his family anthology and thereby unwittingly preserved it for men of later times.

NOTES

[1]Margaret S. Ogden, ed., The 'Liber de Diversis Medicinis', E.E.T.S., 207 (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. xv.

[2]James Orchard Halliwell, ed., The Thornton Romances (London: Nichols and Son, 1844), p. v.

[3]Halliwell, p. xxvii.

[4]Ogden, pp. xi, xiv-xv. Perry presented the idea in 1865 in the first edition of Morte Arthure, E.E.T.S., 8; Brock's edition of 1871 repeats the idea.

[5]Ogden, p. xi.

[6]Ogden, p. xii and passim.

[7]Ogden, pp. x-xi.

[8]Halliwell, p. xxxiv.

[9]Ogden, p. ix.

[10]Halliwell, pp. xxvi-xxvii. Unless otherwise noted, all information about the contents of the manuscript derives from Halliwell's description, pp. xxv-xxxvi.

[11]J. L. N. O'Loughlin, "The Middle English Morte Arthure," MAE, 4 (1935), 153. Ogden also mentions these notes (p. xi, n.2), though she reaches a somewhat different conclusion from them.

[12]Edward Maunde Thompson et al., edd., *The New Palaeographical Society: Facsimiles of Ancient Manuscripts, Etc.*, Second Series, Vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1913-30), notes to Plate 45.

[13]Ogden, p. xv, n. 5.

[14]Kenneth Sisam, *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose* (1921; rpt. corrected edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. xxxii. The romances in the Thornton manuscript are the *Prose Alexander*, *Morte Arthure*, *Octavian*, *Sir Isumbras*, *The Earl of Toulous*, *Sir Degrevant*, *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne*, and *Perceval of Galles*.

[15]Lillian Hornstein, "Miscellaneous Romances" in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, Vol. 1, ed. J. Burke Severs (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967), p. 147. Hereafter, we shall refer to the general work as *Manual*.

[16]Rossell H. Robbins, "The Findern Anthology," *PMLA*, 69 (1954), 628. As Robbins suggests, see also M. M. Crow, "John of Angoulême and his Chaucer Manuscript," *Spec*, 17 (1943), 89, n. 5.

[17]Angus McIntosh, "The Textual Transmission of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*," in *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Norman Davis and C. L.

Wrenn (London: George Unwin & Allen Ltd., 1962), pp. 237-8.

[18]A. C. Gibbs, ed., _Middle English Romances_ (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), p. 136, notes that _Sir Degrevant_ and _Perceval of Galles_ share the "unusual" sixteen-line tail-rhyme stanza. Robert J. Gates in his recent edition of _The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne_ (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969), pp. 37-41, lists some of the verbal similarities in _The Awntyrs_ and _Sir Degrevant_. As he notes, an explanation of the meaning of these parallels "will have to await further comparative study of the poems involved" (p. 41). See also A. MacI. Trounce, "The English Tail-Rhyme Romances," _MAE_, 1 (1932), 87-108, and _MAE_, 3 (1934), 30-50, and Derek Pearsall, "The Development of the Middle English Romance," _MS_, 27 (1965), 91-116, esp. 111ff.

[19]_Sir Degrevant_, _Morte Arthure_, and _The Earl of Toulous_ (see Lillian H. Hornstein, "Miscellaneous Romances," _Manual_, p. 148); _Sir Eglamour_, _Sir Isumbras_, and _Octavian_ (see Hornstein, "Eustace-Constance-Florence-Griselda Legends," _Manual_, pp. 124-5); _Morte Arthure_ and _The Awntyrs off Arthure_ (see William Matthews, _The Tragedy of Arthur_ [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960], pp. 152-63).

[20]_Sir Isumbras_ and _The Earl of Toulous_ in Bodleian 6922* (Ashmole 61); _Sir Isumbras_ and _Sir Eglamour of Artois_ in Bodleian 21835 (Douce 261); _Eglamour_ and _Octavian_

in Cambridge University Ff.2.38 (More 690) and Cotton
Caligula A.2. (olim Cotton Vespasian D.8).

[21]Angus McIntosh "call[s] attention to two linguistical-
ly distinct groups of texts neither of which is fundamentally
northern" (p. 231) in MSS. Lincoln Cathedral A.5.2 and
British Museum 31042, another manuscript copied by Robert
Thornton. "The first and larger group," which he assigns
to an area "somewhere not very far from where the counties of
Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, and Nottinghamshire meet," (pp. 231-
2) includes Octavian, Sir Isumbras, The Earl of Toulous, and
Perceval of Galles (p. 231, n. 3). Interestingly, McIntosh's
second group consists of the Morte Arthure and Bonaventura,
The Privity of the Passion, (MS. Lincoln Cathedral A.5.2,ff.
179-184). Of this group he concluded, "The two texts of the
second group which Thornton had before him were probably the
work of a single scribe" (p. 233). Perhaps further study of
these and similar manuscripts will help us to understand more
fully the information that dialect study reveals.

[22]E. V. Gordon and E. Vinaver, "New Light on the Text of
the Alliterative Morte Arthure," MAE, 6 (1937), 81-98; J. L.
N. O'Loughlin, "The English Alliterative Romances" in
Arthurian Literature of the Middle Ages (hereafter, ALMA),
ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959),
pp. 522-3; and Eugène Vinaver, ed., The Works of Sir Thomas
Malory, Vol. 3, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

1967), pp. 1366-71, have perhaps overstated the case for the authority of the Winchester Manuscript, which is frequently but not always superior to the Thornton text. In his new edition of Malory, Vinaver marshalls a great number of cases in which the Winchester MS. supposedly provides "alliterating lines which are missing in the Thornton text or words or phrases which improve the sense, or even sentences which help to fill some gaps in the narration" (p. 1367). Of these cases, some do in fact provide readings superior to the Morte Arthure; see Vinaver's notes to 196.14-17, 204.17, 221.27, 229.9. Others, however, provide an alternate reading which is not necessarily superior to the Morte Arthure or an alliterative line which would add nothing to the sense of the Morte Arthure; see Vinaver's notes to 198.13, 199.15, 205.20, 210.7-13, 217.21. Vinaver does admit in a number of instances (27 by my count) that the Morte Arthure provides superior readings; see his notes to 206.2-3, 218.13-14, 229.12, 233.6.

[23]A. C. Baugh, "Improvisation in the Middle English Romance," PAPS, 103 (1959), 437. Other evidence of "oral composition" has been adduced by R. A. Waldron, "Oral-Formulaic Technique and Middle English Alliterative Poetry," Spec, 32 (1957), pp. 800-1. As John Finlayson cautions, "it is necessary to be more precise as regards what is meant by oral composition. Obviously, the Morte Arthure poet was literate. . . . Oral composition in this case does not

mean composition by an illiterate poet, or the impromptu improvization . . . which just happens to have been recorded, but rather 'poetry that reaches its audience through the medium of recitation; a manuscript in the background would not alter its oral character.'" (Finlayson is quoting C. S. Lewis, Preface to Paradise Lost [London: Oxford University Press, 1942], p. 17.) In this connection, see also Michael Curschmann, "Oral Poetry in Mediaeval English, French, and German Literature: Some Notes on Recent Research," Spec, 42 (1967), 36-52, for arguments against sharp distinctions between oral and written literature.

[24]J. L. N. O'Loughlin, "The English Alliterative Romances," ALMA, p. 522.

[25]Gates, p. 74.

[26]S. O. Andrew, "The Dialect of Morte Arthure," RES, 4 (1928), 423. This study has long been considered the definitive work on the subject despite the arguments of J. R. Hulbert, "The West Midland of the Romances," MP, 19 (1921), 1-16, that there is "no good evidence to connect alliterative romances with the west" (16). (In trying to locate the provenance of the poem, Andrew does not deal with the possibility of an oral tradition underlying the present version.)

[27]McIntosh, p. 233.

[28]McIntosh, p. 237.

[29]O'Loughlin, "The English Alliterative Romances," ALMA, p. 526, and Matthews, pp. 151-77, argue that its possible influence indicates a wide circulation.

[30]H. N. McCracken, "Concerning Huchown," PMLA, 25 (1910), 507-34. With amazing conciseness McCracken summarizes and deals with the enormous amount of material from the arguments that sprawled over the pages of The Athenaeum at the turn of the century. As late as 1916, George Neilson, "'Morte Arthure' and Huchown," The Athenaeum (October 1916), pp. 488-9, was still arguing for Huchown's authorship and was threatening to publish "my still unassembled researches."

[31]A. C. Baugh, "The Authorship of the Middle English Romances," MHRA: Annual Bulletin of the Modern Humanities Research Association, 22 (1950), 22-3.

[32]O'Loughlin, "The English Alliterative Romances," p. 511; John Finlayson, ed., Morte Arthure (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), p. 33. O'Loughlin also mentions the supposed use of Somer Soneday by the Morte Arthure poet. However, Carleton Brown, "Somer Soneday," in Studies in English Philology: A Miscellany in Honor of F. Klaeber, ed. Kemp Malone and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), p. 362, gives 1327-50 as the limits of the poem and argues that there

are too many uncertainties to permit a theory concerning the relations between the poem and the Morte Arthure.

[33]George Neilson, 'Huchown of the Awle Ryale,' pp. 59-66. An example of this less than convincing evidence is one of the series of historical references Neilson finds in Morte Arthure 582-607: at the end of 1364 the King of Cyprus was preparing a fleet at Venice for an exploit against the Sultan of Alexandria; thus, the line, "The kynge of Cyprys one the see the Sowdane habydes" (596), must have been written soon after 1364, before the attack on Alexandria was widely known (p. 65). The fact that the sultan in the line is not specifically identified does not seem to deter Neilson from his argument.

[34]Neilson, 'Huchown,' pp. 60-2.

[35]John Finlayson, "Morte Arthure: The Date and a Source for the Contemporary References," Spec, 42 (1967), 634.

[36]Lest it be argued that the poet would not be likely to think of an English defeat, we should note Froissart's observation that the English received great praise for their valor at La Rochelle and that defeat came to them only because of their inferiority in numbers. (If the poet did not intend a specific allusion to the battle, of course the difficulty disappears.) Reading Froissart's account of this

battle and the battle at Winchelsea, one is struck with the similarity of the descriptive elements in both accounts, as well as in that of the Morte Arthure poet's account of the battle between the fleets of Arthur and Mordred. All three seem to be composed largely of stock details-- the weighing of anchor, the formation of battle lines, and the use of archers, grappling hooks, and gads of iron. See Sir John Froissart, Chronicles of England, France, Spain, and the Adjoining Countries, trans. Thomas Johnes, Vol. 1 (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1868), pp. 197-9, 469-74. Finlayson, "Morte Arthure: The Date," p. 627, n. 19, points out that "Froissart's account of another sea-battle, Sluys, contains much the same material."

[37]George Neilson, "The Baulked Coronation of Arthur in 'Morte Arthure,'" N&Q, 9th ser., 10 (1902), 403-4.

[38]D[aniel] M[eredith] B[ueno] de M[esquita], "Henry," in Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 11 (Chicago: William Benton, 1964), p. 374; Anon., "Louis IV., or V.," Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 14, p. 411; Anon., "Rupert," Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 19, p. 669.

[39]George B. Parks, "King Arthur and the Roads to Rome," JEGP, 45 (1946), 168-9.

[40]Parks, 169. Edward Schroder, "Zur Datierung der Morte Arthure," Anglis, 60 (1936), 396, also argues for a date of 1350 or earlier because of a correspondence between

the _Morte Arthure_ (626, 2656, 2826) and _Winner and Waster_ (1.140). The correspondence is a consequence of oral formulaic technique, not borrowing.

[41]Harvey Eagleson, "Costume in the Middle English Metrical Romances," _PMLA_, 47 (1932), 345.

[42]Finlayson, "_Morte Arthure_: The Date," 625-6.

[43]R. W. Ackerman, "Armor and Weapons in the Middle English Romances," _Research Studies, State College of Washington_, 7 (1939), 111.

[44]John Finlayson, ed., _Morte Arthure_ (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), p. 33.

[45]Finlayson, "_Morte Arthure_: The Date," 635.

[46]Finlayson, "_Morte Arthure_: The Date," 637. A. H. Inman, "'Morte Arthure' and Hucheon," _The Athenaeum_ (Sept. 1916), 423, and "'Morte Arthure,'" _The Athenaeum_ (Dec. 1916), 608, assembles a series of possible allusions, indicating "that the extant 'Morte Arthure' is not earlier than the last quarter of the fourteenth century, and that it perhaps belongs to the early fifteenth century" (423). His identifications are more reasonably argued than Neilson's, but still not compelling.

[47]P. Branscheid, "Verschiedenes über die Quellen des

Stabreimenden Morte Arthure," _Anglia_ (_Anzeiger_), 8 (1885),
221.

[48]See especially 210-1 of Branscheid's study.

[49]Rudolf Imelmann, _Laȝamon: Versuch über seine Quellen_
(Berlin: Weidmann, 1906), p. 97. In discussing the _Morte_
Arthure, Imelmann relates the dream of fortune to _La Mort_
le Roi Artu:

> Der Traum in MA ist nun offenbar nur die Ausführung
> der Episode im Lancelot; L [Layamon] aber weist
> durch sein Zusammengehen mit dem Lancelot auf
> Herkunft aus dessen Quelle oder vielmehr auf eine
> Wace-Version, auf die der Lancelot gewirkt hatte
> (p. 57).

With the term "Lancelot" Imelmann is referring to the three
romances--_Lancelot_, _La Queste del Saint Graal_, and _La Mort_
le Roi Artu--which are known by the general title, the Prose
Lancelot.

[50]J. S. P. Tatlock, _The Legendary History of Britain_
(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), pp. 477-8.

[51]Tatlock, p. 482.

[52]Tania Vorontzoff, "Malory's Story of Arthur's Roman
Campaign," _MAE_, 6 (1937), 99-121.

[53]Ivor O. D. Arnold, "Malory's Story of Arthur's Roman
Campaign," _MAE_, 7 (1938), 75.

[54]O'Loughlin, "The English Alliterative Romances," _ALMA_,
p. 523, n. 1.

[55]Finlayson, ed., <u>Morte Arthure</u>, p. 32.

[56]Matthews, p. 4.

[57]Matthews, pp. 32-33. The possibility that the dream of fortune in the <u>Morte Arthure</u> may have been inspired by the dream in <u>La Mort Artu</u> has often been noted, from Imelmann, p. 57, to O'Loughlin, "The English Alliterative Romances," <u>ALMA</u>, p. 524. In this regard we might consider the following comment by Jean Frappier, "The Vulgate Cycle," <u>ALMA</u>, p. 311: "The vision of Fortune and her wheel which precedes the battle of Salisbury and presages Arthur's downfall [in <u>La Mort Artu</u>] is a conventional motif, adopted also by the <u>Suite du Merlin</u> (<u>Huth Merlin</u>) and the Alliterative <u>Morte Arthure</u>."

[58]See, for example, James Douglas Bruce, "The Development of the Mort Arthur Theme in Medieval Romance," <u>Rom Rev</u>, 4 (1913), 408-47. W. H. Schofield, <u>English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer</u> (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1906), p. 253, has observed that the <u>Morte Arthure</u> poet "utilised also material from developed romance. Lancelot and Ywain, for example, figure prominently in the story, by name at least, though they bear faint likeness to their portraits in French." In words that echo Schofield's, Matthews, p. 32, argues, "The prominence of Lancelot and Iwain in the first half of the poem leaves no doubt of the poet's familiarity with romances that stemmed from the work of Chrétien de Troyes."

[59]Matthews, p. 181. Perhaps it is not entirely superfluous to point to Otto Jespersen's table of comparative chronology which indicates the extraordinary number of French words entering the English language in the fourteenth century, especially the second half. See Growth and Structure of the English Language, 9th ed. (1948; rpt. Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1955), p. 96.

[60]Matthews, pp. 211-2.

[61]Matthews, p. 212.

[62]Within parentheses are the main entry words from the MED. buscayle, 895 (bushaille); chullede, 1444 (chullen); counge, 479 (conge); crauaunde, 133 (cravant); cretoyne, 197 (cretone); cury, 1063 (curie); endordide, 199 (endoren); engendure, 3743 (engendure, engendrure); fawnell, 2765 (fauvel); fferaunt, 1811 (ferra[u]nt); ferrers, 2714 (actually part of a compound word, barel-fere); fresone, 1365 (Frisoun); hostaye, 555 (hosteien); karfuke, 2003 (carfouk).

[63]Matthews, p. 39. In his analysis, pp. 35-67, Matthews find resemblances between the Morte Arthure and the Secreta Secretorum, the Scottish Buik of Alexander, and such English works as The Wars of Alexander, the Prose Alexander, and Kyng Alisaunder. He avoids stating whether he thinks the poet had "first hand knowledge" of these works. Of course, knowledge of the English works would be somewhat difficult to reconcile with his theory of a lost French original.

[64]Matthews, p. 66.

[65]Neilson, 'Huchown', pp. 44-7, suggested Les Voeux was a source. He argued, "In the Brut there is no machinery of 'avows' made either by Arthur or his knights; no mention of any particular form of surrender or submission by the rebellious vassal or vanquished enemy; no mention of any ceremonial by way of amends to satiate the blood-feud or avert future hostility; no mention of the Nine Worthies. All these features occur in the Voeux du Paon, and are transferred to and made part of the framework of Morte Arthure" (pp. 45-6). See also M. M. Banks, "Notes on the 'Morte Arthure' Glossary," MLQ (London), 6 (1903), 69; R. L. Graeme Ritchie, ed., Introduction to The Buik of Alexander, Vol. 1, Scottish Text Society, n. s., 17 (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1925), p. 1, n. 5; and O'Loughlin, "The English Alliterative Romances," ALMA, p. 253.

[66]J. S. P. Tatlock, The Legendary History of Britain, p. 320. That men of the later Middle Ages thought of Alexander and Arthur in the same terms is obvious from such evidence as this casual statement in which the author of Sir Launfal describes the jewelled eyes of Triamour's eagle: "Alisaundre the conqueroure/ Ne King Artoure in his most honour/ Ne hadde non swich juell!" See Sir Launfal in Middle English Verse Romances, ed. Donald B. Sands (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 211.

[67]Matthews, p. 34.

[68]R. H. Griffith, "Malory, Morte Arthure, and Fierabras," _Anglia_, 32 (1909), 388-98.

[69]Laura Hibbard Loomis, "The Athelstan Gift Story: Its Influence on English Chronicles and Carolingian Romances," _PMLA_, 67 (1952), 535-7.

[70]Finlayson, ed., _Morte Arthure_, p. 32, n. 34.

Chapter 2

The Heroic Image

Traditionally, many readers of the <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u> have called it a romance, even though that term does not provide an altogether adequate description for this poem, which is "undeniably epic in its breadth and heroic scale."[1] Thus, George Kane observes of the poem, "Above all it is heroic, not romantic, and comes in its richness of treatment, its high seriousness and dignity, its stately splendour of colour and imagery and its concept of its subject nearer to the epic level than any of the other romances."[2] Certainly the <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u> differs sharply in its scope and interests from most of the other medieval English works we collect under the romance label, and this fact has made some readers uneasy enough to classify it otherwise. J. P. Oakden, for example, with apologies for his "strange and inapt" term, calls it a "chronicle in the epic manner" because he considers it "more seriously historical in outlook than the usual Arthurian Romance [and] much more epic in quality than a mediaeval romance can ever be."[3]

Those who emphasize the epic qualities of the <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u> often note that, as Larry Benson observes, "the poem seems in many ways closer to Old English heroic verse than to romantic tales of Arthur by writers such as the author of the stanzaic <u>Mort</u> <u>Arthure</u> [sic]."[4] The usual

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arguments for this association are presented most effectively
by Benson:

> In the alliterative <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u>, . . . as in the
> older heroic poetry, the principal concerns are
> feasting and fighting, the tone is serious,
> relieved by occasional touches of grimly ironic
> humor, . . . and the outcome is a defeat. Before
> each battle Arthur's knights boast of the deeds
> they will do in vows that seem to echo the <u>beots</u>
> of Old English warriors, and their relation to
> their leader is similar to that of the Anglo-Saxon
> <u>comitatus</u>. . . .
> Furthermore, Arthur's motives are those of an
> Anglo-Saxon hero—conquest, revenge, generosity
> to his friends, and implacable hatred to his foes.[5]

In the absence of positive evidence relating Old English
heroic poetry and the Middle English alliterative romances,
all we can conclude about these similarities is that they
indicate the extent to which the sentiments of the poem are
heroic.

A more pertinent consideration is that of Dorothy
Everett and John Finlayson, who compare the <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u>
to the Old French <u>chanson</u> <u>de</u> <u>geste</u> which, unlike Old English
heroic poetry, has had a clearly demonstrable relation to
the Middle English romance. Everett, who insists that the
<u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u> is a romance, allows that it "comes very near
to claiming a place among heroic poems in English."[6]
Finlayson believes that the <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u> is much closer to
the <u>chanson</u> <u>de</u> <u>geste</u> than to the romance and argues with
considerable force that the poem "bears a great similarity in
subject matter, attitude and structure to the <u>chansons</u> <u>de</u>
<u>geste</u> of the Charlemagne cycle."[7] In support of this argu-

ment, he offers the following:

> This cycle is concerned with nationalism, the glories of war, with warrior-heroes and a warrior king, and in addition to all this has a strong religious tone. In all of these areas the alliterative poem parallels the Chanson de Roland. That the prime subject of Morte Arthure is war and the glories of war will be obvious enough from the narrative progression, from the zest of the battle descriptions (as well as from their multiplicity) and the enthusiasm of the knights when war is first mooted. In keeping with the serious purpose of the chanson de geste, our author is at pains to point out the justice of Arthur as a pious king, a champion of Christianity.[8]

Whether we accept Finlayson's idea that the Morte Arthure is a chanson de geste or agree with Everett that "the distinction in form between chanson de geste and romance has no relevance for English criticism,"[9] we must admit the force of Finlayson's arguments. For example, we cannot easily dismiss his contention that in the Morte Arthure, as in the chanson de geste, the poet is concerned with ideals involving the group or nation, rather than with the more private ideals of chivalry as in the romance.[10] At the least, Finlayson's observations on the similarity of the Morte Arthure and the chanson de geste have brought the so-called epic or heroic qualities of the poem into sharper focus than the remarks of earlier critics had.

Though final conclusions about the genre of the Morte Arthure are beyond the scope of the present study, we shall want to explore further the development of the heroic tone of the poem and, more particularly, the development of the heroic image of Arthur in the poem. To do so, we shall now

begin with a close analysis of the first 720 lines of the
Morte Arthure, which serve primarily to introduce the main
characters and establish the conflict that motivates most of
the action of the poem. In this analysis, we shall concen-
trate our attention on the poet's handling of the narrative
line he probably found in his chronicle source, which was
itself probably related to the older forms of heroic poetry.[11]
Our main objective is to examine how he enriched and adapted
the chronicle narrative, often with conventions current in
his time, to create a portrait of Arthur as an heroic figure
which is similar in its general outlines to the chronicle
portrait, but still a great deal more complex and subtle in
its details.

The poet's only extended analytic comment on the subject
of his story appears in the prologue to the Morte Arthure.
Though "extremely conventional in diction"[12] and thought,
this prologue deserves our attention, for in it the poet does
give a reasonably detailed statement of his intention. The
prayer (1-11) with which the prologue begins is not simply
an appeal for eternal salvation for all present (as most such
prayers are); rather, it is an appeal for the "grace to gye,
and gouerne vs here,/ In this wrechyde werlde" (4-5) so that
we may come to eternal salvation "thorowe vertous lywynge" (5).
In this prayer the poet observes the contrast between "this
wrechyde werlde" and the "blysse" (8) of abiding with God in
"hys courte, the kyngdome of hevyne" (6). The latter image,

to be sure, is conventional; nonetheless, it implies an attitude. Appropriately enough, the poet's God is the majestic figure of the later or high middle ages, created in the image of the imperial figures of this period.[13] The image and the contrast serve to remind us that what we see of glory in this world or in this poem is imperfect and but a shadow of what exists in the heavenly court.

With the last three lines of his prayer, the poet shifts from the general to the specific matter at hand:

> And wysse me to werpe owte some worde at this tyme,
> That nothyre voyde be ne vayne, but wyrchip tille
> hyme selvyne,
> Plesande and profitabille to the popule that theme
> heres.
>
> (9-11.)

The phrase "Plesande and profitabille," like Chaucer's "best sentence and moost solaas," clearly reminds us of the Horatian standards of delight and instruction. In this explicitly religious context, "profitabille" means instruction that will be conducive to salvation and, thus, suggests an avowed didactic purpose.

In the second half of his prologue, the Morte Arthure poet defines his subject with the same movement from general to specific that we observed in the prayer. He tells his audience he will speak "Off elders of alde tyme and of theire awke dedys,/ How they were lele in theire lawe, and louede God Almyghty" (13-4). Specifically, he will tell of the doughty deeds of the knights of the Round Table. More specifically, he will tell "How they whanne wyth were

wyrchippis many" (22) and conquered the kingdom of Rome. The movement is simple, clear, and direct as the poet draws his listeners into his subject. The passage would seem to require little further comment, except to say that in these lines the poet expresses unreserved respect for the knights of the Round Table and their doings. William Matthews, however, has argued that the words awke in line 13 "apparently contradicts the line that follows" and that "the effect of 'awke' in this crucial position could only have been to impose some measure of ambiguity upon all the splendor and heroic victories that follow."[14] Matthews' support for this contention is his reading (following Brock) of awke as "perverse or untoward,"[15] rather than "strange or unusual," as later editors and the Middle English Dictionary gloss it. Admittedly, the MED provides only the Morte Arthure usage in the latter sense, while it provides several other occurrences in which the word has unfavorable connotations; nevertheless, one word does seem a very slight basis for constructing such a theory. What the poet is probably suggesting with awke, which he uses partly because the other stress words in the line are elders and alde, is that his tale rises beyond the common or ordinary and is therefore worthy of his listeners' attention.

His prologue completed, the Morte Arthure poet turns to his story. His first object is establishing the background against which his characters will move. First, he tells us

that at this time Arthur is lord of much of western Europe--
from Greece to Vienna to Scotland, from Iceland to Germany
to Spain. The poet recounts the extent of Arthur's conquests
in a lengthy catalogue which undoubtedly was inspired by a
similar list in which the chronicle source enumerates the
kings and nobles attending Arthur's coronation.[16] Interest-
ingly, the poet encloses the catalog in the first of three
parallel subordinate clauses of a very long and elaborate
periodic sentence, beginning _Qwene_ _that_ and establishing in
a general way the temporal setting of the forthcoming action.
Whether we regard him successful or not, we must admit that
the _Morte_ _Arthure_ poet, like Chaucer, was aware of the
periodic sentence structure as a sophisticated stylistic
device that carries a reader into a work.[17] Both the content
and this elaborate rhetorical structure point in the same
direction: the poet is conscientiously attempting to over-
whelm the reader with the magnificence of Arthur.

With the independent clause of the periodic sentence,
the poet establishes the specific temporal and spatial locale
of the scene--Christmas festivities at Carlisle, over which
Arthur presides.

> Whas neuer syche noblay, in no manys tyme,
> Mad in mydwynter in tha weste marches!
>
> (76-7.)

With an attentiveness to realistic effect that we shall come
to recognize as customary, the poet tells us about those in
attendance at Arthur's court:

> Dukez and dusperes of dyuers rewmes,
> Erles and ercheuesqes, and other ynowe,
> Byschopes and bachelers, and banerettes nobille,
> That bowes to his banere, buske whene hym lykys.
> (66-9.)

As Marie Borroff observes, "the _dukez_ . . . and so on are different groups, and the number and importance of these groups serve to demonstrate in a logical way the _noblay_, over which the narrator exclaims."[18]

The first important event in the _Morte Arthure_ occurs on New Year's Day, "the traditional high holiday of the Round Table in English romance,"[19] while Arthur and his company are still celebrating ten days of festivities after Christmas. "At the none euyne,/ As the bolde at borde was of brede seruyde" (78-9), there enters suddenly an ambassadorial mission from the emperor of Rome. The senator at its head delivers a message from the emperor Lucius, demanding that Arthur and his entire Round Table appear before him and the Senate "on Lammesse daye" (92) to explain "why thow ocupyes the landez,/ That awe homage of alde tille hym and his eldyrs" (98-9). This abrupt entrance of the ambassadors, as John Finlayson remarks, "has almost as disruptive an effect as the entry of the Green Knight into Arthur's court in _Sir Gawain_ and, as in the latter poem, dramatically reveals the nature of the forthcoming action."[20]

Except for the fact that in the chronicles the mission arrives during festivities following Arthur's coronation, the general outline of the ambassadors' entrance in the _Morte Arthure_ is virtually the same as in the sources. There are, however, a few differences in detail which reflect a con-

scious attempt to achieve a particular artistic effect. To
understand this attempt, let us recall the entry of the
mission in Wace's Brut:

> Es vus duze humes blancs, chanuz,
> Bien afublez e bien vestuz;
> Dui e dui en la sale vindrent
> E dui e dui as mains se tindrent;
> Duz esteient, e duze rains
> D'olive tindrent en lur mains.
> Petit pas, ordeneement,
> Mult bel e mult avenantment
> Par mi la sale trespasserent,
> Al rei vindrent sil saluerent;
> De Rome, ço distrent, veneient
> E messagier de Rome esteient.
>
> (10623-34)

Gone in the Morte Arthure is the physical description of the
ambassadors and with it the sense of solemnity it conveys
with its mention of the hoary heads, the "dui e dui" proces-
sion, and the olive branches. Most important perhaps, the
"duze humes" have become "a senatour of Rome,/ Wyth sextene
knyghtes in a soyte, sewande hym one" (80-1), thus elimina-
ting a number fraught with numerological significance. In
short, without sacrificing its ceremonial quality, the poet
has essentially neutralized the entrance scene and has done
away with the possibility of sympathy for a stately pro-
cession of hoary elders.

The message delivered by the senator, a letter in Wace,
has more directness and less solemnity in its contempt than
in the French version. Matthews remarks, "It is as a
challenge to a rival emperor that Lucius sends this ultima-
tum, claiming under threats of revenge continued payment of
the tribute that had been paid by Arthur's forbears."[21] We

who have just heard the splendid catalog of his conquests
might well agree that Lucius should address Arthur as a
rival emperor. In truth however, he does not. Whereas in
the French poem Lucius addresses his letter to "rei Artur,
sun enemi" (10642), in the MA Lucius greets the British king
through his ambassador "as sugett" (87).[22] Emphatically, this
Lucius regards Arthur not as a rival emperor, but as an un-
ruly subject who has overstepped his limits. The insulting
tone of the message as a whole is in keeping with this view
of Arthur. In the French poem Lucius, for some fifty lines
of elegant rhetoric, marvels and disdains the temerity of
Arthur with splendid indignation and explains with care his
case against Arthur before demanding "Que tu seies en mi
agust/ A Rome, . . . que qu'il te cust" (10691-2). By
contrast, in the English poem the summons to appear in Rome
is the first order of business, after which comes a brief
statement (98-103) of Lucius' case against Arthur.

Finally, both the message in the Morte Arthure and the
letter in Wace conclude with threats of military action
against Arthur if he fails to obey the summons and with an
explicit imputation of cowardice to Arthur. The differences
are again worth noting. Wace's Lucius threatens to bring
troops across the Alps and seize Britain and France. More-
over, he proclaims,

> Ja de ça mer, al mien espeir,
> Ne t'oseras faire veeir
> E si tu ultre mer esteies

> Ja ma venue n'atendreies.
> Ne savras en nul liu tapir
> Dunt jo ne te face saillir;
> Lied a Rome te merrai
> E al sené te liverrai.
>
> <div align="right">(10703-10.)</div>

The threat in the <u>Morte Arthure</u> is much more vivid and compelling; consequently, it is much more insulting to Arthur. According to the senator,

> He [Lucius] salle the seke ouer the see wyth
>   sextene kynges,
> Bryne Bretayne the brade, and bryttyne thy
>   knyghtys,
> And brynge the bouxsomly as a beste with brethe
>   whare hym lykes,
> That thow ne schalle rowte ne ryste vndyr the
>   heune ryche,
> Thofe thow for reddour of Rome ryne to the erthe!
> ffor if thow flee in-to Fraunce or ffreselannd
>   owther,
> Thou salle be fechede with force, and ouersette
>   fore euer!
>
> <div align="right">(105-11.)</div>

What we might describe as a rather civilized contempt and indignation in Wace's Lucius gives way to an almost virulent anger in the <u>Morte Arthure's</u> Lucius who twice, through his emissary, suggests that Arthur is "trouflynge" (89, 114).

In the <u>Morte Arthure</u> these demands and insults initiate a series of events in which the poet has reshaped the chronicle materials extensively to achieve an entirely new purpose. According to Wace, those assembled in Arthur's court, having heard Lucius' letter, raise a "grant bruit" (10711) and menace the ambassadors until Arthur calms them with a reminder that ambassadors are not responsible for the message they carry. The poet of the <u>Morte Arthure</u> shifts

the anger from the assembly to Arthur himself who, as a
result, becomes a more dynamic figure than Wace's reserved
and dignified Arthur. Moreover, with his imposing picture
of the angry Arthur, the first physical description of the
British king, the Morte Arthure poet successfully reinforces
the impression of Arthur's conquests and his court:

> The kynge blyschit one the beryne with his brode
>   eghne,
> That fulle brymly for breth brynte as the gledys;
> Keste colours as kynge with crouelle lates,
> Luked as a lyone, and on his lyppe bytes!
>   (116-9.)

As well as shifting the anger to Arthur, the Morte
Arthure poet creates a highly charged scene as the Romans
fall to the ground and cower before the British king. In
his description of the frightened ambassadors, the poet
exploits the powerful irony of the scene:

> The Romaynes for radnesse ruschte to the erthe,
> ffore ferdnesse of hys face, as they fey were;
> Cowchide as kenetez be-fore the kynge seluyne,
> Be-cause of his contenaunce confusede theme semede!
>   (120-3.)

These lines of course echo the threats and insults in the
message from Lucius. The image of the Romans as "kenetez"
recalls Lucius' threat to bring Arthur "bouxsomly as a
beste." And in line 120, "The Romaynes for radnesse ruschte
to the erthe," the poet is working a variation of the formula
used in the charge of cowardice laid against Arthur in line
109, "Thofe thow for reddour of Rome ryne to the erthe."
Because the poet presented a thoroughly neutral description

of the ambassadors' entry, we need feel no sympathy for their
indignity in this scene; instead we can indulge ourselves in
the stark, grim humor that emerges as a consequence of the
irony.

Because of the arrogant and insulting tone of the
emperor's message, Arthur has ample motivation for his anger.
Yet there remain the questions of whether his emotional re-
action is excessive and whether he should even reveal his
emotions. William Matthews argues that the message from
Rome "inspires . . . Arthur to emotions that are somewhat
less than justifiable in the medieval view of war."[23] More-
over, we commonly expect of heroes and leaders a certain
capacity for restraining their emotions, as Wace's Arthur
does. Werner Habicht, in his discussion of this scene and
its effect on what he calls Arthur's heroic pose, provides
a most convincing explanation for Arthur's behavior in this
scene and for the importance of the scene in the work as a
whole. As he observes, a show of emotion by a heroic figure
is permissable if its ultimate end is the strengthening of
his heroic pose. In this case, Arthur's fearsome countenance
achieves that end successfully and also becomes a leitmotif
through the rest of the poem.

> [D]ie Affektgebärden werden nachtraglich moralisch
> entschuldigt, nachdem sie zuvor den Zweck erfüllt
> haben, das Sinnenfällige der heroischen Pose zu
> verstärken. Denn diese heroische Pose, in der
> Arthur am Anfang der Dichtung gleich so gewaltig
> auftritt, wie auch die im Zusammenhang damit
> unfänglich geschilderte Repräsentation, wirkt die
> ganze Dichtung hindurch fort; sie ist die
> "contenaunce" Arthurs und taucht gleich einem

Leitmotiv an den Kernstellen immer wieder auf.[24]
Habicht's explanation is based on the idea that what we see
in this scene is a convention of the romances, which is
calculated to impress their audience with the strength of the
hero. "In den Romanzen wird auch die Reaktionspose
körperlich mehr veranschaulicht; wir hören von funkelnden
Blicken, ja sogar vom Wegstossen der Tische und dgl. Im
eingeschüchterten Gebären der Boten selbst spiegelt sich
die Wirkung solcher Machtdemonstration."[25] In the Laud
Troy Book, for example, Antenor, serving as messenger to the
Greeks, receives four threats against his life within 200
lines. One of these threats comes from Nestor whose reaction
and the fear it inspires remind us of the scene in the Morte
Arthure:

> Duk Nestor was ful of wratthe and ire
> Toward Antenor, that proudely sire,
> That for tene chaunged alle his hewe:
> He wex ʒolow, bloo, and blewe.
> Antenor sees his colour meued,
> That he come there ful sore him rewed;
> He hoped neuere thenne to wende
> With-outen deth and schamely ende.[26]

Froissart's Chronicles indicate that such treatment of
ambassadors was not merely a convention of the romances.
Froissart describes at some length the treatment of ambas-
sadors sent by Charles V to summon the Black Prince to appear
in Paris and answer charges brought by his Gascon subjects.
In several specific details this description corresponds
closely to the scene in the Morte Arthure. (Excerpts from
Froissart's description appear in Appendix A at the end of

this study.) For example, like Arthur, the Black Prince changes color, though the prince reacts before hearing the ambassador's message. Both Froissart and the Morte Arthure call attention to the eye reaction of the royal figure. Perceiving the Black Prince's anger, the French ambassadors fall to their knees before him--a response similar to, though less exaggerated than that of the Romans. Finally, like the Romans, the Frenchmen beg the prince not to direct his anger at them, who are merely obedient servants of their lord. These striking similarities are not so compelling that we are led to argue for the influence of one work on the other. More likely, they suggest that Froissart and the Morte Arthure poet are probably borrowing from the same common stock of descriptive details. From our comparison of these passages we can also conclude that Arthur's reaction is exactly what we should expect from a king in his circumstances in the fourteenth century.

In this reshaping of the messenger scene, the Morte Arthure poet makes his intention completely clear when he has the frightened senator tell Arthur, "Thow arte the lordlyeste lede that euer I one lukyede;/ By lukynge, with-owttyne lesse, a lyone the semys!" (138-9). Then the poet adds further dimensions to this "lordlyeste lede" by his inclusion of the feast for the ambassadors, with its splendid catalog of elegant and dainty delectables.

[T]he list of dishes . . . impresses by its

> plenitude and the exotic nature of some of the
> food . . . . The richness of the detail dramatical-
> ly conveys Arthur's power at a very early stage in
> the poem. This description, like most others in
> <u>Morte Arthure</u>, is affective in function; it both
> provides a local centre of interest for the audi-
> ence of an intensely visual nature and, at the
> same time, contributes to the total structure of
> the poem by adding to our already growing sense of
> the wealth, power and civilization which Arthur
> represents.[27]

The poet emphasizes his intention when he has Arthur apologize

to the senator for "syche feble as ʒe be-fore fynde" (226);

of course, as we can see from his consistent use of the

polite ʒow, Arthur's tone is mock-modesty. Obviously, we

are supposed to smile when the timorous senator replies,

> There ryngnede neuer syche realtee with-in Rome
>   walles!
> There ne es prelatte, ne pape, ne prynce in this
>   erthe,
> That he ne myghte be wele payede of thees pryce
>   metes!
>
> (228-30.)

At the close of this splendid feast, Arthur and his men

withdraw to "the geauntes toure" (245) to take counsel. Once

again the poet takes great liberties with the chronicle

account. The council meeting begins with Cador's laughing

speech on the merits of warfare, virtually the same in sub-

stance and spirit as his corresponding speech in the

chronicles, though here Cador delivers the speech in the

meeting, rather than on the way to the tower. Gawain's

response to Cador, extolling the virtues of peace, has dis-

appeared. In its place is a response from Arthur who tells

Cador, "thow countez no caas, ne castes no forthire,/ Bot

hurles furthe appone heuede, as thi herte thynkes" (261-2).
This statement seems to be an affectionate chiding of Cador.
With it the poet establishes a contrast between Cador, who
wants war, whatever its causes, and Arthur, who insists that
he must explore the case thoroughly before coming to a
decision about Lucius' ultimatum.[28]

In the rest of this statement, Arthur stresses the
insulting nature of the messenger's speech and his "title
to take tribute of Rome" (275) because of his ancestors who
became emperors of Rome. Arthur's speech derives from a
similar one in the chronicles, which the poet has reworked
to suit his own ends. As John Finlayson concludes,

> Wace, . . . while obviously supporting his hero,
> leaves some doubt as to whether Arthur or Lucius is
> in the right. . . . In Wace there is some conces-
> sion of justice to Lucius in Arthur's comment,
> "Avoir le doivent, ce nos mandent" [10820] . . .
> whereas Morte Arthure concedes no suggestion of
> justice (either moral or political) to Lucius.[29]

As in his version of Lucius' message, the poet shows that his
main concern is directness, and not the niceties of law,
politics, or rhetoric. Arthur's speech is not a debate, on
an abstract level, on the justice or injustice of war. It is
a statement offering in its least complicated sense a legal
basis (or pseudo-legal, of you will) for rejecting Lucius'
summons. While it is not explicitly a proclamation of war, it
does set the tone for the other speakers at the council, all
of whom urge war.

Following Arthur's speech, we hear from "kyng Aungers"

(288), "the burelyche beryne of Bretayne the lyttyle" (304),
and "the Walsche kynge" (320). The first of these speeches
derives from that of King Angusel, king of Scotland, in the
chronicles. This speech and its chronicle antecedents stress
the idea of vengeance for previous wrongs done by the Romans,
but the Morte Arthure poet makes the reasons for vengeance
more concrete. While Angusel speaks simply of avenging his
ancestors who were forced to pay tribute to the Romans,
Aungers vows to avenge specific atrocities committed against
the Scotch:

> Whene the Romaynes regnede, thay raunsounde oure
>   eldyrs,
> And rade in theire ryotte, and rauyschett our
>   wyfes,
> With-owttyne resone or ryghte refte vs oure gudes.
>   (293-5.)

Despite this usual tendency toward concreteness, the poet
makes the speech of "the burelyche beryne of Bretayne the
lyttyle" much more vague than that of Hoel of Armorica in
the Chronicle. However, his unspecific vow to show no fear
before the Romans in the Morte Arthure does avoid the
political implications of Hoel's report of the sibylline
prophecy:

> Trei Bretun de Bretaine eistreient
> Ki Rome a force conquerreient.
> Dui de cels sunt ja trespassé
> Ki de Rome unt seinur esté:
> Li premiers de cels fu Belin
> E li secunz fu Costentin;
> Tu iés li tiers ki Rome avras
> E Rome a force conquerras;
> En tei sera la prophecie
> Que Sibille dist acomplie.
>   (10929-38.)

With the third speech in this series, for which the chronicles
offer no precedent whatever, the poet returns to his usual
concreteness. In this speech the Welsh king vows to avenge
Roman mistreatment of his people and to vanquish "the
Vicounte of Rome" (325) at whose hands he suffered a personal
affront "As I paste in pylgremage by the Pounte Tremble"
(327).

After this series of speeches, "Sire Ewane fytz Vryenne"
(337) turns to Arthur and expresses the wish of the council:
"we wyste ȝour wylle, we walde wirke theraftyre" (339). In
reply Arthur vows to lead an army to the continent and
"plaunte . . . my segge" at Rome "Bot if thay profre me the
pece be processe of tyme" (355-6). In succession, Ewain,
Lancelot, and Loth follow Arthur with vows of their own.
Ewain swears to "ryfe . . . in sondyre"(362) the imperial
eagle on the banner of Lucius "That occupies thine [Arthur's]
heritage, the empyere of Rome" (359). Lancelot, modestly
asserting his own unimportance, proclaims his readiness "to
juste with [the emperor] hym selfene" (374). Loth, accusing
Lucius of willing the war, vows to "Ryde thrughte alle the
rowtte" (390) of the Romans, "Redy wayes to make, and renkkes
full rowme,/ Rynnande on rede blode" (391-2). The meeting
then concludes with Arthur's statement, highly ironic if we
think of the ending of the poem:

> Alweldande Gode wyrchipe ȝow alle!
> And latte me neuere wanntte ȝow, whylls I in
>   werlde regne;
> . . . .

> I acounte no kynge that vndyr Criste lyffes,
> Whilles I see ȝowe alle sounde, I sette be no more.
> (397-8, 405-6.)

Most of this council scene, from the speech of the
Welsh king to the end, would seem to be the invention of the
Morte Arthure poet, since the chronicle accounts provide no
precedent. The dramatic series of vows is of course remi-
niscent of the importance of such vowings as we find in
many of the English Arthurian romances, including _The Avowing
of King Arthur_, _King Arthur and King Cornwall_, and _Sir Gawain
and the Green Knight_. As George Neilson points out, "Chivalry
from the 13th to the 15th century laid great store by vows,
often of extravagant valour, made on choice or royal dishes
at great festivals--vows on the Swan, the Peacock, the
Pheasant, or the Heron."[30] Perhaps, as several scholars
(including Neilson) have suggested, the _Morte Arthure_ poet
drew his inspiration from a scene in _Les Voeux du Paon_ in
which the knights of Epheson and their Indian captives make
a series of vows on a roasted peacock, as was the custom in
that land:

> C'on doit faire au paön l'usage du paÿs:
> Chascuns y doit voër son bon et son avis.[31]

Only in a very general way does the _Morte Arthure_ resemble
the French Alexander poem: "The structure of feast, vows,
fulfillment, and the setting of a battle with an emperor who
is making a tyrannous claim to sovereignty is the same in
both poems."[32] The only detail the scene in _Morte Arthure_
shares with the corresponding scene in _Les Voeux du Paon_ is

a similarity between the vow of Ewain and that of the younger

Gadifer, who swears:

> Non pourquant, de voër sui tous apparelliés,
> Et je veu et promec et voel que vous sachies,
> Qu'a l'estandart Clarvus ert mon frain adreciés,
> La grant hache trenchant en ma main d'acier viés,
> Maugré les Yndiens et leur acompaingniés,
> Sera il de par moi abatus et trenchiés
> Tant con li fanons ert a terre trebusciés![33]

As we can readily see, the parallel is at best very general

and lacks force, even if we ignore the fact that the practice

of striking down the enemy's standard is undoubtedly as old

as organized warfare. We may then conclude that if the poet

did derive his ideas for the council from Les Voeux du Paon,

he took nothing more than a general pattern from the French

work. By no means would it appear he is trying to summon up

memories of Alexander to establish the portrait of a partic-

ularly Alexandrian Arthur, as Matthews would have us believe.

Wherever he found his inspiration, the Morte Arthure poet

uses the scene effectively to enhance the portrait of Arthur.

At the beginning of the meeting, as we said above, Arthur

forcefully puts forward his argument for rejecting Lucius'

summons, thus setting the tone for the council. Yet he does

not commit himself to war until he has had some indication

of the temper of his men. Clearly, Arthur is a strong king

who wisely knows that the source of his strength is a united

and enthusiastic company of brave and valorous men, as his

closing speech shows.[34] The reaction of his men at the

council indicates their devotion to Arthur, which further

enhances his portrait. Moreover, what they say about the injuries done in the past by the Romans and about the present emperor combine "to impart the impression of the justice of Arthur's cause. . . . Thus, what had been in the chronicler merely the prelude to a struggle between two powers seeking world domination becomes a struggle of right against tyranny, with Arthur already emerging as a symbol of Right and Justice."[35]

After the council Wace's Arthur gives notice of his intentions to the ambassadors at once and dispatches them to Rome. In the Morte Arthure seven days pass, "whene the purpos was takyne/ Of peris of the parlement, prelates and other" (415-6). Arthur then informs the Roman senator of his intention of resisting Lucius' demands, and he gives the senator and his entourage instructions for their departure from Britain. They must proceed via "Watlyng-strette" (450) to Sandwich, where they shall arrive within seven days, travelling sixty miles a day. If these instructions seem severe, the penalty for disobeying them is even more severe:

> ffor be thow foundene a fute with-owte the flode
> merkes,
> Aftyr the aughtende day, whene vndroune es rungene,
> Thou salle be heuedede in hye, and with horsse
> drawene,
> And seyne hely be hangede, houndes to gnawene!
> (461-4.)

The evidence presented above from the Laud Troy Book and Froissart indicates that Arthur's treatment of the ambassadors, while extremely stern, is not necessarily unusual nor

unkingly by contemporary standards. An ambassador or
messenger with good news was received well and often re-
warded by his host. However, those who bore unhappy tidings
found they were not so well received (recall Antony's
messenger to Cleopatra). Froissart records more than one
instance in which an ambassador with ill tidings finds him-
self in grave personal danger or in prison.[36] Concerning
the particular treatment of the ambassadors in Morte Arthure,
Neilson has a most interesting explanation.

> The mode of departure laid down so stringently
> under pains and penalties is precisely that
> prescribed by old English law for the criminal
> who, having fled to sanctuary, was allowed to
> escape the gallows by adjuring [sic] the realm.
> Bracton . . . and Fleta . . . contain the regula-
> tions. The coroner assigned the port; the number
> of days' journeys was fixed; there was to be no
> delay; deviation from the direct road was prohib-
> ited; when the grith-man reached his port he must
> go on board ship at once. . . . If the sanctuary-
> man's ship was not in port waiting for him then
> he must wade into the sea as public evidence of his
> due arrival--a detail sufficiently brought in by
> the poeticalreference to the floodmark.[37]

Clearly, if Neilson is right, this treatment of the ambas-
sadors as outlaws is the ultimate expression of Arthur's
contempt for Lucius, whom they represent.

Continuing to expand material covered briefly in the
chronicles, the Morte Arthure poet describes at length the
return of the ambassadors to Rome and the senator's report
to Lucius of all that happened to him in Britain. This
report, as we might expect, reinforces the image of Arthur
that we have seen so far in the poem:

> The knyghtlyeste creatoure in Cristyndome haldene,
> Of kynge or of conquerour, crownede in erthe,
> Of countenaunce, of corage, of crewelle lates,
> The comlyeste of knyghtehode that vndyre Cryste
>   lyffes!
>
> (534-7.)

The senator warns Lucius that Arthur intends to be "ouerlynge of the empyre of Rome" (520), and he urges Lucius to prepare forces to withstand Arthur. The emperor immediately announces a plan to lead forces into Germany and to set up watchtowers at the St. Bernard and St. Gotthard passes to prevent Arthur from crossing the Alps. He then sends letters to summon armies from Europe, Africa, and the Orient to assemble at once in Rome. Naturally, since a lopsided battle is not the stuff of good narrative, the poet provides Lucius with a formidable array of forces, described in another of the poem's many catalogs. Impressive though it is, this catalog contains several indications of the suspicious and unsavory character of Lucius' forces. First, there are the references to "Sowdanes and Sarezenes owt of sere landes" (607). Commonly in the medieval world, the term Saracens used in an unspecific sense, as it is here, is a general term referring to all infidels and enemies of Christendom.[38] More important than this reference are the lines describing "Sexty geauntes before, engenderide with fendez,/ With weches and warlaws to wacchene his tentys" (612-3). Clearly, his alliance with Saracens and creatures of diabolical nature (not suggested in the chronicles) eliminates any possibility of sympathy for

Lucius or his cause, whereas it greatly increases our
sympathy for Arthur and the justice of his cause.

While Lucius assembles his forces and marches into
Germany, Arthur directs his lords to gather their men, and
he sends "sergeantes of armes,/ To all hys mariners on rawe,
to areste hym schippys" (632-3) for a royal fleet. His last
official act before leaving Britain is to hold a parliament
at York, after which Arthur appoints Mordred his lieutenant
and charges his nephew with the care of his kingdoms during
his absence from Britain. Interestingly, the Morte Arthure
poet weaves this appointment into a powerfully poignant and
ironic scene, rather than treating it hastily as the chronicles
do. In his version, for example, Wace simply informs us,

> A Modret, un de ses nevuz,
> Chevalier merveillus e pruz,
> Livra en guarde Artur sun regne
> E a Ganhumare, sa feme.
>
> (11173-6.)

With no attempt to exploit the irony implicit in the situa-
tion, the French poet merely laments Mordred's love for the
queen (11177-89). In contrast, the Morte Arthure poet gives
us Arthur's speech to his council, in which he announces his
appointment of Mordred, and then his words to Mordred him-
self. What Arthur tells his nephew in the latter speech
humanizes him to an extent unprecedented in the chronicles.
First, he commits to Mordred's care both his empire and his
queen, as he does in the chronicles. Here, however, Arthur
very affectionately stresses his concern for Guenevere when,

for example, he orders "That nane werreye my wylde, botte
Waynour hir seluene" (657). Then granting Mordred full
freedom to appoint officeholders throughout his lands, Arthur
gives his nephew only one direction: "Luke thow justyfye
theme wele that injurye wyrkes." (663). Recalling the power-
ful outcry for the proper execution of justice in such works
as Piers Plowman, we can readily see that his expression of
concern is a clear indication of Arthur's own goodness and his
understanding of the proper role of the king. Next, Arthur
appoints Mordred "my sektour" (665); in the event of Arthur's
death, Mordred must "mynystre my mobles, fore mede of my
saule,/ To mendynantez and mysese in myschefe fallene" (666-
7). Ironically (for an audience familiar with the outcome of
the story), he cautions Mordred, "be-traye thowe me neuer!"
(669). In the rest of his speech, Arthur informs his nephew
that if he maintains his trust and governs well, "I salle
coroune the, knyghte, kyng with my handez" (678). Developing
the ironies even further, the poet then has Mordred kneel
before his uncle and ask that he choose another as lieutenant
in words with double meaning for the informed audience:

> ffor if ȝe putte me in this plytte, ȝowre pople es
>   dyssauyde;
> To presente a prynce astate my powere es symple.
> Whene other of werre wysse are wyrchipide here-
>   aftyre,
> Thane may I for-sothe be sette bott at lyttile.
>   (683-6.)

With his customary strength and firmness, Arthur refuses to
hear such arguments and, ironically, tells Mordred, "That

thow ne wyrk my wille, thow watte whatte it menes" (692).

Finally, before departing to take command of his forces
and his fleet at Sandwich, Arthur goes into a chamber to
take his leave of his queen in what is the most moving scene
so far in the poem. In two rather effective lines of verse,
the poet describes how Guenevere receives him:

> Waynour waykly wepande hym kyssiz,
> Talkez to hym tenderly with teres ynewe.
> (697-8.)

In her tearful and poignant speech Guenevere curses the man who
caused this war that denies her the company of her husband and
utters a desperate plea that she might die in Arthur's arms
"Are I this destanye of dule sulde drye by myne one" (704).
For the reader who knows that Guenevere's "destanye of dule"
will be other than what she may now anticipate, the irony is
immediately apparent. With a firmness that is not unbecoming,
Arthur gently assures her that all will turn out well and
takes his leave of Guenevere and the ladies of her chamber.
The poet concludes the scene with a final poignant detail as
Guenevere "swounes fulle swythe, whe[n] he hys swerde aschede"
(715).

In his study of the heroic concept in the _Morte Arthur_,
John Finlayson comments,

> Though much of the material of _Morte Arthure_ is
> heroic in nature, . . . there are innumerable small
> incidents and elements which soften the edges of
> the heroic picture and cast it in a more courtly
> light. This courtliness is expressed at times in
> generous gestures. . . . At other times it appears
> in the conception of a whole scene, such as Arthur's

leave-taking of the grief-stricken Guinevere.[35]
As we have seen, both this scene with Guenevere and the
preceding scene with Mordred "soften the edges of the heroic
picture" by suggesting human qualities in Arthur, unparallel-
ed in the chronicle antecedents of the Morte Arthure. One of
the few Arthurian works to keep Arthur continually in the
foreground, this poem is remarkable for making the British
king into more than a pasteboard figure who merely exhibits
those characteristics and performs those deeds appropriate
to the most uncomplicated heroic image. Finlayson rightly
observes that in the Morte Arthure "elements of all sorts are
handled in such a way as to give complexity to the character,
and at the same time the material is arranged and proportion-
ed so as to present the picture of a man of many traits, some
individual, some typical, none of which is inconsistent with
the guiding conception. He is warrior, leader and knight."[39]

Our comparison of this opening section of the Morte
Arthure with the chronicle story indicates how the poet
achieves what Finlayson calls his "guiding conception"--to be
more direct, his intention. With both rhetoric and realistic
detail, the poet attempts to overwhelm us with the splendor
and magnificence of Arthur's court. When he shows us Arthur
himself, the poet attempts to impress us with the personal
strength of the British king and, more important, the wisdom
with which Arthur uses his strength, especially in dealing
with his nobles and vassals. Only after he has taken pains

to convince us of Arthur's strength and wisdom and the justice
of his dispute with Rome does the poet introduce us to the
more human qualities of Arthur. Dramatically, the scenes
with Mordred and Guenevere come at a most appropriate moment,
when we might otherwise begin to look upon Arthur as just
another legendary hero of superhuman dimensions.

NOTES

[1]Helaine Newstead, "Arthurian Romances," in _A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500_, Vol. 1, ed. J. Burke Severs (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967), p. 45. (The general work is hereafter cited as _Manual_.)

[2]George Kane, _Middle English Literature: A Critical Study of the Romances, the Religious Lyrics, Piers Plowman_ (London: Methuen, 1951), pp. 69-70.

[3]J. P. Oakden, _Alliterative Poetry in Middle English: A Survey of the Traditions_ (1935; rpt. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon, 1968), pp. 24-5.

[4]Larry Benson, "The Alliterative _Morte Arthure_ and Medieval Tragedy," _TSL_, 11 (1966), 76. See also Roger Sherman Loomis, _The Development of Arthurian Romance_ (1963; rpt. New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), p. 150.

[5]Benson, "The Alliterative _Morte Arthure_," 76.
It is not exactly clear how much stock Benson puts in his arguments, for he concludes with this statement: "Yet the hero of our poem is not as anachronistic as the fact seems to imply, for the alliterative _Morte Arthure_ does not look back from romance to a more heroic age; it looks away from romance to medieval life itself" (p. 77).

[6]Dorothy Everett, _Essays_ _on_ _Middle_ _English_ _Literature_, ed. P. Kean (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 21.

[7]John Finlayson, ed., _Morte_ _Arthure_ (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), p. 11.

[8]Finlayson, ed., _Morte_ _Arthure_, pp. 11-2. In his discussion Finlayson is, on the whole, following the traditional arguments concerning the distinction between _chanson_ _de_ _geste_ and romance as they were set forth by W. P. Ker in his classic work, _Epic_ _and_ _Romance_: _Essays_ _on_ _Medieval_ _Literature_ (1908; rpt. New York: Dover Publications, 1957) and as they were further delineated by Erich Auerbach, _Mimesis_: _The_ _Representation_ _of_ _Reality_ _in_ _Western_ _Literature_, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 96-142.

[9]Everett, pp. 20-21. As W. P. Ker, _Epic_ _and_ _Romance_, pp. 287-317, has shown, even the 12th and 13th century epic, while it still retained its distinctive heroic character, had to some extent compromised with the newer romantic tastes.

[10]Finlayson, ed., _Morte_ _Arthure_, pp. 7-10.

[11]Auerbach, p. 122, comments, "For audiences of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries the heroic epic was history; in it the historical tradition of earlier ages

was alive. No other tradition existed, at least none accessible to those audiences. It is only about the year 1200 that the first vernacular chronicles are composed, but they do not relate the past, they are eye-witness accounts of contemporary events, and even so they are strongly influenced by the epic tradition."

[12]John Finlayson, "Formulaic Technique in _Morte Arthure_," _Anglia_, 81 (1963), 375. See also Robert A. Waldron, "Oral-Formulaic Technique and Middle English Alliterative Poetry," _Spec_, 32 (1957), 802-4.

[13]See, for example, Passus XIX, 26-58, of _Piers the Plowman_, B-Text, ed. Walter W. Skeat (1869; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1950), for an extensive metaphorical development of the idea that God is "knyȝte, kynge, conqueroure" (27).

[14]William Matthews, _The Tragedy of Arthur_ (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 112.

[15]Matthews, p. 112. Edmund Brock, ed., Morte Arthure, E. E. T. S., 8 (1865; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 138, glosses _awke_ as "perverse, contrary." The later editors gloss the word as follows: M. M. Banks, ed., _Morte Arthure_ (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), p. 156, "strange;" Erik Björkman, ed., _Morte Arthure_, (New York: G. E. Stechert & Co., 1915), p. 190, "_seltsam_;"

Finlayson, ed., *Morte Arthure*, p. 135, "perverse, strange."
The *Middle English Dictionary* provides the following mean-
ings: "(a) From the left; of a stroke with the sword: from
left to right, backhanded; (b) perverse, wrong; (c) strange,
marvelous."

[16]See, for example, 10237-336 in Wace, *Le Roman de Brut*,
ed. Ivor Arnold, Tome II (Paris: Société des Anciens Textes
Français, 1940). All citations to Wace in the text refer to
this edition.

[17]R. A. Waldron, 800, cites this sentence as evidence
that the *MA* "is decidedly unliterary in appearance." He
insists, "It is impossible to punctuate it according to our
ideas of clause and sentence" (801). Finally, he urges that
this sentence seems "to indicate swift energetic composition,
line by line, in which the beginnings of sentences may be
forgotten or neglected before their ends have been reached"
(801). That a medieval sentence does not accommodate our
post-18th century grammatical and syntactical sensibilities
is hardly cause to assume it is "unliterary." As Fernand
Mossé points out, "It often happened in long periodic
sentences that the connection between clauses was not well
made and that there were very abrupt changes of construction,
called anacolutha" (*A Handbook of Middle English*, trans.
James A. Walker [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1952],
p. 120).

[18]Marie Borroff, _Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study_ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 101.

[19]Larry D. Benson, _Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight_ (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1965), p. 26.

[20]Finlayson, ed., _Morte Arthure_, pp. 15-6.

[21]Matthews, p. 127.

[22]In Geoffrey's account, following their solemn entrance ("ecce duodecim uiri mature etatis. reuerendi uultus. ramos oliue in signum legationis dextris ferentes."), the ambassadors present a letter which begins very politely, "Lucius rei publice procurator arturo regi britannie; qua meruit." (Geoffrey of Monmouth, _The Historia Regum Britanniae_, ed. Acton Griscom [London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929], p. 459.) In Layamon's version, the address by the ambassadors begins with an extraordinary heartiness: "Hal seo þu, Arður king:/ Bruttene deorling./ and hal seo þi duȝeðe:/ and al þi drihtliche uolc." (_Laȝamons Brut_, 24760-3, ed. Sir Frederick Madden, Vol. 2 [London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1847], p. 618.) Interestingly, pf the three chronicles Layamon's alone does not include the demand that Arthur appear in Rome.

[23]Matthews, p. 127.

[24]Werner Habicht, Die Gebärde in englischen Dichtungen des Mittelalters (Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Abhandlungen, Neue Folge, Heft 46, 1959), p. 93. Habicht relates the change of color and the biting of the lips to expressions of anger "im altfranzösischen Heldenepos" (p. 92). Unfortunately, he does not develop this idea because he accepts unquestioningly Branscheid's study of the sources of the Morte Arthure.

[25]Habicht, p. 91. Margaret A. Gist comments, "The weight of evidence from the romances tends to indicate that instances where an undue tolerance of envoys is shown represent the ideal of conduct rather than the actuality. The ill treatment of messengers or the violation of their rights in one measure or another and the disregard of the safe-conduct, which are common in the romances, are closer to the practice as it is seen in Froissart or as it is implied in the regulations of the chivalric handbooks" (Love and War in the Middle English Romances [London: Oxford University Press, 1947], pp. 176-7). Gist also calls attention (pp. 171-2) to Froissart's account of the treatment of messengers by the Black Prince, which we shall discuss later.

[26]The Laud Troy Book, 2133-42, ed. J. Ernst Wulfing, E. E. T. S., 121, 122 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1902), pp. 63-4. The visit to Nestor is part

of a series (1983-2166) to which Habicht calls attention, p. 91, n. 5.

[27]Finlayson, ed., Morte Arthure, p. 21. The inspiration for this feast is probably the coronation feast in the chronicles; see, for example, Wace, 10445-93. Regarding this scene, Sister Imogene Baker, The King's Household in the Arthurian Court (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1937), pp. 127-8, calls attention to the "remarkably original" treatment of Arthur's household. In the chronicles and other Arthurian literature Kay is seneschal and Bedevere is cupbearer. In the Morte Arthure, however, we hear, "There was a cheeffe buttlere, a cheualere noble,/ Sir Cayous the curtaise, that of the cowpe seruede" (208-9). Perhaps the poet is consolidating functions for poetic economy. However, another explanation is possible. Perhaps the poet was depending on these lines from Wace:

> Od cupes e od nés d'or fin
> E od hanaps portoent vin.
> N'i aveit hume ki servist
> Ki d'ermine ne se vestist.
> Bedoer devant els alout
> Ki la cupe le rei portout.

(10475-80.)

Conceivably, the poet may have been using a text of Wace in which "ki" in 10480 appeared as "ke" or perhaps "kei." Among his variant readings for this passage Ivor Arnold includes "ke i serveit" for "ki servist" in 10477. If such a textual error occured in a text of Wace that has not survived, the poet may have simply ignored what must have seemed a puzzling

reference to Bedevere in 10479 (the only reference to him in the description of the feast).

[28]Robert M. Lumiansky comments, "Here is the virtuous ruler, urging that a needed decision be based upon reason rather than passion. . . . While Cador doubtless understands 'strengthe' [258] as military prowess alone, for Arthur it seems to include the necessity of meeting Lucius' demands with the reason and courage that are aspects of Fortitude in the behavior of a ruler." ("The Alliterative Morte Arthure, the Concept of Medieval Tragedy, and the Cardinal Virtue Fortitude" in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Vol. 3, ed. by John M. Headley [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968], p. 106.)

[29]John Finlayson, "The Concept of the Hero in 'Morte Arthure,'" in Chaucer and seine Zeit: Symposion für Walter F. Schirmer, ed. Arno Esch, Buchreihe der Anglia, Zeitschrift für englische Philologie, 14 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1968), pp. 258-9.

[30]George Neilson, 'Huchown of the Awle Ryale' the Alliterative Poet (Glasgow: James MacLehose & Sons, 1902), p. 44. David Fowler, The Age of Plantagenet and Valois (New York: G. O. Putnam's Sons, 1967), pp. 145-6, gives examples of vows by individuals, which received wide circulation in the fourteenth century.

[31]Jacques de Longuyon, Les Voeux du Paon, 3911-2,

in John Barbour, The Buik of Alexander, ed. R. L. Graeme
Ritchie, Vol. 3, Scottish Text Society, n. s., 21
(Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons Ltd., 1927).

[32]Matthews, p. 43.

[33]Les Voeux du Paon, 4278-84.

[34]Finlayson, ed., Morte Arthure, p. 16, observes,
"Arthur's controlled anger, courteous treatment of the
ambassadors and subsequent consultation of his knights
quickly establish the moderation, courtesy and readiness to
take counsel which are the marks of the medieval 'wyse
prince'." His readiness to take counsel and his conduct
in the council scene might even suggest the wisdom of the
traditional sapientia et fortitudo associated with the
ideal hero in medieval writings. For a full discussion
of these traditional ideals, see Ernst Robert Curtius,
European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans.
Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series, 36 (New York: Pantheon,
1953), pp. 174-9. For an extended discussion of the theme
of fortitude in the poem, see Robert M. Lumiansky, pp.
95-118.

[35]Finlayson, "The Concept," p. 259. William Matthews,
pp. 80-93, 131-2, passim, has much to say on the subject of
whether Arthur's entry into this war is legal and justifiable
by medieval standards. His conclusion seems to be that

Arthur is waging an unjust "war of revenge" (p. 131).
Unfortunately, Matthews bases his arguments on the assumption
that the poet is a political theorist with the temperament
of a moral Gower and the concern of a canonist delivering
a disquisition before a company of his peers. Nevertheless,
if we must find a legal basis for this war, we can undoubtedly
conclude it is self-defense, a motive which Aquinas approved
(see Bede Jarrett, Social Theories of the Middle Ages
[Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1926], p. 87) and which the
romances "evidently accept . . . as always a legitimate
explanation" (see Margaret A. Gist, Love and War in the
Middle English Romances [London: Oxford University Press,
1947], p. 144). As our analysis in this chapter and the
next shows, up to the death of Lucius, the poet makes
completely clear that Arthur's cause is honorable and just.

[36]See Froissart, Vol. 1, pp. 563-6.

[37]George Neilson, "Three Footnotes," in An English
Miscellany: A Festschrift in Honor of F. J. Furnivall, ed.
W. P. Ker and A. S. Napier (1901; rpt. New York: Benjamin
Blom, 1969), pp. 384-5. See Neilson, 'Huchown,' pp. 42-4,
for a fuller exposition of this idea. The legal works he
cites are "Bracton's Tractatus de Legibus et Consuetudinibus
Angliae, written before 1259," and "Fleta Seu Commentarius
Juris Anglicani, which--largely drawn from the former work--
a judge of the time of Edward I. composed in Fleet prison"

('Huchown,' p. 43). Neilson believes the poet (who for him
is Sir Hew of Eglintoun) alludes to this punishment because
of his own legal training. One would hardly need legal
training to know about punishment by outlawry, which was an
increasingly common weapon of the English kings in the later
middle ages. H. S. Bennett, The Pastons and Their England
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 173-4,
tells us that when a man took sanctuary, the coroner came
to him to arrange for his surrender or his removal from the
realm by the procedure described by Bracton and Fleta. This
fact increases the possibility that the details of this
procedure might be widely known among Englishmen with no
legal training.

[38]C. Meredith Jones, "The Conventional Saracen of the
Songs of Geste," Spec, 17 (1942), 202-4. See also Roger
Sherman Loomis, The Development of Arthurian Romance, p. 151.

[39]Finlayson, "The Concept," p. 256. This is not to
suggest that such scenes are unprecedented or incongruous in
heroic poetry. As W. P. Ker, Epic and Romance, p. 16,
observes, "Epic poetry is one of the complex and comprehen-
sive kinds of literature, in which most of the other kinds
may be included--romance, history, comedy." That a poet
so obviously preoccupied with a martial theme should turn
his efforts to a detailed and exquisitely tender representa-
tion of domestic love, which we find commonly in romance,

is as pleasant a surprise as the leave-taking scene of Hector and Andromache in The Iliad. Considering the tone of the Morte Arthure to this point, we should likely expect such a brisk treatment of Arthur's departure as we find in the chronicle. In this regard, we might consider the following comment by Karl Heinz Göller, König Arthur in der englischen Literatur des späten Mittelalters, Palaestra, 238 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), p. 107: "Auch das Verhältnis zur Frau gibt einigen Aufschluss. Zwar finden wir sie in unserem Gedicht nicht im höfischen Glanz der französischen Romanzen des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts, aber sie sinkt auch nicht in die völlige Vernachlässigung der vorhöfischen Zeit zurück."

[40]Finlayson, "The Concept," p. 255.

Chapter 3

The Christian Hero

In his treatment of Arthur's continental adventures,
up to the victory over Lucius (721-2385), the poet of the
Morte Arthure handles the chronicle narrative with much the
same creativity and freedom that we saw in the introductory
section of the poem. He constantly reshapes the chronicle
account to create a more concrete, more dramatic story from
which evolves a more complex and more fully realized portrait
of Arthur. Once again he works very consciously and
deliberately to manipulate the sympathies of the audience
for the British king and his cause. In particular, he empha-
sizes Arthur's role as a protector of Christians in his
battle with the Giant of St. Michael's Mount and his war
with Lucius, who is equated with the giant by the philoso-
pher's interpretation of Arthur's first prophetic dream.
However, here as in the earlier portion of the _Morte Arthure_,
the poet stops far short of making his Arthur into a super-
human hero. Without detracting in any way from the strength
and valor of Arthur, the poet keeps us aware of his hero's
human weakness so that Arthur's fall, when it occurs later
in the poem, is not merely another medieval tale of a "sodeyn
fal" from joy to woe.

This portion of the poem begins with a description of
the loading of the British ships and their embarkation from

Sandwich.[1] During the night in which the British cross the Channel, Arthur has a marvelous dream about a fight between a dragon and a bear. Although he is borrowing the major elements of the dream-sequence from the chronicle, the _Morte Arthure_ poet, as we should expect, makes the dream more impressive by giving more concrete and spectacular descriptions of the beasts in the dream. Despite a few puzzling details,[2] his dragon is a more handsome and striking beast with its splendid array of bodily colors, as well as the flames flowing from its lips. By contrast, while Wace's bear is an unpleasant beast,

> Mult lai, mult fort, mult gros, mult grant;
> Mult esteit d'orrible facun
>
> (11248-9),

the _Morte Arthure_'s "blake bustous bere" (775) is truly hideous:[3]

> Wyth yche a pawe as a poste, and paumes fulle huge,
> Wyth pykes fulle perilous, all plyande thame semyde,
> . . . .
> . . . . wyth fomannde lyppez,
> The foulleste of fegure that fourmede was euer!
> (776-7, 780-1.)

In his account of the interpretation of this dream, the _Morte Arthure_ poet makes a small but interesting departure from the chronicle. Those to whom Arthur tells his dream in both Geoffrey's and Wace's versions suggest that the dragon represents Arthur and that the bear, as Wace puts it, "ert demustrance/ D'alcun gaiant qu'il ocirreit,/ Ki d'estrange

terre vendreit" (11270-2). We are told, however, that Arthur

has his own interpretation in which the dream signifies the

war "Entre mei e l'empereür" (11277).4 In the Morte Arthure,

the poet eliminates this disagreement by having the philoso-

phers tell Arthur that the bear

> Be-takyns the tyrauntez that tourmentez thy pople;
> Or elles with some gyaunt some journee salle
>   happyne,
> In syngulere batelle by ʒoure selfe one.
>   (824-6.)

This change in the interpretation serves two thematic pur-

poses. First, it suggests an equation between the giant

and Lucius and Arthur's victories over them, thus establish-

ing a relation between what are in the sources two rather

distinct events. Second, it avoids the hint of smugness or

excessive self-confidence one might find in the Arthur of the

chronicle. Any such hint would certainly be out of place in

the Morte Arthure where Arthur awakens "wery fore-trauaillede"

(806) from his dream and asks his philosophers to interpret

it "Ore I mone swelte as swythe, as wysse me oure Lorde!"

(813).5

Immediately upon arriving "at Barflete" (835) and meet-

ing his forces there, Arthur hears of a beast whose descrip-

tion recalls the philosophers' interpretation of his dream:

> Here es a teraunt be-syde that tourmentez thi pople,
> A grett geaunte of geene, engenderde of fendez;
> He has fretyne of folke mo than fyfe hondrethe,
> And als fele fawntekyns of freeborne childyre!
> This has bene his sustynaunce alle this seuene
>   wyntteres,

And itt es that sotte noghte sadde, so wele hyme
    it lykez!
In the contree of Constantyne no kynde has he
    leuede,
With-owttyne kydd castelles enclosid wyth walles,
That he ne has clenly dystroyede alle the knaue
    childyre,
And theme caryede to the cragge, and clenly
    deworyde!

                                    (841-51; italics
                                        added.)

Thus begins one of the most striking and dramatic episodes
in the _Morte Arthure_. In a very convincing analysis of its
meaning and importance within the poem, John Finlayson has
argued, "The giant-episode . . . makes it quite clear that
at this point Arthur is not only a great conqueror, but is
also, more significantly, the champion of Christianity and
the redeemer of his people. . . . It is not too fanciful,
I think, to compare this episode in _Morte Arthure_ with the
struggle of David and Goliath, for in both the smaller man
is supported by divine strength, and the giant defeated and
a people redeemed."[6]

Throughout the episode, as Finlayson has observed,
"what is stressed most in the monster is not simply the sensa-
tional aspect of his appearance, such as his size (though
this is not ignored), but rather his anti-Christian conduct,
the eating of the baptized children, and the general disorder
he creates among Arthur's people."[7] To illustrate this idea,
we need only recall the first account of the giant given to
Arthur by the templar upon his arrival in France. Further-
more, when Arthur confronts the giant, who is just then

preparing a feast of "Beerynes and bestaile brochede to-
geders" (1050), Arthur's first accusation is, as Finlayson
points out,

> . . . thow killide has thise cresmede childyre,
> Thow has marters made, and broghte oute of lyfe,
> That here are brochede one bente, and brittenede
> with thi handez.
>
> (1065-7.)

Perhaps because Finlayson is a little too intent on

demonstrating that this episode is not "simply . . . a

romance interlude in a heroic poem,"[8] he does not give much

attention to the most recent atrocity committed by the

giant--his abduction of the "duchez of Bretayne to daye"

(852). In the chronicle this abduction is the most important

part of the messenger's tidings. In the Morte Arthure, as

Finlayson notes, the poet has shifted the emphasis of the

episode to make it more than a romantic interlude. Neverthe-

less, we should not overlook the fact that within the widened

focus of the episode the Morte Arthure poet treats the

giant's heinous abduction of the duchess with a much more

effective emotional quality than the chronicles, which merely

express an insipid and mechanical indignation at the abduc-

tion. Here the poet puts into the message of the templar

(following the passage quoted above) a highly stylized poetic

lament for the loss of the lady (860-7), after which he has

Arthur deliver a lament of his own (868-79). Finally, as

in the chronicle, when Arthur finds her by the grave of the

duchess, the foster-mother offers a lament (974-85). As

Velma Richmond observes, the effect of these laments is that the duchess becomes "a pitiable human being not merely an object involved in a knight's accomplishment of feats of glory."[9]

By assigning a lament to Arthur and thus providing him with a personal response to the abduction, the poet of the Morte Arthure uses a conventional motif to enrich the character of Arthur that he found in his source.[10] In another use of conventional motif, the poet describes the emotional reaction on Arthur's part when the British king returns to his tent alone:

> Than romyez the ryche kynge for rewthe of the pople,
> Raykez ryghte to a tente, and restez no lengere!
> He welterys, he wristeles, he wryngez hys handez!
> (888-90.)

Werner Habicht observes that in medieval poetry such mournfulness and the deeds it inspires deepen and enhance the picture of the virtuous hero.

> Ein anderer Gesinnungswert, der sich in Klagegebärden der Helden der weltlichen Dichtung noch mehr manifestiert, ist die Tugend des Mitleids--aber nicht des Mitleids, das sich in gefühlvollem Bedauern erschöpft, sondern eines Mitleids, das zur Tat antreibt. . . . Eine solche Mitleidsklagegestik, die den Kampfesentschluss aus sich hervorbringt, ist nichts Seltenes; als König Arthur im allit. Morte Arthure von den Schändlichkeiten des Riesen von Mont Saint-Michel erfährt, benimmt er sich ganz ähnlich, wobei dort sowohl sein Klagegebaren als auch seine nachfolgende Entschlusspose noch viel anschaulicher geschildert sind. Durch solches Mitleidsklagegebaren wird sozusagen die heroische Pose erganzt und in der Tugend vertieft.[11]

The action to which his sorrow leads Arthur is of course

his encounter with the giant. Summoning Sir Kay and Sir
Bedevere, he orders them to meet him "aftyre euensange . . ./
On blonkez by зone buscayle, by зone blythe stremez" (894-5).
Ironically, he explains that he plans to make a pilgrimage
"ffor to sekene a saynte be зone salte stremes,/ In seynt
Mighelle mount, there myraclez are schewede" (898-9).
(Perhaps part of the irony involves an oblique allusion to
St. Michael, who was renowned for putting down fiends--Rev.
12.7-9--as Arthur will soon be renowned for putting down a
creature "engenderde of fendez.") There follow two rheto-
rical descriptions which, according to Finlayson, are
"clearly in the tradition of the roman d'aventure."[12] The
first is an account of Arthur's splendid armor of silver and
gold.

> The elaborate richness of armour and dress, besides
> giving the poem concreteness and feeding the
> audiences' love of colour and wealth, is also a
> method of expressing visually the rank and
> importance of the character. In addition, the
> formality of the elements of the description--based
> as they are on stereotyped models--produces a sense
> of order and power, of that order which is . . .
> threatened [by the tyranny of the giant].[13]

The second rhetorical description is a beautiful, though
somewhat conventional landscape. The serenity and peaceful-
ness of this landscape with its pleasant array of flowers,
animals, and birds, as well as the orderliness of the arming,
help to build the tension as we await Arthur's encounter
with the giant.[14] In addition, both descriptions serve as
balance and contrast to the hideous scene and the hideous

creature we shall soon see. Finally, as John Finlayson suggests, "the impressionistic note struck by the last two lines of the _descriptio_ give [sic] a particular significance to the scene . . . namely, to set the atmosphere of an . . . Other World":[15]

> That whate swowynge of watyre, and syngynge of
>   byrdez,
> It myght salue hyme of sore, that sounde was
>   neuere!
>
>   (931-2.)

The suggestion seems remote. However, if the poet does intend to suggest the aura of the other world, he undoubtedly does so to evoke an enthusiastic anticipation for the spectacular adventure ahead.

Tension builds more rapidly as Arthur leaves his knights behind and climbs alone "To the creste of the clyffe . . . one lofte" (942). When Arthur reaches the top, the _Morte Arthure_ poet scores a particular success with his splendidly realistic effect in these lines:

> Keste vpe hys vmbrere, and kenly he lukes,
> Caughte of the colde wynde to comforthe hym seluene;
> Two fyrez he fyndez fflawmande fulle hye,
> The fourtedele a furlange be-twene thus he walkes.
>   (943-6.)

The poet is assuming Arthur's point of view. For at least a moment we are with Arthur, looking through the aperture in his helmet, feeling the cold wind refresh his face, and seeing the flames of the fires leap high.[16]

Probably as a result of his determination to exploit the emotional potential of this sequence, the poet allows

the conversation between Arthur and the foster-mother to run
beyond all reasonable limits. Obviously, he wishes to wring
all the pathos he can from the foster-mother's plight, for he
emphasizes her loneliness and her concern for Arthur's
safety. Furthermore, he attempts to reinforce this pathos
by introducing a strain of very grim humor in the beard-
motif, which he transfers from another giant episode describ-
ed in the chronicle.[17] To be completely fair to the _Morte
Arthure_ poet, we should admit that his narrative in this
portion of the poem is still superior to the chronicle in
which the narrative is very diffuse and unnecessarily
complicated. For example, in the chronicle Bedevere climbs
the mountain, hears the old woman's story, and then returns
to Arthur to tell him what he has discovered. Our poet has
wisely concentrated the narrative by having Arthur perform
all the action. Nevertheless, the conversation with the
old lady is still excessively long; as a result, the pathos
nearly gives way in the end to a tedious melodrama.

With the realistic description of Arthur's first sight
of the giant, we have the poet again at his best:

> He lay lenande one lange, lugande vn-faire,
> The thee of a manns lymme lyfte vp by the haunche;
> His bakke, and his bewschers, and his brode lendez,
> He bekez by the bale-fyre, and breklesse hyme semede.
> (1045-8.)

After Arthur has issued his challenge, the poet provides
us with another description of the beast, this time a
catalog of his features from a frontal view. This

"descriptio of the giant (1074-1103)," as Finlayson comments,
"is one of the longest static descriptions in the poem, and
one of the few descriptio personae: it parallels the rich
portrayal of Arthur's arming (900-919) in a way which is
reminiscent of the paralleled descriptions of Gawain and the
Green Knight."[18] Thematically, the elements of this descrip-
tion of the giant are of great importance:

> [T]he minute description in terms of wild or savage
> beasts emphasizes his animal-like ugliness and, by
> implication, associates him with the moral signi-
> ficacio of these animals. His vivid ugliness
> expresses both the physical and moral threat he
> represents and dramatically, heightens the figure
> of Arthur, his opponent.[19]

From the bestiaries Finlayson has compiled the moral
significance of each of the beasts associated with the giant:
"the frog and toad represented anger, the hawk and shark
rapacity, the bear cruelty and sloth, the wolf bloodthirsty
rapacity (a shape often taken by the devil), the bull and
boar ferocity."[20] In addition, the "eghne fulle horreble,
and ardauunt for sothe" (1087) may recall descriptions of
the devil[21] and thus add further support to Finlayson's
argument that the giant is "a very potent symbol of Evil,
the unnatural and death."[22]

Throughout his version of Arthur's encounter with the
giant, the Morte Arthure poet maintains the sharp contrast
between the adversaries by his careful use of synonyms, one
of the standard stylistic devices of the alliterative poets.
In a comment on this passage (1041-151) Larry Benson notes

that Arthur "has nothing in common, not so much as a noun, with a churlish character like the giant of St. Michael's Mount."[23] In thirteen references to Arthur the poet "uses only three synonyms."[24] By contrast, he "uses twelve different synonyms" for the giant "in the fifteen times he designates him by a noun."[25]

> The difference between the king and the giant is thus established . . . by the mode of designation, in which the restrained, decorous manner of designating the king is sharply contrasted to the freely varying mode of designating the giant, a character with none of the unchanging nobility of Arthur.[26]

In his description of the fight between Arthur and the giant, the Morte Arthure poet also glorifies Arthur by keeping before us the idea that the British king's triumph "is owed not purely to his own prowess, but to Providence."[27] For example, when the giant strikes the first blow, the poet tells us,

> He walde hafe kyllede the kynge with his kene
>   wapene,
> Bot thrughe the crafte of Cryste ʒit the carle
>   failede.
> (1106-7.)

When the fight begins to go against Arthur, "the balefulle bierdez" (1136)--the three women serving as the giant's slaves--begin to pray,

> Knelande and cryande, and clappide theire handez,--
> "Criste comforthe ʒone knyghte, and kepe hym fro
>   sorowe,
> And latte neuer ʒone fende felle hym olyfe!"
> (1137-9.)

"A few lines later," as John Finlayson points out,

"Arthur succeeds in killing the monster, and it is noteworthy that he accomplishes this with an 'anlace' (1. 1148)."[28] To explain the importance of the "anlace" and its appropriateness in this context, Finlayson offers the following passage from Caxton's translation of Ramón Lull's _Le Libre del Ordre de Cauayleria_, in which we find an explanation of the significance of this particular weapon:

> Mysericorde or knyf with a cross is gyuen to a
> knyght to thende that yf his other armures faylle
> hym that he haue recours to the myserycorde or
> daggar. . . . And bicause this armure which is
> named myserycorde sheweth to a knyght that he ou3t
> not to trust al in his armes ne in his strength but
> he ou3t so much affye & trust in god & to joyne to
> hym by ryght good werkes & by very hope that he
> ought to haue in hym that by the helpe and ayde of
> god he vaynquysshe his enemyes.[29]

Whether the _Morte Arthure_ poet was aware of this traditional symbolic significance of the "anlace" is uncertain: he mentions the "anlace" only once and, judging from the context, seems to attach no special importance to the weapon.[30] If he was unaware of its significance, he inadvertently hit upon a most appropriate detail to end this exciting battle.

In his account of this battle, the _Morte Arthure_ poet adapted the chronicle account with considerable originality. The opening exchange of blows is the same as in Wace. With his club the giant strikes the first blow which Arthur catches on his shield. Then Arthur replies with a fierce stroke of his sword on the giant's brow. At this point the _Morte Arthure_ poet departs from the chronicle, reversing the order of events he found there. Wace (following Geoffrey)

has the giant seize Arthur and force him to his knees.
Arthur, however, soon frees himself:

> Mult fu isnels, entur ala,
> Ore ert de ça, or ert de la,
> Od l'espee suvent ferant;
> . . . .
> Tant ala Artur guandissant,
> Suvent detriés, suvent devant,
> Que de Caliburn l'alemele
> Li enbati en la cervele.
>
> (11539-41; 11545-8.)

In the _Morte Arthure_ the battle continues for some time
with Arthur eluding the wild blows of the giant while at
the same time dealing him several effective blows in the
groin and gut.[31] Apparently dismayed and angered by the
king's success in battle, the giant _then_ catches Arthur
"in armez,/ And enclosez hyme clenly, to cruschene hys
rybbez" (1133-4). The fight appears to turn against Arthur
as he and the giant "wrystille to-gederz" (1141) and
finally roll down the mountainside together, "ffro the heghe
of the hylle vn-to the harde roche" (1146). Still in the
grip of the giant when they reach the bottom, Arthur deals the
death blow with the "anlace"--presumably the only weapon
available to him in his predicament. Thus, we have a
splendidly realistic detail which, as we noted earlier,
may have had symbolic significance for its contemporary
audience.[32]

The poet, in a most effective stroke of artistry,
follows Arthur's triumph with a moment of humor which re-
lieves the tension generated by the struggle and which at

the same time continues the religious theme described above.
When Kay and Bedevere, who had been waiting at the base of
the cliff, find Arthur, he is still caught in the death-grip
of the giant. Only after they lift his hauberk and examine
him do they realize Arthur is still alive. Bedevere express-
es his relief and joy at this discovery in a most human way:
jokingly, he alludes to Arthur's earlier statements (894-9,
937-40) that he was going to St. Michael's Mount on a
pilgrimage.

> "Now, certez," saise Sir Bedwere, "it semez, be my
>   Lorde!
> He sekez seyntez bot seldene, the sorere he grypes,
> That thus clekys this corsaunt owte of thir heghe
>   clyffez,
> To carye forthe siche a carle at close hym in
>   siluere;
> By Myghelle, of syche a makk I hafe myche wondyre
> That euer owre soueraygne Lorde suffers hym in
>   heuene;
> And alle seyntez be syche, that seruez oure Lorde,
> I salle neuer no seynt bee, by my fadyre sawle!"
>   (1162-9.)

Returning to a more serious tone, the poet guarantees
that his audience understand the importance of the giant-
episode by having a group of people from the countryside
visit Arthur the following day and praise him for his deed
(1200-7). Arthur's modest response to their praise and
gratitude is put in terms which are the perfect expression
of the Christian spirit.

> "Thankes Gode," quod he, "of this grace, and no
>   gome elles,
> ffor it was neuer manns dede, bot myghte of Hym
>   selfene,

> Or myracle of hys modyre, that mylde es tille
> alle!"
>
> (1209-11.)

Then acting in this same true Christian spirit, Arthur gives

orders that the giant's treasure should be divided among

the people of the country, and he directs that a church and

convent be built on the mount to honor the memory of the

martyred duchess.[33]

After these generous gestures, Arthur moves his army

"To-warde Castelle Blanke" (1225) and sets up camp "One a

strenghe by a streme, in thas straytt landez" (1230). There he

receives two messengers from the marshall of France, who

tell him in a 28-line speech of atrocities committed against

his people and their lands and cities by the emperor of Rome.

On behalf of the people of France, the messengers beseech

Arthur,

> "ffor-thy the lordez of the lande, ladys and other,
> Prayes the for Petyr liffe, the apostylle of Rome,
> Sen thow arte presant in place, that thow wille
> profyre make,
> To that perilous prynce, by processe of tyme.
> . . . .
> Helpe nowe for His lufe, that heghe in heuene
> sittez,
> And talke tristly to theme, that thus vs destroyes!"
>
> (1255-8, 1261-2.)

This moving plea represents a considerable change from the

chronicle in which Arthur simply receives tidings that Lucius

and his army are waiting nearby. In making this change, the

Morte Arthure poet of course has an artistic purpose in mind:

he establishes a dramatic contrast between Arthur, who

generously distributes the giant's treasure "To comouns of the contre, clergye and other" (1215), and Lucius, who "Confoundez thy comouns, clergy and other" (1245).[34]

Also of great importance in this message is the detailed account of the acts of destruction the poet ascribes to Lucius. Such acts were of course "a very old accompaniment of war, feared but expected, in the marchlands of most states."[35] Those Englishmen who had not personally participated in a chevauchée on the continent had no doubt heard about these destructive forays from those who had. More important, they probably knew, directly or indirectly, about the French forays onto English soil in 1338-40 (when the French burned Portsmouth, sacked Southampton, and inflicted damage on Sandwich, Dover, Hastings and other coast settlements) or in 1360 (when the French attacked Winchelsea).[36] In his recent study of the wars of Edward III, H. J. Hewitt has shown that the fear of such raids had a very dramatic effect on life in England from 1338 to 1362. As he remarks, "the mobility of naval power had enabled France to threaten a long coast line, to choose successfully where she would inflict damage, to keep thousands of people in a state of anxiety and, in brief, to cause social and economic dislocation out of proportion to the effort she had expended."[37] If, as seems likely, the Morte Arthure was written for an audience in the northern counties, the reaction to the description might be based on even more direct experience,

"for border warfare was endemic. The Scots besieged Carlisle
and wrought awful havoc in Cumberland. They besieged Berwick,
crossed the border between the castles, thrust down into
Durham, ravaged as far as the North Riding and drove away
hundreds of cattle."[38] Recalling also the "atmosphere of
acute nervous tension"[39] generated throughout England as a
whole by an invasion scare as late as 1386, we can readily
understand why the poet introduces his very specific descrip-
tion of Lucius' devastation. Even if he were writing in the
early fifteenth century, the memory of these fears would no
doubt intensify in his audience the strong emotional reaction
to this description.

Arthur's response to Lucius' actions is, as in the
chronicle, to send an embassy to Lucius. He instructs his
ambassadors:

> Comande hym kenely wyth crewelle wordez,
> Cayre owte of my kyngryke with his kydd knyghtez;
> In caase that he wille noghte, that cursede wreche,
> Come for his curtaisie, and countere me ones!
> (1271-4.)

This embassy is essentially a mere formality; a war between
Lucius and Arthur is inevitable since, as Arthur's reference
to "curtaisie" reminds us,[40] neither he nor Lucius can change
his present course of action without a complete loss of face.
In Wace, when the ambassadors are ready to ride to Lucius'
camp, "cez chevaliers,/ Ces bachelers, cez plus legiers"
(11677-8) urge Gawain to provoke a war by his words and
actions, and indeed he does just that. The Morte Arthure

poet wisely eliminated that unhappy and unnecessary touch
from his account. The only vestige of the chronicle incident
is Arthur's direction that Gawain address the emperor "wyth
crewelle wordez."[41] This direction indicates a necessarily
forceful attitude entirely in keeping with Arthur's concern
for his people and for his respect and reputation. For those
who suffered from devastation, as the message from the
marshall of France suggests, "the only conceivable reaction
proper in a king was defense or retribution in kind. . . .
Where there was neither defence nor retaliation, loyalty
might be very seriously undermined."[42]

The embassy to Lucius clearly parallels the opening
scene of the poem.[43] We hear of the splendid company
attending the emperor, just as we had heard of Arthur's
company earlier. There are, however, certain unfavorable
suggestions in the description of Lucius' company, to which
John Finlayson rightly calls our attention:

> Note in the mention of 'hornes of olyfantez',
> 'sowdane' and 'selcouthe metez' the overtones of
> the mystery of the East. . . . This 'eastern'
> flavour is developed strongly, in order to as-
> sociate the Roman emperor with the pagan and evil.
> Lucius' allies, it will be remembered, are mainly
> Eastern paynims . . . and in the battles which
> follow frequent mention is made of the Kings of
> Syria, Lybia, various Sultans, Saracens and Turks--
> recalling the enemies of the Crusades.[44]

As in the earlier scene, the ambassadors arrive just as the
royal company is about to begin a feast. When Gawain
interrupts the feast with Arthur's message, his words more

than match the arrogant and insulting tone of the senator's
message. Given the devastation committed by Lucius and
also Arthur's admonition to use "crewelle wordes," Gawain's
tone is more understandable and perhaps even admirable.[45]
Certainly Gawain's reaction to the emperor and his attack on
Sir Gayous are meant to contrast sharply with the Roman
ambassadors "Cowchide as kenetz be-fore" Arthur. By our
standards, the beheading of Gayous is much too severe a
reaction to the occasion. For our poet, however, it probably
did not seem so. By eliminating the idea that Gawain intends
to provoke a war, he removes the suggestion that the act may
have any element of calculation behind it. In this present
context Gawain's motivation then is rooted entirely in
youthful impetuousness and heroic recklessness. And what we
call heroic recklessness here is but the obverse side of the
coin to chivalric valor.

The _Morte Arthure_ account of the Roman pursuit of the
ambassadors and the ensuing battle between Roman and British
armies indicates clearly the poet's determination to portray
Gawain as a knight of great valor. In Wace, during the
pursuit, Guerin and Boice both kill a Roman while Gawain
kills two. Wace himself is interested in emphasizing
Gawain's importance, for he describes Gawain's acts in much
greater detail than those of Guerin and Boice. The _Morte
Arthure_ poet increases the emphasis by eliminating Guerin,
who had first turned upon the Romans during the pursuit in

Wace, and by having Gawain perform the first killing. Boice,
as : ce, kills one of the enemy, after which Gawain slays
a Roman ("Marcel" in Wace, "Feltemour" in the Morte Arthure),
who would avenge the death of Gayous ("Quintilien" in Wace).
Then in Wace another Roman tries to kill Gawain, but the
latter strikes and cuts off his arm. We are told,

> Altre cop li eüst duné,
> Mais cil de Rome l'unt hasté.
> (11875-6.)

Very different is the action in the Morte Arthure after
Gawain kills Feltemour:

> Than a ryche man of Rome relyede to his byerns,--
> "It salle repent vs fulle sore and we ryde
>   forthire!
> ʒone are bolde bosturs, that syche bale wyrkez;
> It be-felle hym fulle foule, that thame so fyrste
>   namede."
> (1391-4.)

Nevertheless, a body of Romans does continue the pursuit
and, as in the chronicle, it runs into a British ambush. In
both accounts, the Romans scatter until a hero named Peter--
"senatour Petyr" in Morte Arthure (1419); "Petreius, uns ber"
in Wace (11905)--arrives with reinforcements. At that point
in the Morte Arthure the battle turns against the Britons
until "Sir Idrus fytz Ewayne" (1498)--"Ider, le fiz Nu" in
Wace (11938)--arrives with a British force. During the
battle, according to Wace, Boice attempts to capture Peter and
the two engage in battle. Then Gawain from one side and Ider
and Guerin from the other make their way to Boice and Peter,
taking the latter as their prisoner. The Morte Arthure

account again gives greater emphasis to Gawain. In the
English poem when Peter first rebuffs the British, his forces
take Boice prisoner. This act and the other losses they
suffer cause Arthur's men to be "Alle to-stonayede with the
stokes [? strokes] of tha steryne knyghtez" (1436). Sir
Idrus then arrives and the British regroup. Gawain, angered
by the losses the British have sustained, performs great
deeds with his sword Galuth, including the rescue of Boice at
the same time he is holding off the senator Peter. This
rescue raises the fallen spirits of the British forces.
Idrus then captures Peter, and the battle turns against the
Romans.

With this episode emphasizing Gawain's valor and impor-
tance, the poet prepares us for the role Gawain will play
later in the poem. Equally important, however, he enhances
the portrait of Arthur through his description of the dedi-
cation of such brave and valorous knights as Gawain. Even
though Arthur may not appear in person on the battlefield,
we are still aware of his influence on the course of events.
First, we have the use of his name as a battle-cry (1412,
1490). Second, we have Gawain's lament over the Romans'
temporary superiority:

> . . . we lurkede vndyr lee as lowrande wreches!
> I like neuer one my lorde the dayes of my lyfe,
> And we so lytherly hyme helpe, that hyme so wele
>   lykede![46]
>   (1446-8.)

Finally, with a touch borrowed from the chronicle, the poet

has the victorious Idrus defer to Arthur's wishes in the
handling of Peter (1511-4).

When we do see Arthur after the battle, we hear him
offer a prayer of thanksgiving that his losses in the battle
were slight. The prayer is important because of the pious
sentiment, similar to that of his statement after the death
of the giant, which leads Arthur to a modest acknowledgement
of God's supremacy over the course of human events:

> Desteny and doughtynes of dedys of armes,
> Alle es demyd and delte at Dryghtynez wille!
> $\qquad$ (1563-4.)

The piety expressed in this prayer, as Finlayson notes, "is
clearly a deliberate part of the poetic pattern, not just
a conventional platitude."[47]

The next episode in the Morte Arthure, Cador's battle
with the Romans on the road to Paris, offers an interesting
comparison and contrast to what we have just seen. In this
episode Arthur charges a company of knights under Cador's
command with the delivery of Peter and other prisoners to
the provost of Paris for safe-keeping. On their way the
British come upon a company of Romans dispatched by Lucius
to ambush them and rescue their prisoners. In Wace, where
Cador is only one of four commanders of the force going to
Paris, the Romans surprise the Britons and force them into
battle. In the Morte Arthure, however, Cador sends advance
scouts, including Clegis, to see that the way is clear. They
soon discover the Romans, and Clegis engages in a round of

verbal bravado with them. Then Clegis returns to tell Cador that 50,000 Romans await them ahead:

> Thay hafe the furthe for-sette alle of the faire
>   watyre,
> That fayfully of force feghte vs byhowys;
> ffor thus vs schappes to daye, schortly to telle,
> Whedyre we schone or schewe, schyft as the lykes.
>   (1714-7.)

As we should expect, Cador chooses to do battle, and he exhorts his men to valor with a speech that, Everett observes, "reads like a fourteenth-century version of one from The Battle of Maldon."[48] In the end, as we should expect, Cador and his men carry the day, though they lose fourteen of Arthur's greatest knights in the battle.

This episode, as a whole, is very curious and resists easy interpretation, especially in view of Arthur's scolding response to Cador's report of the battle. With some very colorful (if borrowed) rhetoric, William Matthews charges that Cador's motive for leading his forces into battle against the Romans "is the vanity of courage, the desire to seek the bubble reputation even in the cannon's mouth."[49] He reminds us that Cador, in his speech in the giant's tower, "had displayed a thoughtless eagerness for war, thinking it an opportunity to escape from frivolous idleness." What underlies this interpretation is revealed in the following statement from Matthews, "In this battle, he scorns the wise caution of Cleges, who urges that they should retreat before the overwhelming Roman forces."[50] A careful reading

of the episode reveals two problems with this statement.
Despite Brock's gloss on 1716-7 ("Sir Clegis . . . suggests
a retreat."[51]) Clegis, who has spent some 55 lines tossing
challenges back and forth with the Romans, does not "urge"
retreat. He reports the strength and position of the Romans
and leaves the decision to Cador "Whedyre we schone or schewe,
schyft as the lykes." In fact, his line, "That fayfully of
force feghte vs byhowys," seems to suggest the opposite of
a retreat.[52] Moreover, it is not clear that the number of
Romans is so important as Matthews wants us to believe.
Clegis informs Cador that the Romans are "ffifty thosandez"
strong (1710). Yet in the midst of the battle when "ffyfty
thosande of folke was fellide at ones!" (1851), all of
whom seem to be Romans, the battle still goes on. Given
that such numbers are always preposterous in romance and
that we do not know the number of Cador's forces, it is
futile to argue about numbers.[53] The advantage that the
Romans enjoy is geographical: like the British the day
before, they are in a wood (see 1645, 1713, 1723, 1765,
1896). This fact explains why they are willing to wait until
Cador decides to fight with them. And it also explains why
Arthur--himself a wily strategist, as we shall see--tells
Cador:

> To putte mene in perille, it es no pryce holdene,
> Bot the partyes ware puruayede, and powere arayede;
> When they ware stade on a strenghe, thou sulde hafe
>   with-stondene,
> Bot ȝif thowe wolde alle my steryne stroye fore the
>   nonys!
>
> (1924-7; italics added.)

Viewed in light of this understanding of the language
of the poem, Cador's actions are somewhat more comprehensible
and perhaps even less irresponsible than Matthews would have
us believe. (This is not, after all, another Charge of the
Light Brigade.) Earlier, in discussing the account of the
first battle, we saw that the poet is very much aware of the
psychology and morale of armies. By his terms (and the
dramatic rallying powers of the Black Prince, for example,
suggest that his terms are by no means unique), only devotion
to a valiant and dedicated leader can bring an army to
victory. Note how the turns of battle on the preceding day
are affected by the presence of Peter, the capture of Boice,
Gawain's rescue of Boice, and the capture of Peter. Thus,
to expect Cador, Arthur's own heir (1944), to turn and run
from the Romans would not be at all reasonable by the ethic
of the battlefield, even if we were not aware of his own
personal love of valor. As Cador suggests, by running from
battle with the Romans only because they occupy a superior
position, he would become an object of ridicule:

> It ware schame that we scholde schone for so
> lyttyle!
> Sir Lancelott salle neuer laughe, that with the
> kyng lengez,
> That I sulde lette my waye for lede appone erthe.
> (1719-21.)

By the most severe moral lights, of course, reputation may
be merely a bubble. In time of war, however, it is suicidal
to insist on such harsh and often blinding lights. It may be

that in this scene--which contains an extraordinary amount
of dialogue for a battle scene--the poet is reminding us of
the importance of reputation. The insults traded by Clegis
and the Romans before the battle and by Cador and the King of
Lebe during the battle, as well as the words of Cador to his
men, certainly point in this direction.

In his account of the battle, the poet gives an entirely
favorable picture of Cador as warrior and leader. His speech
to his men, as Everett's comparison suggests, is very impres-
sive:

> Thynke one riche renoune of the Rounde Table,
> And late it neuer be refte vs fore Romayne in
>   erthe;
> ffeyne ʒow noghte feyntly, ne frythes no wapyns,
> Bot luke ʒe fyghte faythefully, frekes ʒour
>   selfene.
>
> (1732-5.)

His battlefield strategy, albeit bloodthirsty by some stan-
dards, is clever and necessary. Holding his experienced men
in reserve, Cador uses inexperienced knights--"Oure newe
mene" (1829)--to draw the Romans from their cover. His words
over the body of the dead Berill are touching, and they form
a sharp contrast to the taunting of the King of Lebe. With
his killing of that unpleasant king and his words over the
king's body, Cador gains added stature and dignity:

> Thow killyde my cosyne, my kare es the lesse!
> Kele the nowe in the claye, and comforthe thi
>   selfene!
> Thow skornede vs lang ere with thi skornefulle
>   wordez,
> And nowe has thow cheuede soo; it es thyne awene
>   skathe!
>
> (1838-41.)

Still the problem remains; what are we to make of

Arthur's scolding of Cador? If we accept the foregoing
reading of the episode, then we are left with the conclusion
that the speech reveals more about Arthur than about Cador.
In the action of the preceding day, Gawain's slaying of
Gayous in the Roman camp--also a response involving a concern
for reputation--was no more reckless than Cador's stand
against the Romans. Yet we do not hear that Arthur chides
Gawain. Clearly, Arthur's reaction to Cador's report is a
very natural anger, resulting from the exceptionally frus-
trating news that he has lost fourteen of his most valued
men.[54] Ideally perhaps, Arthur should offer a prayer of
thanksgiving for the victory and for the fact that he has
lost _only_ fourteen knights in a very difficult fight.
Another prayer from Arthur at this point, repeating the
victory-prayer pattern now established, would probably seem
mechanical and unconvincing. Or, it might even create the
impression of a monkish Arthur. Instead we have a very
understandable outburst that makes Arthur seem very human.
As Finlayson points out in one of his studies of the poem,

> Our author appears to intend to portray Arthur as a
> great hero and courteous king, but at the same time
> makes him (in a limited way, to be sure) a
> realizable human being who owes his good fortune
> equally to his own virtue and to the grace of god,
> so that his later fall may be more than the usual
> medieval tragedy caused by an inscrutable
> fortune.[55]

When we consider exactly what Arthur says in this
speech, we can also see that the speech is important as more

than just a general humanizing touch. Consider particularly his statement--"To putte mene in perille, it is no pryce holdene,/ Bot the partyes ware puruayde, and the powere arayede" (1924-5)--in relation to what happens in the next episode. Arthur is a strategist, a planner. (Recall the careful instructions he gives Mordred before leaving Britain.) When he discovers that Lucius intends to shut himself up in "Awguste" (1967), Arthur immediately moves to prevent him. The siege of a city--recall Calais!--was an extremely time-consuming exercise that could be very costly in human life. Therefore, Arthur races to overtake Lucius' army, and he arranges his army with great care to forestall any possible entrance into the city. His strategy, of course, is success-ful. Here and throughout the first half of the poem, Arthur shows he is more than an equal match in a fight in which "the partyes ware puruayde, and powere arayede." His words to Cador suggest that Arthur fails to recognize that one cannot always face the enemy on grounds of his own choosing. Soon he will discover an enemy that is more subtle and does not permit easy strategy.

For the moment, however, Arthur is triumphant, and the poet takes pains to emphasize the dramatic brilliance of the triumph. The battle against Lucius begins with the fulfill-ment of the vows made by Valiant of Wales, Ewain fitz Urien, Lancelot, and Loth at the council in the giant's tower. From that point onward, Arthur is at the center of the action.

When the giants overwhelm his men, Arthur comes bravely to take his stand, spitting scorn at these "bare-legyde boyes, that one the bente houys!" (2122). As he "Kuttes hyme [Golapas the giant] euene by the knees clenly in sondyre" (2125), Arthur jests scornfully:

> "Come down," quod the kynge, "and karpe to thy
>   ferys!
> Thow art to hye by the half. I hete the in
>   trouthe!
> Thow salle be handsomere in hye, with the helpe of
>   my Lorde!"
>
>   (2126-8.)

Even William Matthews finds Arthur's conduct "admirable" in this scene. "He directs the battle, encourages his forces, brings his own courage and strength to rally them in moments of difficulty, exacts vengeance for the death of Kay and others, slays Lucius the emperor with his own hands."[56]

When Lucius' men turn and run, Arthur invites Cador to join him in a massacre:

> "Cosyne of Corenwaile, take kepe to thi selfene,
> That no captayne by kepyde for none siluer,
> Or sir Kayous dede be cruelly vengede!"
> "Nay," sais sir Cador, "so me Cryste helpe!
> Thare ne es kaysere ne kynge, that vndire Criste
>   ryngnes,
> That I ne schalle kille colde dede be crafte of my
>   handez!"
>
>   (2262-7.)

Lest the tenderhearted condemn Arthur for his attitude, they would do well to consider what a recent editor of Froissart observed on the grim elements in the Chronicles:

> Indeed, in reading Froissart with one's mind free
> of Victorian preoccupations with 'very perfect
> gentle knights' . . . one's first impression is of

> crudely savage small wars and private feuds in
> emergent nations not far removed from tribalism.
> Over this brutal reality were pasted a few laudatory
> adjectives such as 'noble' and 'gallant' which
> deceived no one, though they may have made them
> feel better. On examination this too is an exag-
> geration, because the savagery of fourteenth-
> century Europe was tempered and sometimes control-
> led by a tradition of order and culture. Its
> guardians were precisely the same knightly class
> which on occasion massacred its prisoners and
> tortured its enemies in public.[57]

We must also refrain from an overscrupulous reaction

to the message Arthur sends with Lucius' corpse. Comparing

it to the jesting of Golapas, Matthews contends that the

"sardonic humor" in the message "is hardly . . . admirable,

even in medieval thinking: the moralists condemn such

inhumanity, and other tellers of the story prefer to make

this occasion an example of Arthur's generosity toward a

dead foe."[58] Matthews' statement, however, is not very

accurate. In his <u>Historia</u>, Geoffrey tells us, "Hostes

quoque suos miseratus precepit indigenis sepelire eos.

corpusque lucii ad senatum deferri. mandans non debere aliud

[both Bern and Harlech MSS. insert "tributum" at this point]

ex brittania reddi."[59] In a like fashion, Wace reports,

> Le cors fist de l'empereür
> Prendre e guarder a grant enur;
> A Rome en biere l'enveia
> E a cels de Rome manda
> Que de Bretaine qu'il teneit
> Altre treü ne lur deveit,
> E qui treü li requerreit
> Altretel li enveereit.

(12987-94.)

Finally, in Layamon's account Arthur has three kings bear

Lucius' body to Rome with the following message:

> And grette Rom-weren alle.
> mid graete ane huxe.
> and seide þat he heom sende.
> þat gauel of his londe.
> and efte wolde heo alswa.
> senden heom gretinge ma.
> ʒif heo ʒirnen wolde.
> of Artures golden.

(27880-7.)

As we can easily see, the scornful jest is not the invention
of the Morte Arthure poet. The "other tellers of the story,"
one of whom was probably the source of the Morte Arthure, use
the same scornful jest. In fact, Heinz Reinhold, discussing
the humor of "Hohn und Spott" in medieval English poetry,
suggests that such scornful statements are conventional:
"Den Höhepunkt bilden natürlich auch hier die Hohnreden an
der Leiche des erschlagenen Feindes. Sie sind gewisser-
massen zum Ritus geworden, ohne sie geht es nicht ab."[60]

What is disturbing in the poet's description of Arthur's
victory is the notable absence of a prayer such as we heard
after the death of the giant of St. Michael's Mount. As we
said earlier, Arthur's failure to offer a prayer after
Cador's victory is easily enough understandable. However,
in this case, the moment of Arthur's greatest victory, his
failure to offer thanksgiving is not at all understandable.
Perhaps we have a lapse on the poet's part. Perhaps, though
the absence of such a prayer at this point in Malory's
version suggests otherwise, the original version of the poem
had a prayer which has since dropped out. More likely, we

have an omission of some considerable significance in the
thematic development of the _Morte Arthure_. Although the
poet makes no reference to the fact, we are about to see
an entirely new phase in Arthur's career. Henceforth, the
poet will no longer portray Arthur as an agent of God, bring-
ing death and destruction to evil "tyrauntez that tourmentez
thy pople." In the remainder of the poem, we shall see
Arthur confronting evil from an unexpected source--the evil
within himself and within those he holds most dear. His
failure to offer a prayer acknowledging the divine source
of all man's strength is the first step in a process that
will culminate in his fall and eventually in a complete
awareness of his weakness.

[1]The poet describes the loading of the ships in some very spirited lines which correspond in a few details to the equivalent passage in Wace. For example, the French poet enumerates some of the items brought on board:

> <u>Helmes</u>, <u>escuz</u>, halbercs porter,
> Lances drecier, <u>chevals</u> tirer.
> <div align="right">(11199-200; italics added.)</div>

Similarly, the English poet tells us the British

> Bryngez <u>blonkes</u> one bourde, and burlyche <u>helmes</u>;
> Trussez in tristly trappyde <u>stedes</u>,
> Tentez, and othire toylez, and <u>targez</u> fulle ryche.
> <div align="right">(730-2; italics added.)</div>

Unfortunately, the similarities are very general and such as we might expect to find in any two passages of this nature.

P. Branscheid, "Verschiedenes über die Quellen des Stabreimenden Morte Arthure," <u>Anglia</u> (<u>Anzeiger</u>), 8 (1885), 187, finds a parallel in "Al vent guardent e as <u>esteilles</u>" (11229; italics added) and "Lukkes to the lade-<u>sterne</u>, whene the lyghte faillez (751; italics added). Once again, the similarity is very general.

[2]These details, puzzling because they do not seem appropriate in a description that otherwise emphasizes the nobility of the dragon, are the italicized portions of the following lines:

> Come dryfande ouer the depe <u>to drenschene hys pople</u>,
> Ewene walkande owte of the weste landez,
> Wanderande <u>vnworthyly</u> ouere the wale ythez.
> <div align="right">(761-3; italics added.)</div>

Karl Heinz Göller, König Arthur in der englischen Literatur des späten Mittelalters, Palaestra, 238 (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), p. 117, suggests that the detail in line 761 (repeated by the philosopher in line 816: "That come dryfande ouer the deepe, to drynchene thy pople") is a foreshadowing of the unhappy end of Arthur's efforts: "Die weisen Philosophen wiederholen diese Tatsache, können aber nicht erklären, wieso der Drache, der den König bezeichnet, das eigene Volk mit Verderben bedroht."

[3]It is difficult to agree with Heinz Reinhold's view that the description has a humorous effect: "Ein wahres Musterbeispiel für die Neigung, humoristische Wirkung durch die Darstellung des Unästhetischen zu erzielen, bildet die Schilderung des Äusseren des Riesen vom Mont St. Michel im alliterierenden Morte Arthure--einer Gestalt, der, wie wir noch sehen werden, auch sonst humoristische Züge anhaften" (Humoristische Tendenzen in der englischen Dichtung des Mittelalters [Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1953], p. 104).

[4]Similarly, Geoffrey of Monmouth, The Historia Regum Brittaniae, ed. Acton Griscom (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929), p. 469, tells us, "At arturus aliud coniectabat. existimans ob se & imperatorem talem uisionem contigisse." Layamon, Brut, ed. Sir Frederick Madden (London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1847), simply avoids giving any interpretation of the dream:

aelc bi his witte.
wisdom saeiden
þis sweuen araehten.

<div align="right">(25627-9.)</div>

[5]Layamon also stresses the king's highly emotional reaction to the dream:

þene king hit auerde.
þa þe king him awoc.
swiþe he wes idraecched.
and granein agon.
ludere stefenen.

<div align="right">(25554-8.)</div>

[6]John Finlayson, "Arthur and the Giant of St. Michael's Mount," MAE, 33 (1964), 119-20. William Matthews, The Tragedy of Arthur (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), pp. 128-9, admits that Arthur serves "as the hand of God" in this "exploit against an imperialistic monster," but offers this alternate view of Arthur's conduct:

> In making Arthur forego the help of the two knights who assist him in other versions, the poet may have had in mind to prepare for the rash self-reliance that Arthur displays on later occasions, but the king's objective in this fight is admirable.

(In all the chronicle accounts, Kay and Bedevere accompany Arthur to the mountain-top, but the king makes them swear to remain apart unless he has a desperate need for them.)

[7]Finlayson, "Arthur and the Giant," 113.

[8]Finlayson, "Arthur and the Giant," 114.

[9]Velma Bourgeois Richmond, Laments for the Dead in Medieval Narrative (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University

Press, 1966), p. 78.

[10]For an exposition of the idea that the lament is a conventional device, see Richmond, pp. 13-28.

[11]Werner Habicht, _Die Gebärde in englischen Dichtungen des Mittelalters_ (Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Abhandlungen, Neue Folge, Heft 46, 1959), p. 96.

[12]John Finlayson, "Rhetorical 'Descriptio' of Place in the Alliterative _Morte Arthure_," _MP_, 61 (1963-4), 3.

[13]John Finlayson, ed., _Morte Arthure_ (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), pp. 21-2.

[14]R. W. V. Elliott, "Landscape and Rhetoric in Middle-English Alliterative Poetry," _Melbourne Critical Review_, 4 (1961), 67, offers a different view of this passage:

> Arthur's arming, described at some length, heightens the tension. He sets off, all ready, with his "brade aschez", and one expects him to plunge forthwith into a wilderness of rocks and cliffs, bare, desolate, forbidding, to meet his man--or rather his giant. Instead, the poet makes us skip across as pretty a daisy-meadow as ever graced a medieval vision of Dan Cupid, complete with catalogue of falcons and pheasants and thrushes, and "of the nyghtegale notez the noisez was swette" (929). The incongruity is so deflating that it is with difficulty one recovers to welcome "the colde wynde" which eventually does blow across the scene when Arthur at length reaches "the cragge wyth cloughes fulle hye".

[15]Finlayson, "Rhetorical 'Descriptio,'" 4.

[16]As Dorothy Everett, Essays on Middle English Literature, ed. P. Kean (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 64, notes, the cold wind is "a touch that did not escape Malory."

[17]See Wace, 11561-92.

[18]Finlayson, "The Concept," p. 261.

[19]Finlayson, "The Concept," p. 262.

[20]Finlayson, ed., Morte Arthure, p. 51, n. to line 1103. Of course, "Harske as a hunde-fisch" (1084) reminds us of Chaucer's famous description of January.

[21]Reinhold, p. 104, n. 1, offers this observation: "Für die Heidenporträts der chansons de geste sind die 'roten,glUhUnden Augen' typisch; wahrscheinlich spielt hier die Vorstellung vom Aussehen des Teufels mit herein." If Reinhold is correct, we may have an explanation for the difference between Wace's dragon--"E de ses oilz flambe getout' (11252)--and the Morte Arthure's dragon-- "And syche a vennymous flayre flowe fro his lyppez" (772): the Morte Arthure poet probably changed the origin of the flame to avoid possible association of the dragon with the devil.

[22]Finlayson, "Arthur and the Giant," 117.

[23]Larry D. Benson, _Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight_ (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1965), pp. 139-40.

[24]The poet uses "'that hende' once, 'Arthur' three times, and 'kyng' nine times" (Benson, _Art_, p. 140).

[25]He uses "reke, segge, sott, renke, gloton, hulk, bierne, schalk, lede, carl, warlowe, theef. Some of the nouns, such as 'theef,' are pejorative, but five of them are the alliterative synonyms for 'man'" (Benson, _Art_, p. 140).

[26]Benson, _Art_, p. 140.

[27]Finlayson, ed., _Morte Arthure_, pp. 17-8.

[28]Finlayson, "Arthur and the Giant," 118.

[29]William Caxton, _The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry_, ed. Alfred T. P. Byles, E. E. T. S., 168 (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 81. See also Finlayson, "Arthur and the Giant," pp. 118-9.

[30]The work, which Caxton translated from a French version, was originally written by Ramón Lull, probably in 1276-86, to describe the practices of chivalry that were common in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. That the work was still being translated in the latter half of the fifteenth century (by both Caxton and Gilbert Hay) may

suggest that the ideas it contained may have had some currency even at that time. For a full discussion of Lull and the background of his work, as well as the various translations of it, see Byles' introduction to his edition, pp. xi-xlii.

[31]Reinhold, p. 102, has commented on the ironic appropriateness of line 1123--"Iust to the genitales, and jagged thame in sondre!"--which describes a punishment befitting his violation of the duchess of Brittany.

[32]Göller, König Arthur, p. 106, in his discussion of the fight, compares the Morte Arthure to the Beowulf:

> Der Riese sieht bald ein, dass er mit seiner eisernen Keule nichts ausrichten kann und verlegt sich aufs Ringen. Arthur nimmt auch diese unritterliche Kampfesart an, und ebenso wie Beowulf Grendel im Ringkampf besiegt und zu Tode verletzt, beherrscht hier Arthur seinen an Körperkraft überlegenen Gegner, mit dem er eng verschlungen. . . den Felsen herunterrollt und schliesslich vor Kay und Bedwer landet. Auch das im Beowulf benutzte Messer ist an ähnlicher Stelle zu finden.

Göller does not consider the fight in relation to its antecedent in the chronicle.

[33]In Wace (11602-8) and the other chronicles Hoel orders the building of the chapel. None of the chronicles mentions distribution of a treasure to the commons. Karl Heinz Göller, König Arthur, p. 107, intent on establishing a relationship between the Morte Arthure and the Germanic saga, offers this comment:

> Der bezeichnendste--bisher noch nicht gesehene
> Unterschied gegenüber den Quellen un Vorlagen
> besteht aber darin, dass der Riese auch einen
> Schatz verwaltet und hütet. . . . Nunmehr
> übernimmt der Riese die Funktion des Drachens, und
> Arthur vereinigt in seiner Person die drei
> Hauptmotive des Drachenkampfes der germanischen
> Heldensage: er ist Ortnit, indem er auszieht,
> um Land und Leute vor dem Zugriff des Riesen zu
> schützen; Seyfried, indem er eine entführte Jung-
> frau befreien will, und Sigmund, da er den Hort des
> Riesen gewinnt und auf das Volk verteilen lässt.

[34]The account of Lucius' devastation may have its inspiration in these lines from Wace describing Arthur's movement through France:

> France passa, vint en Burguine
> A Ostum vuleit dreit aler,
> Kar ol aveit nuveler
> Que cil de Rome la veneient
> E la cuntree purperneient;
> Luces Hiber les cundueit
> Ki de Rome l'enur teneit.

(11616-22.)

Interestingly, Arnold provides a variant reading of 11620: "Qui la contree destruiroient." If the _Morte Arthure_ poet knew a version of Wace containing this form of the line, the source of his inspiration would be clear.

[35]H. J. Hewitt, _The Organization of War Under Edward III_ (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), p. 116.

[36]Hewitt, pp. 1, 19, 156-7.

[37]Hewitt, pp. 15-6.

[38]Hewitt, p. 156.

[39]May McKisack, The Fourteenth Century, 1307-1399 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 442.

[40]W. O. Evans, "'Cortaysye' in Middle English," MS, 29 (1967), 148, comments on the meaning of the word in this context: "Cortaysye would sometimes seem to imply valour, the spirit or quality of bravery which impels a knight to fight. . . . It is difficult to be certain of the exact implications of the word here; its centre would seem to be 'spirit of valour,' and even if reputation is involved, it will be reputation for valour."

[41]William Matthews, p. 126, includes cruel among "terms of ambiguous meaning" in the Morte Arthure. Larry Benson, "The Alliterative Morte Arthure and Medieval Tragedy," TSL, 11 (1966), 86, n. 9. offers a more accurate view of the word: "We must remember that when the word 'cruel' appears in the Morte Arthure it usually has the meaning 'stern, unyielding' (cf. Middle English Dictionary, s.v. 'cruel'). This quality was necessary, as was a touch of cruelty in its bloodier sense, for the king's duty, as John of Salisbury tells us in Polycraticus, was to wield the 'bloody sword' of the state."

[42]Hewitt, p. 117.

[43]Finlayson, ed., Morte Arthure, p. 58, calls attention to the parallels in a note to 1341: "Note how the author

proceeds by a simple parallel method; first, Arthur's feast
is interrupted by an arrogant message, then both sides gather
armies and invade France, and now Lucius has his arrogant
words returned. These simple strong lines are well suited to
a story which was probably narrated orally."

[44]Finlayson, ed., Morte Arthure, p. 56, n. to lines
1248-95. These are the same unsavory elements we noticed
in the earlier catalog of Lucius' forces (Morte Arthure
570-609); see above, chapter 2, n. 34.

[45]Finlayson, ed., Morte Arthure, p. 57, reminds of
the tradition of verbal attack in a note to line 1325:
"His [Gawain's] words here are in the heroic tradition, where
combatants engage in elaborate invective before battle, as
do Oliver and Fierabras in Fierabras."

[46]In a note to this line, John Finlayson, ed., Morte
Arthure, p. 62, remarks, "This speech expresses a typical
heroic sentiment: that warriors are defending not only
their lives, but also the honour of their lord."

[47]Finlayson, ed., Morte Arthure, p. 66, n. to line 1564.

[48]Everett, p. 62.

[49]Matthews, p. 130.

[50]Finlayson, "The Concept," p. 264.

[51]Brock's marginal gloss to line 1716, p. 51, is a misreading.

[52]In The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, ed. Eugene Vinaver, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 213, Clegis clearly encourages a battle: "And therefore, lordynges, fyght you behovys, other ellys shunte for shame, chose whether ye lykys."

[53]John Finlayson, "The Concept," p. 264, follows Matthews' view that the Roman advantage is numerical. R. M. Lumiansky, p. 107, offers a more accurate interpretation: "Arthur's point [in his rebuke of Cador] is that a wise leader does not risk the lives of his men except in planned battle" ("The Alliterative Morte Arthure, the Concept of Medieval Tragedy, and the Cardinal Virtue Fortitude," in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Vol. 3, ed. John M. Headley [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968], p. 107).

[54]K. H. Göller, König Arthur, p. 109, offers the following comment on Arthur's anger:

> In merkwürdigem Gegensatz zu dieser unbeugsamen
> Starrheit steht die Gefühlsbetontheit des Herrschers,
> der öfters eine unverständliche Rührung an den Tag
> legt und sich nicht einmal seiner Tränen schämt.
> So übermannt ihn nach dem Bericht Cadors über den
> Verlust der vierzehen Ritter im siegreichen Kampf
> gegen die Römer eine so tiefe Trauer, dass er die
> Hande ringt und weint.

(Göller follows Matthews in relating Arthur's frequent piques

of anger to Alexandrian antecedents. See Göller, p. 108; Matthews, p. 40.)

[55]Finlayson, "The Concept," p. 263.

[56]Matthews, p. 131.

[57]Geoffrey Brereton, trans., Froissart: Chronicles (Baltimore: Penguin, 1968), pp. 18-9. In this connection, we might recall the attitude, bloodthirsty by our standards, toward vengeance in so civilized a work as Piers the Plowman, B-Text, ed. W. W. Skeat (1869; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1950), Passus III, 257ff., in which Conscience reminds Lady Meed of the fate of Agag and Samuel (Exodus 18; 1 Samuel 15).

[58]Matthews, p. 131.

[59]Geoffrey, Historia, pp. 495-6.

[60]Reinhold, p. 32.

Chapter 4

Tragic Dimensions

I

The English chronicle tradition--as represented by Geoffrey, Wace, Layamon, and Robert Mannyng of Brunne-- describes Arthur clearly and simply as the most splendid figure in British history. Insofar as the chronicle portrait of Arthur has any thematic meaning or significance, it is almost entirely political: Arthur represents the fulfillment of a grand imperial destiny for the British--and, by transference, English--nation. (Even Layamon's work ultimately remains within these narrow thematic confines because he fails to explore and develop the interesting complexities with which he endows his Arthur.) Though closely related to the chronicle tradition, the Morte Arthure departs sharply from this tradition in its concern for the human dimensions of Arthur. The Morte Arthure poet, as we have seen in the preceding analysis, envisions his hero as more than a brilliant military leader and a splendid emperor. With his dramatic account of Arthur's further adventures in the second half of the Morte Arthure, the poet takes even more liberties with the chronicle story than in the first half. Obviously intent to tell a story that is both "Plesande and profitabille," the Morte Arthure poet explores with some considerable sophistication and artistry the tragic implications of Arthur's final battles

and his death.

The one critical point on which most current students of the poem agree, though for varying reasons, is that the Morte Arthure is a medieval tragedy. John Finlayson sums up the common area of agreement: "The overall theme of the poem is the Rise and Fall of a Christian warrior-king."[1] The disagreements among the critics concern the precise nature of the tragic structure in the Morte Arthure and the meaning that emerges from this structure. For the most part, the source of this disagreement lies in the critics' individual readings of the poem, a matter to which we shall give our attention later in this chapter. For the present, however, we shall turn to the other source of the critics' disagreement--the lack of a generally accepted definition of medieval tragedy.

On the one hand, we have William Matthews who argues that "the theme of guilt and retribution . . . inheres in many tragedies of medieval literature."[2] Despite the fact that Chaucer's Monk's definition of tragedy contains no reference to such a theme, Matthews urges that an examination of the stories told by the Monk reveals that "Few indeed of the Monk's heroes are guiltless or undeserving of the retribution that comes upon them." From this evidence, as well as some consideration of several other medieval tragic works, Matthews ventures toward more inclusive generalizations about medieval tragedy:

For Chaucer's spokesman, human failings rather than

> any irrational world force are the direct cause and
> occasion of these celebrated falls from prosperity
> into misery.
>
> Since this is the pattern of human responsibi-
> lity for a tragic fall that was normal at the time
> when the Morte Arthure was written, it may fairly
> be expected that this tragedy of fortune, too, was
> composed on the premise that Arthur or his knights
> must have deserved the calamity that befell them.

Similarly, John Finlayson argues that the "scheme" of the

Morte Arthure is "not simply one of the rise and inevitable

fall of a great man, nor merely an example of mutability or the

caprice of 'False Fortune.'"[3] Like Matthews, Finlayson be-

lieves that Arthur's fall is retribution for his sins, though

he disagrees with Matthews' explanation of the sins.

Opposed to this view is Larry Benson who, arguing solely

from Chaucer's Monk's definition, warns against looking for a

tragic flaw or hamartia in medieval tragedy. Benson, however,

does not deny that a tragic flaw may exist in the medieval

tragic figure. (In fact, he suggests that Arthur suffers

from hybris.[4]) His point is that in medieval tragedy one

should not expect to find Aristotelian elements: "if a

medieval tragic hero has a fault, it is not so much in himself

as in the code to which he has given allegiance, and the only

significant moral choice is the original decision to strive

for wordly success."[5] In short, Benson denies that medieval

tragedy develops on a pattern of sin and retribution.

> The tension in a work like the Morte Arthure is
> . . . between two goods, between the Christian
> detachment that is necessary for ultimate happiness
> even on this earth and the complete engagement with

an earthly ideal that is necessary for heroism.
That is why we finally admire the medieval tragic
hero for the very qualities that lead to his fall.[6]

These conflicting positions are not so very far apart as
might appear, if we consider that each side is to some extent
overstating its case. To understand the entire problem more
clearly, we shall turn briefly to Willard Farnham's classic
study of medieval tragedy. From his survey of the examples of
tragedy in the writings of Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Lydgate,
Farnham concludes that the concept of tragedy in the medieval
world was continually developing. Thus, it would seem that
one must be careful not to draw too narrow limits when
attempting to describe medieval tragedy. As Farnham him-
self observes, "Tragedy as a critical term was a wide and
capacious net in the Middle Ages."[7]

What we may call the tragic literature of the Middle Ages
derives, of course, from the ascetic de contemptu mundi
doctrine which maintains that trust in this corrupt, fallen
world leads only to an unhappy end. With Boccaccio's De
Casibus, the first work to give "a definite form to the
vague medieval conception of tragedy,"[8] Farnham shows that
the Italian writer set out "to write one more piece of
testimony to the utterly fickle ways of Fortune and the need
of scorning the world." Perhaps as an inevitable consequence
of his artistic genius, Boccaccio went beyond simple illustra-
tion of an idea: "immersing himself in the details of his
stories, asking himself why this man fell and why that, he

lets himself make or imply answers which cannot be fitted into the orthodox scheme of a De Contemptu Mundi."[9] While Farnham stops far short of suggesting that Boccaccio conceived of tragedy with its basis in character and event, he does suggest that the Italian poet ventured close to such a conception in at least a few of his narratives.

Of more immediate interest to us is the treatment of tragedy in the writings of Chaucer, who may have been a contemporary of the Morte Arthure poet. For a number of reasons, not the least of which is its derivation from Boethius and Boccaccio, the Monk's definition has been assumed to be Chaucer's own authoritative statement on the nature of tragedy. Farnham, however, warns against accepting the Monk as Chaucer's spokesman.[10] From the evidence of the Troilus and Criseyde, Farnham asserts that Chaucer's conception of tragedy, like Boccaccio's, embodies "that curiously paradoxical partnership between scorn of the world and espousal of the world."[11] In other words, the Troilus embodies those popular contrarieties--the misery of the human condition and the dignity of the human condition--that were such immensely fascinating concerns for the so-called Gothic imagination from Boethius to Innocent III and far beyond. Discussing the conflict of these contrarieties in Troilus and Criseyde, Farnham aptly concluded,

> Chaucer makes the philosophy of the Troilus very
> thoroughly deterministic, . . . and quite possibly
> he does so in accordance with his own well-considered

theory of life; but when he comes to distill his actual experience of life into this long poem, he makes his creatures act vitally, that is, purposefully and hopefully. It would seem that we are here face to face with the truth of the Johnsonian dictum that no matter how successfully theory may place itself against freedom of the will, experience is always for it.[12]

Finally, turning to Lydgate, Farnham finds a clearly enunciated pattern of sin and retribution in several of the tragedies he narrates in his _Fall of Princes_. It would seem that as an avowed moralist, Lydgate was torn between the traditional idea of blind Fortune, on one hand, and the idea of human guilt and responsibility, on the other. The result is, as a recent student of Lydgate concludes, a contradiction from which Lydgate "fails to extricate himself. . . . He condemns wicked Fortune as false, fickle, double-dealing, and deceitful, but then goes on to say that it is not Fortune that is blind, but the tyrants themselves."[13] Farnham argues that as a result of this divided attitude, Lydgate plays an important part in advancing medieval tragedy toward the Elizabethan tragedy of character and event.

From this brief consideration of Farnham's findings, we can come to some tentative conclusions about medieval tragedy, after which we shall look closely at the second half of the _Morte Arthure_ in order to reach more definite conclusions. First, we must admit that we certainly cannot dismiss Benson's argument that in medieval tragedy "the villain is the human condition itself. . . . The hero, like all men, will inevitably fall to death or wretchedness even though he be flawless,

for the lesson of medieval tragedy is simply that man is not the master of his own destiny."[14] Still, as Chaucer's _Troilus_ indicates, we need not assume that a medieval tragedy must be only an exemplum _de contemptu mundi_. An artist with more than a shred of sophistication and self-consciousness, no matter how committed to the _de contemptu_ doctrine, would be likely to recognize that a work presenting only an exposition or illustration of this idea is onesided and unbalanced.[15] Even Innocent III, in his prologue to _De Miseria_, seems to have recognized the limitations of his treatise and thus, proposed to write another in which he would describe "the dignity of human nature; so that, as in the present work the proud man is brought low, in that the humble man would be exalted."[16]

To be completely fair to Benson, we should observe that he is not suggesting that the _Morte Arthure_ is such an un-complicated and unbalanced work. Instead, he argues that the poet maintains "contradictory viewpoints, sincerely admiring and just as sincerely rejecting worldly ideas."[17] Perhaps the problem with Benson's argument is that he fails to con-sider--or at least to give proper emphasis to--the possibility that an author of medieval tragedy can so portray a character that his fall seems less a work of a whimsical and capricious fortune and more a natural outcome of a world in which justice prevails. From such a portrayal to a scheme of sin and retribution is a short and logical step. Indeed, to a more

rational and moral temperament, a tragedy in which the outcome reflects divine justice would probably be more satisfying and perhaps more Christian than a simple portrayal of Fortune as a blind, vindictive force.

The _Morte Arthure_ poet, as we have seen, is concerned not merely with morality, but also with the subtleties and nuances of character and the relation of character to event. When such an author creates a poem reminding us of the ultimate end of human greatness, for which he obviously has great admiration, we should not be surprised to find the poem expressing themes and attitudes more complex and profound than Chaucer's Monk's definition might permit. While his poem may verify the idea that man is not master of his own destiny, we should hardly expect an author of some genius, writing in an age with an increasing concern for realism, to ignore the dramatic potential inherent in this idea. Rather, we should expect him to explore the difficulties of accepting such an idea, the tendency to act in despite of the idea, and the problem of facing the concrete realities which embody the idea. And indeed, as we shall see in the ensuing analysis, the _Morte Arthure_ poet does just that.

Instead of following the chronicle, in which Arthur receives the news of Mordred and Guenevere immediately after his victory over Lucius, the Morte Arthure postpones the report of the treachery and the subsequent fall of Arthur for some 1,000 lines. In these lines the poet adds a further series of victories to the traditional chronicle account of Arthur's adventures. This portion of the poem begins with a council summoned by Arthur "at Lusscheburghe" (2388) several months after the defeat of Lucius. To this council Arthur announces his desire to subdue the duke of Lorraine and then to invade Lombardy and Tuscany, though he proposes to respect the sovereignty of the papal kingdoms in these areas.

John Finlayson regards this council as a major turning point in the dramatic structure of the Morte Arthure:

> It is at this point . . . that Arthur's wars cease to be just defences of the Right and become wars of aggression and acquisition, the categories of unjust wars recognized by the Church and medieval military writers.[18]

A close examination of the scene reveals that while it does represent a turning point, the change it initiates is less drastic than Finlayson would have us believe. If we look, for example, at Arthur's statement to the council, we find that the poem gives no cause for mistrusting Arthur's sincerity. First, his description of the duke of Lorraine as "renke rebelle . . . vn-to my Rownde Table" (2402) and his

association of the duke with the Roman design to "ryotte my landes" (2403) would, given the sympathies established so far in the poem, seem to justify Arthur's desire to subdue him. Second, there would seem to be no apparent reason for disapproving of Arthur's plan to "sette lawe" (2407) in Lombardy and "The tyrauntez of Turkayne [Tuscany] tempeste a littyle" (2408). If the poem was written in the second half of the 14th century, "the tangled state of contemporary Italian politics"[19] was probably widely known in England through the marriage of Lionel of Clarence and Violante Visconti in 1368 and, later, through accounts of the adventures of Hawkwood and company. Thus, Arthur's plan to establish a rule of law and order in these wild Mediterranean lands might well seem a very noble goal.

To understand exactly how the council scene represents a turning point in the poem, we must compare it to the earlier council held in the Giant's Tower near the beginning of the Morte Arthure. Interestingly, the absence of any ceremony in the present scene makes it a curious and colorless contrast to the earlier council. As we may recall, though Arthur remained in control of that earlier assembly, he allowed his men to express their attitudes toward a war with Lucius before proclaiming his own intention. Moreover, the scene in the tower with its series of vows by Arthur's men and his praise of his men for maintaining his honor was a dramatic climax to an artistically arranged series of events intended to capture

audience sympathy for Arthur's cause.[20] Here we have only

the king's own speech announcing his plans, after which his

company "spede at the spurres, with-owttyne speche more"

(2416). The contrast that emerges, while it may not support

Finlayson's entire argument, does indeed suggest that we

have reached a turning point in the poem. Clearly, the poet

is relaxing his grip on our sympathy for Arthur, that sympathy

which to this point he has attempted to hold with almost

unrelenting determination.

In his description of the siege of Metz, the poet's

treatment of Arthur certainly verges on the unsympathetic.

First, the fact that Arthur raises a siege is somewhat

startling if we recall his pains to avoid a siege when

Lucius tried to take refuge in a city. A siege, after all,

was inevitably a long and costly affair. William Matthews,

discussing Arthur's attack on Metz, offers this interesting

observation:

> In similar circumstances, Lucius had sent to Arthur
> an ultimatum which offered some opportunity for a
> peaceful settlement. Arthur's own method is more
> imperious: he marches against Metz with the
> intention of deciding by force of arms "who has
> ryghte to þat rente, by ryche Gode of heuen!"[21]

As we saw earlier (see above, pages 62-4), what Matthews

calls "an ultimatum which offered some opportunity for peace-

ful settlement" was, in fact, an insulting demand which

directed Arthur to submit to degradation or be forced to it.

Nonetheless, Matthews' point is well taken. Arthur fails to

send an embassy to offer either terms of peace or an invita-

tion to war. We are especially surprised if we recall
Arthur's brusque words to Cador:

> To putte mene in perille, it es no pryce holdene,
> Bot the partyes ware puruayede, and powere arayede.
> (1927-5.)

By not trying to draw the duke's forces into open combat,
Arthur makes no attempt to follow his own advice.

Equally disturbing is the exchange of words between
Arthur and Sir Ferrer when the British king puts his own
life in peril by riding without any shield before the walls
of Metz. As the bowmen of Metz direct a volley of arrows at
Arthur and his horse, Sir Ferrer, in rather pointed terms
cautions the king, "a ffoly thowe wirkkes,/ Thus nakede in
thy noblaye to neghe to the walles" (2432-3). Arthur's reply
is, as Matthews describes it, "first an ill-bred scorn of his
adviser and then an arrogant assertion of the right of kings
to commit such follies under the protection of God."[22]
Werner Habicht, in his study, Die Gebärde, argues that
Arthur's conduct is in keeping with the heroic image, "die
Aussenseite des Heldentums,"[23] which we expect of the hero
of a romance. At first glance, Habicht's argument would
seem to have substantial merit. Kings and their lieutenants
commonly rode in the front lines of real, as well as fiction-
al battles because of their concern for their image as
warriors. This concern also motivated such extravagant
behaviour as that of the blind John of Bohemia led on horse-
back at Crécy and that of the ailing Black Prince carried on

a litter to the battlefield at Limoges. Yet the behaviour of Arthur in this particular instance, when viewed closely, still seems unnecessarily foolish. Ferrer's speech, perhaps a bit too pointedly, emphasizes the extreme of Arthur's conduct, his riding too close to the city without a shield or any sort of protective gear--"nakede in thy noblaye," as Ferrer puts it. Nevertheless, the tone of Arthur's reply is most disturbing. His opprobrious description of Ferrer as "bot a fawntkyne" (2440) would be more appropriate if addressed to an enemy, rather than one of his own lieutenants. Also, Arthur's bold assertion, "Salle neuer harlotte haue happe, thorowe helpe of my Lorde,/ To kylle a corownde kynge with krysome enoynttede!" (2446-7), smacks of some of the same arrogance and presumptuousness as Claudius' insistence "There's such divinity doth hedge a king/ That treason can but peep to what it would" (Hamlet IV. V. 121-2). Surely, the tone of Arthur's statement reminds of those branches of pride described by Chaucer's Parson:

> Arrogant is he that thynketh that he hath thilke
> bountees in hym that he hath noght, or weneth that
> he sholde have hem by his desertes, or elles he
> demeth that he be that he nys nat./ . . .
> Presumpcioun is whan a man undertaketh an emprise
> that hym oghte nat do, or elles that he may nat do;
> and this is called Surquidrie.[25]

From this evidence it seems clear that the poet wishes to modify the almost totally sympathetic portrait of Arthur presented earlier in the poem. Nevertheless, it would be rash to conclude that the poet intends to turn his audience

against Arthur at this point. At worst, the poet's treatment evokes an ambivalent attitude. While Arthur's prideful boasting may in this instance seem a vice by contrast to such earlier speeches as that following the death of the Giant, we must recall that this vice is but an exaggeration of what is in other circumstances an heroic virtue. As we saw on numerous occasions in the war with Lucius, such proud words are a psychologically necessary accompaniment of a valiant warrior, for they serve as inspiration to valorous deeds. This fact surely qualifies any excessively harsh judgment we might otherwise make of Arthur at this point.

After "the garnysone . . . at the grete ʒates" (2471) thwarts the first attempt of Arthur's army to capture Metz, there follows one of the most unusual episodes in the poem—the encounter of Gawain and Priamus. The episode seems to be derived from *Fierabras* (or some English redaction of that Old French *chanson* *de* *geste*), in which we find the story of a "heroic encounter between Oliver, whose wounds from a previous battle had not yet healed, and a fearsome, gigantic pagan king in order to maintain the honor of Charlemagne and Christianity."[26] Why the poet chose to incorporate into his poem an adaption of this extremely popular Charlemagne story is not very clear. In fact, the meaning of the episode and its relation to the rest of the poem are questions that most critics avoid. To all appearances, the episode would seem to be easily detachable from the poem and, in the end, to

have little relevance to the portrait of Arthur. Alone among the critics, John Finlayson has attempted to relate it to the poem as a whole.

To understand the significance Finlayson attaches to the Gawain-Priamus episode we must recall that he considers the Morte Arthure a chanson de geste rather than a romance. The distinction he makes between these two genres is based largely on spirit and tone and on the concept of the hero embodied in each. The chanson de geste, he argues, is a work of predominantly heroic tone "dependent on values essentially associated with war. Valour is the main ingredient of a warrior's character, but this valour need not be accompanied by mesure or courtoisie as it must be in a romance hero."[27] Furthermore, concerning the concept of the hero in the two genres, he concludes, "Both chanson de geste and romance heroes are known through their prowess, but while the former employs his skill in a public context, the latter does so solely or usually in pursuit of a private ideal."[28]

With these ideas underlying his interpretation, Finlayson urges that the Morte Arthure poet treats the Gawain-Priamus episode as a romance incident "whose values, taken in the larger context of the whole poem, are seen as frivolous."[29] At the outset of the episode, the poet presents a landscape descriptio (2501-12) which, according to Finlayson, "invokes the essential atmosphere of aventure." Moreover, borrowing the idiom of romance, the poet states that Gawain "wendes

owtt . . . wondyrs to seke" (2513-4). From these facts,

Finlayson proceeds to an interpretation of the entire episode:

> At this point, Gawain is no longer the national
> warrior, maintaining his king's cause and justice,
> as he was during the Roman wars, but is now the
> individual 'chevalier errant' whose actions have no
> socio-political motivation but are simply an end in
> themselves, related only to the individual's need
> to 'prove' himself. In this world, the combatants
> are not enemies but simply opponents or rivals in
> an elaborate, if dangerous, game. In some respects,
> this encounter serves to contrast the purposeless
> ritual of the typical romance combat with the
> serious political and religious context of the
> whole poem.[30]

Relating the episode to the poem as a whole, Finlayson

concludes, "Placed as it is at the point where Arthur's wars

cease to be just, it serves as an emphasis to the altered

nature of the subsequent wars."[31]

Unfortunately, this interpretation of the Gawain-Priamus

episode is based on a somewhat arbitrary reading that

emphasizes certain facts while ignoring others. An adven-

ture in which a knight sets out in search of "wondyrs,"

meets a strange knight with whom he exchanges insults, and

then engages that knight in combat is the standard fare of

romance. Granted that such an adventure, if it were carried

out "solely . . . in pursuit of a private ideal," would be

completely out of place in the Morte Arthure. However, from

the outset, the poet does take pains to integrate this adven-

ture into the larger context of the poem. For example, after

the knights see each other, we have the following:

> Egerly one Inglisce "Arthure!" he [Gawain] askryes,

> The tother irouslye ansuers hym sone
> On a launde [?launge] of Lorrayne with a lowde
>   steuen,
> That ledes myghte lystene the lenghe of a myle!
> "Whedyr prykkes thow, pilouur, that profers so
>   large?"
>
> (2529-33).

Considering this proclamation of loyalty by Gawain and the

response it evokes from Priamus, we can hardly agree with

Finlayson's argument that "the combatants are not enemies

but simply opponents or rivals." Further on, in 2652-67 and

2916-23 the poet makes clear that Priamus had been fighting

in the company of the duke of Lorraine.

This is not to say that the poet's integration of the

episode has been complete. To some extent, Finlayson is

correct in his assessment of the episode, a point to which

we shall return later. For the moment, however, our concern

will be with establishing a proper perspective in which to

view the passage. For example, we should consider that

Finlayson may be just a bit too rigid in his insistence that

the "romantic" nature of the episode violates the heroic tone

of the poem. Elsewhere in his studies of the Morte Arthure,

Finlayson himself acknowledges that the poet frequently

compromises the heroic tone with romantic material: "the

poem and its hero is too much a creature of its time to be

purely heroic. Arthur and the poem embodies, without dis-

sonance, all the heroic values compounded with those of four-

teenth century monarch, the whole modified by . . . [a] sort

of romanticizing vision."[32] The expansion and elaboration of

the vowings by Arthur's knights, the concern for Guenevere
when Arthur leaves Britain, the idealized landscapes, the
laments for the duchess of Brittany--these and other elements
in the poem indicate that the world of romance has pervaded
the world of the heroic.

Finally, we must consider the most serious difficulty
in Finlayson's interpretation. As we have seen in our
analysis of the poem up to this point, the Morte Arthure poet
is by no means the master of an art that conceals itself. We
should, therefore, expect to find within the Gawain-Priamus
episode some fairly clear and direct indication that the poet
wishes us to see the encounter as a "deed of arms without any
moral justification." Instead, Finlayson offers only argu-
ments suggesting the poet is depending on some extremely
subtle artistic indirection. Even if we were to assume the
poet capable of such indirection, we should be rather startled
to find him using subtle means to suggest "the purposeless
ritual of the typical romance combat"[33] in an episode adapted
from a work which his audience may well have known and to
which it probably had a traditionally favorable response.[34]

Taking the episode on its own terms, we can see that it
is significant both for its own sake and in relation to the
poem as a whole. First, the episode establishes emphatically
the importance of Gawain who will henceforth assume a much
larger role in the action of the poem. His encounter with
Priamus is enclosed by two beautiful landscapes where we see

Gawain's companions baiting their horses (2501-12, 2670-7).

The knights' easeful and calm enjoyment of the natural scene

--"With lowde laghttirs one lofte for lykynge of byrdez"(2673)

--contrasts sharply with Gawain's conflict with Priamus and

heightens the drama of that conflict. The wonder of Gawain's

victory is emphasized by the surprise of the knights when

they see him and Priamus:

> Sir Wychere, sir Walchere, theis weise mene of
>   armes,
> Had wondyre of Sir Gawayne, and wente hyme a-gayns,
> Mett hym in the mydwaye, and meruaile theme
>   t[h]oghte
> How he maisterede that man, so myghtty of strenghes!
>   (2680-3.)

Of course, Priamus is not just any overwhelmingly powerful

knight. As he tells us,

> "My name es sir Priamus; a prynce es my fadyre,
>
> • • •
> He es of Alexandire blode, ouerlynge of kynges,
> The vncle of his ayele, sir Ector of Troye;
> And here es the kynredene that I of come,
> And Iudas and Iosue, thise gentille knyghtes."
>   (2595, 2602-5.)

This interesting lineage, which relates Priamus to four of

the Nine Worthies, makes Gawain's victory over him all the

more impressive. When we consider the spectacular dimensions

of the victory, we must not fail to recognize that the glory

of it accrues not only to Gawain, but also to his sovereign

lord Arthur. So that his audience will not overlook this

fact, the _Morte Arthure_ poet has Priamus respond to Gawain's

claim that he is merely a knave of Arthur's chamber,

> "Giffe his knafes be syche, his knyghttez are noble!

> There es no kynge vndire Criste may kempe with hym
>   one!
> He wille be Alexander ayre, that all the erthe
>   lowttede,
> Abillere than euer was sir Ector of Troye."
>   (2632-5.)

We also see in this episode, and even more clearly in the unbalanced combat scene which follows, that quality of heroic recklessness which we observed earlier in Gawain's slaying of Sir Gayous in the Roman camp and in Cador's refusal to turn away from the Roman ambush. It is, of course, this same recklessness and démesure that will contribute to the destruction of Gawain and Arthur himself at the end of the poem. To return to Finlayson's interpretation of the Gawain-Priamus episode, we should note that he makes an interesting and valid point by comparing Gawain's motivation with Arthur's in the Giant episode:

> When he [Arthur] does indulge in individual combat
> it is not, as in the case of Gawain, for the sake of
> adventure or renown, but in order to succour his
> people who have been oppressed and to rescue a
> lady. . . . In Gawain, on the other hand, the
> prime motivation seems to be a desire for los et
> pris, together with a sheer delight in battle.[55]

Especially interesting in this regard are Gawain's argument for doing battle with the duke of Lorraine's army, despite the extremely disproportionate odds against Arthur's men,

> ʒif we gettlesse goo home, the kyng wille be
>   greuede,
> And say we are gadlynges, agaste for a lyttile
>   (2727-8),

and his speech exhorting his men when the battle is going

against them,

> We salle in this viage vicoures be holdene,
> And avauntede with voycez of valyant biernez;
> Praysede with pryncez in presence of lordes,
> And luffede with ladyes in dyuerse londez!
> (2863-6.)

The first speech, of course, recalls Cador's decision to

do battle so that "Sir Lancellot salle neuer laughe, . . ./

That I sulde lette my way for lede appone erthe" (1720-1).

However, the second speech forms a striking contrast to

Cador's beautiful and stirring exhortation, in which he re-

minds his men they are fighting for their gracious sovereign:

"Thynk one the valyaunt prynce that vesettez vs euer,/ With

landez and lordcheppez" (1726-7). Whereas Cador appeals to

his men's dedication to a higher cause, Gawain merely stirs

his men with rather selfish thoughts of personal glory.

Emerging from this contrast is a picture of Gawain as

a more callow and immature character than Cador. This is not

to say that the contrast turns our sympathies against Gawain.

In fact, the Morte Arthure poet is simply working a variation

on the traditional treatment of Gawain, which W. W. Lawrence

describes in the following comment:

> Gawain rather than Arthur was the most perfect
> example of knightly generosity. With him, indeed,
> it becomes a kind of desmesure, or heroic reckless-
> ness. He marries a loathly lady out of hand to
> help Arthur out of a tight place; he cuts off the
> head of his host on request without the slightest
> hesitation,--not because he realizes that this will
> free his afflicted entertainer from a spell, but
> because the perfect guest ought to do as he is told.
> He pledges himself unhesitatingly to the most
> fantastic adventures when his aid has been invoked.

Common-sense is the last thing to deter him.[36]
What is missing in the _Morte Arthure_--at least, at this
point in the narrative--is the association of generosity with
his heroic recklessness, which might bind our sympathies more
firmly to Gawain's cause in the present venture.

All in all, the poet seems intent on keeping the sympa-
thy of his audience within some rather narrow limits in this
portion of the poem. He repeatedly reminds us that the
enemies of Gawain are Saracen (2657, 2815, 2906), "Paynim"
(2787, 2835), Jew (2895), and heathen (2974, 2992). Further-
more, he reinforces the idea of a religious cause by having
Gawain remind his men that "Marie . . . es oure maisters
seyne" (2869-70). On the other hand, the fact that Gawain
sends his men into battle against overwhelming odds, a battle
he might not have won without the defection of Priamus' army,
certainly qualifies our sympathy. Such action was not
generally approved, according to Margaret Gist:

> The romances show that observation of the rule of
> equality in number was required of the noble knight.
> Though this theory had its pragmatic element--the
> avoidance of danger and unnecessary bloodshed--it
> was in large measure determined by the ideal of
> fair play. Any warrior who deliberately disregarded
> the precept and by chance gained victory, won with
> it simultaneously disgrace and ignominy.[37]

Before rushing to any severe conclusions about Gawain, how-
ever, we might note that Gist's survey of the Middle English
romances also yielded another conclusion: "Those who were
outnumbered were nevertheless occasionally glad to face
overwhelming odds for the sake of the greater glory gained

in victory."[38] Thus, we do not have solid ground for making a completely negative judgment of Gawain, though our sympathy for him is at best tempered by an awareness of his tendency toward extravagant recklessness, the tendency that will lead him to his futile encounter with Mordred.

The focus of the poem returns to Arthur after this combat. When he receives word of Gawain's victory from a herald, his reaction is unqualified joy. We hear no angry words such as those we heard after Cador's victory. Nor do we hear a prayer of thanksgiving. Instead, inspired by the joyful news of Gawain's exploit, the king immediately begins another attack on Metz. This time the attack is successful, and the destruction is great:

> Mynsteris and masondewes they malle to the erthe,
> Chirches and chapelles chalke-whitte blawnchede.
> Stone [s]tepelles fulle styffe in the strete
> ligges,
> Chawmbyrs with chymnes, and many cheefe inns
> Paysede and pelid downe playsterede walles;
> The pyne of the pople was pete for to here!
>   (3038-43.)

Indeed the destruction might have been even greater had it not been for a personal appeal by "The cowntas of Crasyne with hir clere maydyns" (3045), who come on their knees to beg Arthur, "Send vs some socoure" (3052). In this highly romantic scene recalling, for example, that of Chaucer's Theseus and the widows of Thebes, Arthur answers "myldly with fulle meke wordes" (3056) that he grants "chartire of pes" (3058) to all but the duke himself.

The poet's treatment of Arthur in this brief episode is

as ambivalent as his treatment of Gawain in the preceding
episode. The mild and meek promise to the countess and the
orders Arthur gives to his men to carry out his promise are,
of course, highly favorable elements. Balancing these, how-
ever, is the description of the destruction which might have
seemed unexceptional if it were not for the emphasis on the
religious buildings--"Mynsteris and masondewes . . ./ Chirches
and chapelles." Equally important is the reference to the
people whose "pyne . . . was peté for to here" and the descrip-
tion of the frightened citizens fleeing "at the ferrere ʒate"
(3068) with their treasured possessions. Perhaps one should
be careful not to overestimate the worth of such evidence,
for though medieval canonists condemn despoiling of noncom-
batants, they leave numerous possibilities for exceptions to
their rule and thereby accommodate the realities of war.[39]
However, when we recall the earlier indictment of Lucius
for such acts--which "Confoundez thy comouns, clergy and
other" (1245)--the importance of the evidence seems clear.

Ambivalence gives way to severity in the next several
episodes as Arthur's actions come more and more to resemble
those of Lucius earlier in the poem. None of the conquests
in Italy brings any honor to Arthur. The description of the
seizure of Como, for example, makes it seem an ignominious
conquest. Resorting to tactics hitherto reserved to enemy
armies, Florent and Floridas and 5,000 men "sett an enbusche-
ment" (3115) outside the city. In the morning there issues
from the city certain scouts who "Diskoueres for skulkers

that they no skathe lymppene" (3119). Then follows a pleasant

pastoral scene:

> Poueralle and pastorelles passede one aftyre,
> With porkes to pasture at the price ʒates;
> Boyes in the subarbis bourdene ffullé heghe,
> At a bare synglere that to the bente rynnys.
> (3120-3.)

In this context the raid on the city by Arthur's men seems

wholly inappropriate.[40] The conduct of Arthur's men, as

they "Stekkes and stabbis thorowe that them a-ʒayne-stondes"

(3126), seems strangely out of place in the pleasant orderly

world of Como. Interestingly, Malory makes drastic changes

in the parallel conquest in his work:

> Sir Florent and sir Floridas . . . leyde there
> ["the cité of Virvyn" in his account] a buysshement
> as hem best lykys. So there yssued oute of that
> cité many hundretthis and skyrmysshed wyth oure
> foreryders as hem beste semed. Than broke oute our
> buysshement and the brydge wynnys, and so rode unto
> their borowys with baners up dysplayed.[41]

Obviously, Malory recognized the jarring incongruities in the

MA account and decided they had no place in his work.[42]

Even more startling than the conquest of Como is this

description of Arthur's actions in Tuscany:

> Walles he welte downe, wondyd knyghtez,
> Towrres he turnes, and turmentez the pople,
> Wroghte wedewes fulle wlonke, wrotherayle synges,
> Ofte wery and wepe, and wryngene their handis;
> And alle he wastys with werre, thare he awaye rydez,
> Thaire welthes and their wonny [n] ges, wandrethe
> he wroghte!
> (3152-7.)

This highly emotional description of the devastation brings

Arthur to the same depths as Lucius.[43] At best, the con-

querors of the fourteenth century might rationalize devasta-
tion as a means to force another king's army into battle.[44]
However, in this and the other conquests in Italy, we hear of
no armies or kings opposing Arthur's plan of conquest. The
devastation, therefore, seems entirely wanton. As Lumiansky
notes, "now he is not magnanimous to widows and all women,
as he was in Lorraine; now he does not stabilize the conquered
areas--rather he leaves them in chaos and devastation."[45]
Of course, the phrase "turmentez the pople" indicates rather
clearly how the poet regards Arthur at this point, for this is
the very phrase he had used in the description of the bear
in Arthur's dream (824) and the Giant of St. Michael's Mount
(842).

With these actions and his taking of "awughte score
childrenne" (3188) as hostages from the representatives of the
Pope, we have reached the political zenith and the moral nadir
of Arthur's career. Yet Arthur's ambitious appetites have
not been sated; after coming to terms with the pope, he gives
voice to that age-old hope of men, an empire of Alexandrian
proportion:

> We salle be ouerlynge of alle that one the erthe
>   lengez!
> We wille by the Crosse dayes encroche theis londez,
> And at the Crystenmesse daye be crowned ther-aftyre;
> Ryngne in my ryalltés, and holde my Rownde Table,
> Withe the rentes of Rome, as me beste lykes;
> Syne graythe ouer the grette see with gud mene of
>   armes,
> To reuenge the renke that one the rode dyede!
>   (3211-7.)

However overweening Arthur's pride and ambition may seem in this speech, we must not overlook the last two lines in which Arthur expresses the great Christian hope of the Middle Ages and thereby indicates he is not unregenerate. Even at his worst, Arthur does not entirely forget God. For this and for all the good he has done in destroying the enemies of Christendom earlier, Arthur receives a "schewynge" (3401) which prophesies his own imminent fall from power.

This shewing is the dream of fortune which may have been inspired by a similar dream that comes to Arthur during his war with Mordred in La Mort le Roi Artus.[46] If the inspiration did come from the very brief dream in the French work, the poet showed enormous genius in developing it more fully and using it as an important dramatic element in the structure of his poem. Incorporating the Nine Worthies motif, as well as material from dream-vision literature, the poet has made this dream a vivid and integral reinforcement of the moral and philosophical significance of the poem. Coming as it does when Arthur is supremely confident in his own strength, the dream is a dire warning of the folly of putting such trust in human strength.[47]

As the dream begins, Arthur finds himself alone and astray in a woods with wild, terrifying beasts. According to the philosopher's later interpretation,

> . . . the whilde bestes,
> Are some wikkyd mene that werrayes thy rewmes,

> Es entirde in thyne absence to werraye the pople,
> And alyenys and ostes of vncouthe landis.
> (3446-9.)

Among these beasts are wolves, symbolic of rapaciousness,

and wild swine, symbolic of greed, as well as lions, symbolic

of pride and ambition, who "lykkede theire tuskes,/ Alle fore

lapynge of blude of my lele knyghtez!" (3234-5).[48] Frightened

by these sights, Arthur flees

> . . . to a medowe with montayngnes enclosyde,
> The meryeste of medillerthe that mene myghte be-holde!
> (3238-9.)

Perhaps, as John Finlayson suggests, the source of these land-

scapes is the dream allegory tradition.[49] Whatever the

source, the poet is using these landscapes to serve his

thematic ends. The abrupt change from a hostile wilderness

to what Finlayson calls an Earthly Paradise, for example, is

most appropriate to the theme of Fortune. Though he offers

no landscapes similar to those of the Morte Arthure, H. R.

Patch suggests that such symbolic changes and contrasts are

commonly found in traditional account of Fortune's dwelling

place.[50]

Into the unnatural opulence of the meadow descends the

splendidly adorned "duches" (3251) and her ornately jewelled

wheel, which she "whirllide . . . with hir whitte hondez"

(3260). Accompanying the duchess are several other figures:

> Appone the compas ther clewide kyngis one rawe,
> With corowns of clere golde that krakede in sondire:
> Sex was of that setille fulle sodaynliche fallene.
> (3268-70.)

From each of these men, whom we soon recognize as the three
pagans and three Jews of the Nine Worthies, we hear a brief
account of his life. Alexander speaks first, probably because
he would have been best known to the poet's audience,[51] and
his statement sets the tone for the other Worthies:

> Was neuer roye so riche that regnede in erthe!
> When I rode in my rowte, roughte I noghte elles,
> Bot reuaye, and reuelle, and rawsone the pople!
> And thus I drife forthe my dayes, whilles I dreghe
>   myghte,
> And there-fore derflyche I am dampnede for euer!
>   (3273-7.)

Having heard in turn from Hector, Julius Caesar, Judas
Maccabeus, Joshua, and David, we then catch sight of two
other figures who "ware clymbande, and clauerande one heghe,/
The creste of the compas they couette fulle ȝerne" (3324-5).
These figures, of course, are Charlemagne and Godfrey of
Bouilloun.

With a brilliant sense of artistry, the Morte Arthure
poet has created a miniature De Casibus.[52] Having established
this perspective, he now returns to Arthur. The duchess
greets him and places him in the chair on her wheel. She
presents him with all the symbols and accouterments of im-
perial glory and then takes the wheel to a woods. There she
makes the trees bow and yield their finest fruits to Arthur,
and she gives him a wondrous wine she has drawn from a well.
Suddenly, "at the myddaye fulle ewyne all hir mode chaungede"
(3382), and she speaks menacingly to Arthur. When he protests,
she tells him he has "lyffede in delytte and lordchippes

inewe!" (3387), and she spins her wheel. As Arthur describes it,

> Abowte scho whirles the whele, and whirles me
>   vndire,
> Tille alle my qwarters that whille whare qwaste al
>   to peces!
> And with that chayere my chyne was choppede in
>   sondire!
>
> <div align="right">(3388-90.)</div>

The philosopher, who interprets this dream for the terrified Arthur, explains that he has received a warning:

>   . . . thy fortune es passede!
> ffor thow salle fynd hir thi foo, frayste whene the
>   lykes!
> Thow art at the hegheste, I hette the for-sothe!
> Chalange nowe when thow wille, thow cheuys no more!
> Thow has schedde myche blode, and schalkes
>   distroyede,
> Sakeles, in cirquytrie, in sere kynges landis;
> Schryfe the of thy schame, and schape for thyne ende!
> Thow has a schewynge, sir kynge, take kepe ʒif the
>   lyke,
> ffor thow salle fersely falle with-in fyve wynters!
>
> <div align="right">(3394-402.)</div>

Coming as it does immediately after Arthur's conduct in Lombardy and Tuscany, the dream and the warning it embodies contain a very particular irony: Arthur, who in his imperial might has wrought destruction upon others, discovers that an Emperor (i.e., God), more powerful than he, will soon destroy him.

It is entirely appropriate then that the philosopher accuses Arthur of "cirquytrie" or "surquedrie," as it is often written. As we mentioned earlier, this sin, known also as presumption, is a form of pride--"whan a man under-taketh an emprise that hym oghte nat do, or elles that he may

nat do." It is a sin that seems rarely to remain unpunished in the medieval world. In Troilus and Criseyde, for example, when the God of Love smites Troilus for his words against lovers, Chaucer observes,

> O blynde world, O blynde entencioun!
> How often falleth al the effect contraire
> Of surquidrie and foul presumpcioun.
>   (I, 211-12.)

An apposite comment is that of Gower in Mirour De L'Omme:

> Mais nepourquant par s'enticer
> Sovent as gens fait commencer
> Tien chose que jammais nul jour
> Ne la pourront bien terminer;
> Dont en la fin leur falt ruer
> De sus en jus leur grant honour
> Leur sen deschiet en grant folour,
> Et leur richesce en povre atour;
> Leur peas destourne en guerroier,
> Leur repos chiet en grant labour,
> Tornent leur joyes en doloup;
> Vei la le fin du Surquider![53]

Exactly when Arthur succumbs to this sin is a matter of great dispute among the critics of the poem. Matthews argues that from the first Arthur's wars are unjust because the British king is fighting only for self-aggrandizement. "Step by step, Arthur's conquest becomes a manifestation of mounting cruelty, covetousness, and imperialistic ambition."[54] Finlayson, as we have seen, argues that the nature of Arthur's wars change after his victory over Lucius. Lumiansky believes that "a sharp change occurs in Arthur's thinking and action, as he turns into Tuscany."[55] Karl Höltgen is less specific, setting no particular point at which Arthur's activities become sinful. He simply observes, "Er soll Gott durch

Waffentaten dienen, versündigt sich dabei fast notwendigerweise an Leben und Eigentum seiner Mitmenschen."[56] From our analysis in the preceding pages, we can see that it is rather difficult to establish a specific point at which Arthur succumbs to sin. (Indeed, the poem is more convincing because of this difficulty.) Arthur's devastation in Tuscany is clearly sinful, and his attack on Como seems also to be sinful. At least some aspects of his conduct in the siege of Metz--his foolhardy bravado before the walls of the city, his destruction of church properties--seem to have their basis in a sinful attitude. If we look back even further in the poem and recall Arthur's haughty treatment of Cador and his failure to give thanks for Cador's victory at the ambush or his own in the main battle with Lucius, we can see the tendency toward sinfulness that becomes manifest in Arthur's later conduct. It would seem that as Arthur's glory increases, he loses sight of his own human weaknesses and his indebtedness to God, the source of all strength and glory.

Thematically, the dream of Fortune is probably the most important episode in the Morte Arthure, for it establishes the perspective in which we are to view all the rest of the poem. Obviously, we are to see Arthur as the ninth Worthy and the ninth example of the workings of Fortune. As the eight other Worthies serve as illustrations of mortality for Arthur, so Arthur serves as illustration for the audience. However, as Finlayson notes, the effect of the Nine Worthies motif "is

dramatically ambiguous. Arthur, like all men, must fall and, like all men, he is sinful; but at the same time, he is judged among the highest of this earth."[57] Thus, in the very same speech in which he accuses Arthur of "cirquytrie," the philosopher also tells him,

> ffore-thy ffortune the fetches to fulfille the
>   nowmbyre,
> Alls nynne of the nobileste namede in erthe;
> This salle in romance be redde with ryalle knyghttes,
> Rekkenede and renownde with ryotous kynges,
> And demyd one domesdaye, for dedis of armes,
> ffor the doughyeste that euer was duelland in erthe.
>   (3438-43.)

This "mention of Doomsday," as Benson observes, "seems to imply that even God admires these earthly deeds."[58]

Whether Arthur's sin is the cause of his fall--that is, whether the poem contains a pattern of sin and retribution-- is perhaps the most important question to arise in a con- sideration of the dream of Fortune passage. This question, as we have seen, concerns the tragic structure of the poem itself. Interestingly, the poet seems to sidestep the question; he simply presents the events in sequence without giving any clear indication of the relation between them. By doing so, he suggests the possibility that Arthur's fall may be retribution for his sins, while at the same time he avoids the corollary question of whether there would have been a fall if Arthur had not sinned. Indeed, the emphasis of the episode seems to be not so much on the rather narrow and negative idea of retribution as on the broader and more positive

concept of divine justice, tempered by mercy. That is, instead
of merely suggesting that Arthur must fall because he is
wicked, the poet suggests that because of his sin, the fall
that Arthur, like all men, must experience seems more just.

For a proper understanding of the poem, we must consider
that the presence of the dream associates mercy rather than
retribution with divine justice in the present case. As
Matthews points out, "The philosopher . . . regards the dream
as a 'schewynge,'--a word common among contemporary mystics
for their visions of Christ and the saints--a divine revela-
tion to Arthur at the climax of his career as a conqueror."59
Viewed in this way, the dream is an act of mercy or, to use
the more accurate theological term, an act of divine grace.
If we may return to the poet's prologue, we will recall that
grace is a gift of the "grett glorious Godde, thurgh grace
of hym seluene" (1), given to man

> . . . to gye, and gouerne vs here,
> In this wrechyde werlde thorowe vertous lywynge,
> That we may kayre til hys courte, the kyngdome of
>   hevyne,
> When oure saules schalle parte and sundrye ffra the
>   body,
> Ewyre to belde and to byde in blysse wyth hyme
>   seluene.
>
> (4-8.)

The function of the dream then is to warn Arthur of his im-
minent fall, to remind him of his own mortality, and to urge
him to penitence and reconciliation with God. It is rather
similar in nature to a piece of medieval jewelry that Willard

Farnham describes, "a pendant shaped like a coffin, preserved in the British Museum" with the inscription, "COGITA MORI VT VIVAS."[60] As Farnham explains, the meaning of these words is, "Let a man think upon his own death--and by all means, too, upon the deaths of princes and cities--in order that he may not suffer death in his immortal soul."

In its spirit, the Morte Arthure is not too far removed from such morality plays as The Castle of Perseverance, which emphasize the merciful divinity of God. In fact, what Willard Farnham observes on the "tragic potentialities" of these moral plays applies as well to the Morte Arthure:

> So long as the moral dramatist and his audience con-
> ceive that a universal law of justice, under which
> man lives and engages himself with his destiny, is
> dominated by the force of mercy, their recognition
> of tragedy must necessarily be small. The grip of
> tragic forces is allowed to be formed in this world
> only to be broken either in this world or the next;
> and the sense of irreparable loss--partial if not
> total--and of inevitable suffering by which the
> greatest tragedies move men to a peculiar pity and
> fear must remain thwarted.[61]

We would do well to recall, in regard to this comment, that medieval artists are viewing life from the perspective of Christianity which, as Reinhold Niebuhr observes, transcends tragedy: "Christianity's view of history is tragic insofar as it recognizes evil as an inevitable concomitant of even the highest spiritual enterprises. It is beyond tragedy inasfar as it does not regard evil as inherent in existence itself but as finally under the dominion of a good God."[62]

Under this dominion, the act of repentance is the proper means to effect one's release from the grip of tragic forces. As Niebuhr comments, if the sinner "can weep for himself, if he can repent, he can also be saved."[63] In the Christian scheme, this repentance begins with an acknowledgement of one's own responsibility for his sin. "Repentance does not accuse life or God but accuses self. In that self-accusation lies the beginning of hope and salvation."[64] Though apparently a simple act, repentance is most difficult of accomplishment for all but the rarest of men. The temptation to blame wanton and inimical forces outside oneself is, as we see in Oedipus or Lear, very natural. To forego the exaltation of the moment and to accept immediate humiliation is to strain human nature almost beyond its limits.

The *Morte Arthure* poet is keenly aware of the difficulty of following such a course. Thus, in Arthur's behavior following the philosopher's words, the poet portrays with powerful drama the struggle and turmoil within the king. Instead of falling to his knees in penitence, as might happen in a lesser work, Arthur continues to live up to his heroic dimensions. In a stately *descriptio* we see Arthur dressing-- not in the armor we saw him don before meeting the Giant, but in attire befitting the most magnificent Oriental potentate. With his "bede grehownde," Arthur "bownnes ouer a brode mede, with breth at his herte" (3464-5). Arthur, alone and withdrawn in his anger, is almost the classical heroic figure determined

to resist the inimical forces that would control him:

> ffurth he stalkis a stye by tha stille enys,
> Stotays at a hey strette, studyande hyme one.
> (3466-7.)

As Arthur stands and faces the rising sun, he sees in
the distance a figure, in the guise of a pilgrim, whom he
does not at first recognize. He soon discovers this figure
is Cradok, "Kepare of Karlyone" (3512), who informs him of
the treachery of Mordred and Guenevere. This scene in which
Arthur meets Cradok is fraught with meaning, especially in
its contrasts. Matthews aptly comments, "Dressed in the dull,
shabby array of a pilgrim, in complete contrast with Arthur's
peacock magnificence, [Cradok] is intent, before announcing
his news to the king, on hurrying to Rome for a purpose quite
different from Arthur's--to purchase pardon from the pope and
to absolve himself from the pains of purgatory."[65] Emphasizing
the contrast is the fact that neither man recognizes the other.
Obviously, the state of each man has changed considerably from
the days of harmony described at the opening of the poem.
Caerlon has been captured, and Cradok has been cast out.
Having experienced this turn of Fortune, Cradok is reduced
to repentance. By contrast, Arthur, resplendent in his glory,
resists repentance, even though he has been forewarned of the
change of fortune that lies ahead for him.

Ironically, that change has already begun, as Arthur
discovers when Cradok informs him of events in Britain.
Arthur's reaction to this news is interesting: "for brethe at

his herte,/ And for this botelesse bale all his ble chaungede"
(3557-8). It would seem that Arthur's earlier anger has been
intensified, and perhaps redirected. "All wepande for woo"
(3561), Arthur moves to action, summoning his men to another
council. As he reports the news of the treachery to his men,
"his repetition of several of Sir Cradok's phrases helps to
convey his stunned horror at the news."[66] The emotional
quality is a most convincing touch, in which we can see the
deterioration of the smug self-confidence with which Arthur
had proclaimed, "We salle be ouerlynge of alle that one the
erthe lengez!" (3211).

Making his way to Flanders, Arthur assembles his fleet
and sets sail for Britain. Off the coast of his kingdom, he
finds an enemy fleet awaiting him, and he makes ready for
battle. For our concern, one of the most important elements
in the poet's description of the preparations is his mention
of the emblem of the Lady and Child among the banners displayed
on Arthur's ship. Lumiansky is perhaps right when he suggests
that by his emphasis on this emblem the poet is telling us
that "Once again, Arthur is Christ's knight."[67] At the least,
we have a clear indication of Arthur's imminent reconciliation.

As soon as his fleet is prepared for battle, Arthur
engages the enemy and overcomes them in one of the most
exciting scenes in the Morte Arthure:

> Thare was conteke fulle kene, and crachynge of
>   chippys!
> Grett cogges of kampe crasseches in sondyre!

> Mony kabane clevede, cabilles destroyede!
> . . . .
> Than Bretones brothely with brondis they hewene,
> Lepys in vp one lofte lordeliche berynes;
> When ledys of owt-londys leppyne in waters,
> Alle oure lordes one lowde laughene at ones!
> <div align="right">(3669-71; 3695-8.)</div>

This grim laughter of Arthur's victorious knights, as the enemy leap into the sea, provides an effective, though temporary release from the emotional intensity of the preceding scenes. It permits the audience a brief moment of relaxation before the poem plunges more and more deeply into a somber tone from which there will be no relief until Arthur's final victory nearly 800 lines later.

After this joyful victory over Mordred's fleet, a victory that seems to bode well for Arthur's cause, the tide goes out, and Arthur decides to remain on board his ship.

> Thane was it slyke a slowde in slakes fulle hugge,
> That let the kyng for to lande, and the lawe watyre;
> ffor-thy he lengede one laye for lesynng of horsesys.
> <div align="right">(3719-21.)</div>

The ever impetuous Gawain, heedless of the dangers, leads a small force of warriors ashore. At first Gawain and his men meet with success. The poet tells us, "ffor hade sir Gawayne had grace to halde the grene hille,/ He had wirchipe i-wys wonnnene for euer!" (3768-9). However, Gawain presses on further and further into danger, intent on doing combat with Mordred himself.[68] Soon the knight and his small force "are with Sarazenes be-sett appone sere halfes!" (3795). Realizing the hopelessness of their plight, Gawain exhorts his men with

ringing words:

> Bes dowghtty to-daye, ȝone dukes schalle be   oures!
> . . . .
> Thofe we hafe vnwittyly wastede our selfene,
> We salle wirke alle wele in the wirchipe of Cryste.
> (3798, 3802-3.)

In the futile and bloody battle with Mordred's forces,

Gawain conducts himself with great bravery and gallantry.

He fights his way to Mordred and engages him in battle. At

first Gawain gains the advantage and wounds the traitor.

Unfortunately, the direction of the combat soon turns: "With

a trenchande knyfe the traytoure hym hyttes,/ Thorowe the

helme and the hede, . . ./ And thus sir Gawayne es gone"

(3856-8). It is a shocking and dramatic moment when "this

gryffoune of golde . . . es one growffe fallyne"(3869). With

the comments of King Frederick and Mordred, the poet shows

great skill in constructing the scene to exploit the dramatic

potential of Gawain's death. Velma Richmond offers this

analysis of the structure:

> The author varies the tension in this death scene.
> King Frederick does not know Gawain's identity, and
> Mordred knows him well. Both agree that Gawain was
> a peerless knight and praise him accordingly. . . .
> The inevitable conclusion is that Gawain's death can
> rightly produce only endless grief for any who have
> known him.[69]

At the end Mordred "Went wepand a-waye, and weries the

stowndys,/ That euer his werdes ware wroghte siche wandrethe

to wyrke" (3888-9).[70] As George Kane notes, "The fine

fatality of this encounter, and the manner in which Gawain

dead had more power than Gawain living to turn Mordred from

his purpose, is part of the climax of destruction, the heroic calamity to which this poem rises."[71]

Even more dramatic and poignant is the scene that follows shortly--Arthur's discovery of Gawain's body. As the king holds Gawain in his arms and "cryes fulle lowde" (3955), he delivers a moving lament for the knight to whom he owes so much of his glory. William Matthews finds in this scene and the others dealing with Gawain's death "an allegory of Christ's passion"[72] in which Gawain represents Christ, Mordred represents Judas, and Arthur represents Joseph of Arimathea. While such allegorizing raises more problems than it settles, Matthews is right in recognizing the posture of pieta in Arthur's embrace of the corpse. The associations with this posture are, however, emotive rather than typological. As Helaine Newstead observes, "The human emotions revealed in these superb scenes are communicated with an intensity that overwhelms any allegorical suggestions ingenuity can detect."[73]

Arthur's own men cannot understand the extravagance of his grief, and they chide him with harsh words:

> This es botles bale, for bettir bees it neuer!
> It es no wirchipe i-wysse to wryng thyne hondes.
> To wepe als a womane it es no witt holdene!
> (3976-8.)

This paralysing grief that seems to have hold of Arthur is, naturally enough, incomprehensible to his men. Within the scheme of the heroic ideal, as we noted earlier, grief is shameful unless it incites one to noble deeds of revenge for

the fallen.[74] In the case of Arthur and Gawain, however,
we have some extraordinary circumstances which the other
warriors cannot be expected to know. Along with his grief,
Arthur experiences a surge of remorse for what he feels is his
complicity in the death of Gawain. This is the idea that
Arthur attempts to explain in his reply to his men:

> Itt is fulle sibb to my selfe, my sorowe es the
> more!
> Was neuer so sorowfulle a syghte seyne with myne
> eyghene!
> He es sakles supprysede for syne of myne one!
>
> (3984-6.)

With this speech we have a clear indication of a change
in Arthur's attitude. He has now accepted the idea of his
sinfulness, an idea that merely drove him to anger when the
philosopher interpreted his dream. With the mood of repentance
upon him, Arthur is driven to make an open confession for his
sin and his guilt in the death of the "sakles" Gawain. More-
over, with his next speech--in which he appeals, "O _rightwis_
riche God" (3989; italics added)--we can see that Arthur has
overcome his "cirquytrie." He has reached a full recognition
of the order and justice in the events of this world, and he
also recognizes his own role as an agent of God's justice.
Despite his overwhelming grief, he must act. Thus, he swears
"To Messie, and to Marie" (3998) to avenge the death of his
beloved Gawain. The language in which he states this vow is
striking:

> I salle neuer ryvaye, . . .

> Ne regnne in my royaltez, ne halde my Rownde Table,
> Tille thi dede, my dere, be dewly reuengede!
> Bot euer droupe and dare, qwylles my lyfe lastez,
> Tille Drightene and derfe dede hafe done qwate them
>   likes!
>
> (3999, 4005-8.)

The last two lines of this speech, in particular, bespeak a
humility in Arthur, which we have not seen since his slaying
of the Giant of St. Michael's Mount.

From this point to the end of the Morte Arthure, the poet
maintains an interesting balance in his portrait of Arthur.
On the one hand, we see him as a man still fraught with
weakness and driven by his passions. Thus, he refuses to hear
the words of "sir Wychere the wy" (4025), who advises Arthur
to rally more forces before rushing headlong into battle with
the enormous numbers of forces under Mordred's control. In
rejecting this wise advice, Arthur is all the more credible
as a character because his action reflects the emotional
turmoil within him at this moment. On the other hand, the
poet reminds us that the recklessness or démesure that re-
sults from his emotional strain is but an exaggeration of
the strength and daring we expect of a hero. As Arthur
marches to battle with his men, "Ne none of his lige men luke
hym in the eyghne,/ So lordely he lukes for losse of his
knyghttes" (4050-1). This is surely the same lordly look
that we so admired when the Roman messengers "Cowchide as
kenetz" (122) before Arthur. Indeed, the loyalty of Arthur's
men, so much emphasized in these last lines of the Morte

<u>Arthure</u> are the best testimony to Arthur's strength. For example, one of the most effective moments in the last battle occurs when Idrus chooses to stay with Arthur rather than go forth to save his own father.[75]

A happy complement to these qualities is the growing humility of Arthur, which we see, for instance, in his comment on Idrus' action:

> "Qwythene hade Dryghttyne destaynede at his dere
>   wille,
> That he had demyd me to-daye to dy for ȝow alle!
> That had I leuer than be lorde alle my lyfe tyme,
> Off alle that Alexandere aughte qwhilles he in erthe
>   lengede."
>   (4157-60.)

His humility becomes most evident at the end of his battle with Mordred when he laments the loss of his brave men and admits how deeply he is indebted to these men for what glory he has known.

> Here rystys the riche blude of the Rownde Table,
> Rebukkede with a rebawde, and rewthe es the more!
> I may helples one hethe house be myne one,
> Alls a wafulle wedowe that wanttes hir beryne!
> I may werye and wepe, and wrynge myne handys,
> ffor my wytt and my wyrchipe awaye es for euer!
>   (4282-7.)

The metaphor in these lines "makes the king's personal involvement with his peers explicit; they command the most intense human attachment." Thus, Arthur speaks not merely as a king who has lost his army, but as a man who has lost those he holds most dear. "His grief is a personal rather than a professional one, and thus immediately more appealing."[76] In this grief is a humble acceptance of the ways of God, as we

see when Arthur finishes his lament and turns to a prayer of
thanksgiving.

> "I thanke the, God, of thy grace, with a gud wylle;
> That gafe vs vertue and witt to vencows this beryns;
> . . . .
> Of this dere day werk, the Dryghttene be louede,
> That vs had destaynede and demyd to dye in our
> awene."
>
> (4296-8, 4305-6.)

Gone completely is the pride and anger that we have seen in
Arthur so often at earlier moments in the poem. Thus we
are not surprised that when Arthur is taken to Avalon, his
first request should be for a confessor and that he should
die with In manus on his lips.

The Morte Arthure ends like a Shakespearean play--with
all the world set to order again. Before he says In manus,
Arthur appoints his successor, directs the burial of his
fallen men, orders the slaughter of Mordred's children,[77] and
offers forgiveness to Guenevere. Following his death we have
a description of the stately procession of dignitaries atten-
ding Arthur's funeral:

> Relygeous reueste in theire riche copes,
> Pontyficalles and prelates in precyouse wedys,
> Dukes and dusszeperis in theire dule-cotes,
> Cowntasses knelande and claspande theire handes,
> Ladys languessande and lowrande to schewe;
> Alle was buskede in blake, birdes and othire,
> That schewede at the sepulture, with sylande teris;
> Whas neuer so sorowfulle a syghte seene in theire
> tyme!
>
> (4334-41.)

With this description, the final scene in the poem becomes a
complement to the first scene in which the poet had described

those in attendance at Arthur's Christmas festivities and
exclaimed, "Whas neuer syche noblay, in no manys tyme" (76).
The world is not what it was at the outset of the poem--
naturally, it will never be the same again--but it has at
least returned to order.[78]

As we hear of this funeral and think back on the grand
events of Arthur's career, we can surely conclude that in
his portrait of Arthur, the Morte Arthure poet embodies a
mature vision of human greatness. He achieves his intention
of offering both delight and instruction with an exciting
narrative that incorporates some very serious moral and
philosophical considerations. Showing his audience a little
of the ways of God to man, the poet reminds us of the temporal
nature of this sublunary world and of the humility that an
awareness of its temporal nature must bring. In the poet's
view man may fulfill to some limited extent his dreams of
greatness, but only through the grace of the "grett glorious
Godde," who is the source of all human strength. Thus, to
act as though one's free will makes him complete master of
his own destiny and to ignore the inconstancy of fortune is
utter folly.

The Morte Arthure poet obviously had great fondness for
the story of Arthur of Britain and for the chivalric and
heroic ideals that Arthur represented, but his fondness was
tempered by a shrewd understanding of human nature. While
he does not achieve the subtlety of the Gawain-poet, the

Morte Arthure poet suffers little by comparison with that
great artist. He too saw that weakness flourishes alongside
strength and that man's worst motives are sometimes merely
the obverse side of his most noble motives. Like the Gawain-
poet, he recognized that pride is an innate and central
quality in man and that this pride leads to meanness as well
as nobility. Like the Gawain-poet and most of the authors
writing in their age, he knew that truth is delicate and
fragile and easily perverted into falsehood.. What the Morte
Arthure poet lacks in a comparison with the Gawain-poet is the
delicate sense of humor which both restrains and refreshes
the work of the latter.

The Morte Arthure poet was too deeply endowed with a
benign Christian optimism ever to achieve a truly tragic
vision, in the strictest Aristotelian sense of that term.
While he recognized the corruptibility of prideful man, he
still believed firmly in the basic goodness of man and in a
merciful divinity who loves man for this goodness. We can
hardly expect that as a Christian he should see his hero as
a victim of an inexorable, unsympathetic fate. Though he
recognized that the pursuit of human greatness, like all of
man's efforts, culminates in death, he did not look cynically
upon this pursuit as a mere exercise in futility. Above all
else, he saw the potential for nobility in the human condi-
tion.[79]

NOTES

[1]John Finlayson, ed., <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u> (Evanston:
Northwestern University Press, 1967), p. 14. Karl Josef
Höltgen, "König Arthur und Fortune," <u>Anglia</u>, 75 (1957),
35-54, was the first critic of the poem to discern a tragic
structure in the <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u>. We have not considered
his theory in the text because he does not seem to be con-
cerned with a specific definition of <u>medieval</u> tragedy, as
the more recent critics are. His study is a survey of the
fortune theme in medieval Arthurian literature, which
emphasizes the importance of the <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u> in the
association of fortune and the Arthur story:

> Sie setzt, zumal mit dem alliterierenden <u>Morte</u>
> <u>Arthure</u>, die nationalen, heroischen, ritterlichen und
> <u>religiösen</u> Tendenzen in ein neues Wertverhältnis
> zueinander, indem sie selbst als Hauptfaktor einer
> neuen und weiterwirkenden geschichts-exemplarisch-
> heilspädagogischen Auffassung der Arthurgestalt
> auftritt (34).

However, he deals only in a general fashion with the <u>Morte</u>
<u>Arthure</u>'s tragic dimensions, stressing a conflict between
moral and national interests which he finds in the author.
Höltgen's views have been repeated recently by Hanspeter
Schelp, <u>Exemplarische</u> <u>Romanzen</u> <u>im</u> <u>Mittelenglischen</u>, Palaestra,
246 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), pp. 171-81,
246-7. Schelp's highly derivative discussion of the <u>Morte</u>
<u>Arthure</u>, drawn mainly from Höltgen and Matthews (see below),
adds little to our understanding of the poem. Also of

incidental interest to this discussion is a recent study by Robert M. Lumiansky, "The Alliterative _Morte Arthure_, the Concept of Medieval Tragedy, and the Cardinal Virtue Fortitude," in _Medieval and Renaissance Studies_, Vol. 3, ed. John M. Headley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 95-118. Lumiansky argues that the _Morte Arthure_ should not be read as a medieval tragedy because "according to Boethius' very influential system the right-thinking man cannot be a tragic hero, even if he suffers a fall from high to low place" (p. 100).

[2]William Matthews, _The Tragedy of Arthur_ (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 120.

[3]John Finlayson, "The Concept of the Hero in _Morte Arthure_," in _Chaucer und Seine Zeit_, ed. Arno Esch (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1968), p. 272.

[4]Larry Benson, "The Alliterative _Morte Arthure_ and Medieval Tragedy," _TSL_, 11 (1966), 83.

[5]Benson, "The Alliterative _Morte Arthure_," 80.

[6]Benson, "The Alliterative _Morte Arthure_," pp. 80-1.

[7]Willard Farnham, _The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy_ (1936; rpt. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963), p. 170.

[8]Farnham, p. 71.

[9]Farnham, pp. 82-3.

[10]Farnham, p. 136. For a more recent study treating this problem, see R. E. Kaske, "The Knight's Interruption of the Monk's Tale," ELH, 24 (1957), 249-68.

[11]Farnham, p. 155. Unfortunately, Farnham follows J. S. P. Tatlock, "The Epilog of Chaucer's Troilus," MP, 18 (1920-1), 625-59, and overstates the "contradiction" of the Troilus. For a more balanced view of this so-called contradiction, see Alfred David, "The Hero of Troilus," Spec, 37 (1962), 566-81.

[12]Farnham, pp. 156-7. For further consideration of these ideas, see D. W. Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy," ELH, 19 (1952), 1-37, and John F. Mahoney, "Chaucerian Tragedy and the Christian Tradition," AnM, 3 (1962), 81-99.

[13]Walter F. Schirmer, John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), p. 213.

[14]Benson, "The Alliterative Morte Arthure," 79.

[15]As Howard R. Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927), p. 69, notes, "mediaeval authors wrote better stories than those of pure chance."

[16]Lothario Dei Segni (Pope Innocent III), On the Misery of the Human Condition, trans. by Margaret Mary Dietz, ed. by Donald R. Howard (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969), p. 3.

[17]Benson, "The Alliterative Morte Arthure," 85.

[18]John Finlayson, ed., Morte Arthure (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), pp. 80-1.

[19]May McKisack, The Fourteenth Century, 1307-1399 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 267. In this regard, we might consider what Gower has to say of the Lombards in the prologue to Confessio Amantis, 786-801:

> Bot in proverbe natheles
> Men sein, ful selden is that welthe
> Can soffre his oghne astat in helthe;
> And that was on the Lombardz sene,
> Such comun strif was hem betwene
> Thurgh coveitise and thurgh Envie,
> That every man drowh his partie,
> Which myhte leden eny route,
> Withinne Burgh and ek withoute:
> The comun ryht hath no felawe,
> So that the governance of lawe
> Was lost, and for necessite,
> Of that thei stode in such degre
> Al only thurgh divisioun,
> Hem nedeth in conclusioun
> Of strange londes help beside.

See The Complete Works of John Gower: The English Works ed. G. C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), pp. 26-7.

[20]Perhaps the poet expects us to recall that at the earlier council Arthur vowed

> . . . to lenge at my large
> In Lorayne or Lumberdye, whethire me leue thynkys;

Merke vn-to Meloyne, and myne doune the wallez,
Bathe of Petyrsande, and of Pys, and of the Pounte
    Tremble,
In the Vale of Viterbe vetaile my knyghttes,
Suggourne there sex wokes and solace my selfene;
Send prekers to the price toune [Rome], and plaunte
    there my segge,
Bot if thay profre me the pece be processe of tyme.
                                        (349-56.)

[21]Matthews, p. 132.

[22]Matthews, p. 132.

[23]Werner Habicht, Die Gebärde in englischen Dichtungen

des Mittelalters (Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften,

Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Abhandlungen, Neue Folge,

Heft 46, 1959), p. 70.

[25]Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Parson's Tale," 395, 402, in

The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston:

Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), pp. 239-40.

[26]John Finlayson, "Rhetorical 'Descriptio' of Place in

the Alliterative Morte Arthure," MP, 61 (1963-4), 6.

[27]Finlayson, ed., Morte Arthure, p. 7.

[28]Finlayson, ed., Morte Arthure, p. 8.

[29]Finlayson, "Rhetorical 'Descriptio,'" 6.

[30]Finlayson, ed., Morte Arthure, pp. 18-9.

[31]Finlayson, ed., _Morte Arthure_, p. 81.

[32]Finlayson, "The Concept," p. 257.

[33]Finlayson, "The Concept," p. 268.

[34]H. M. Smyser, "Charlemagne Legends," _Manual_, p. 81, observes, "Of the _chansons de geste_ one of the most favored outside France was the _Fierabras_, a _chanson_ of which the plot is so lively that it can survive even mediocre handling. Barbour tells us that Robert the Bruce read the romance of Ferumbras to his men on the shores of Loch Lomond, and, though no such early version is known to survive, we have four versions in English."

[35]Finlayson, "The Concept," p. 268.

[36]W. W. Lawrence, _Medieval Story_ (1938; rpt. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1962), p. 106.

[37]M. A. Gist, _Love and War in the Middle English Romances_ (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 160.

[38]Gist, p. 159.

[39]See Bede Jarrett, _Social Theories of the Middle Ages_ (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1926), p. 196.

[40]Benson, "The Alliterative _Morte Arthure_," 82, observes, "the idyllic scene of shepherds driving their flocks to pasture

and boys shouting at a boar is shattered by Florent's striking and stabbing men."

[41]The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, Vol. 1, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 242-3.

[42]Lumiansky, p. 109, seems not to notice these incongruities and finds a wholly favorable picture of Arthur in this incident: "Arthur 'with knyghtly wordez' gains the support of the 'comouns' and establishes order. Such an exhibition of magnanimity in a conqueror means that 'alle the contré and he full sone ware accordide' (3133)."

[43]Malory had "reduced" this passage to eliminate the grim details, "Than into Tuskayne he turned whan he tyme semed, and there he wynnys towyrs and townys full hyghe, and all he wasted in his warrys there he away his spedfull knyghtys" (p. 244).

[44]See H. J. Hewitt, The Organization of War under Edward III (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), p. 116.

[45]Lumiansky, p. 110.

[46]J. L. N. O'Loughlin, "The English Alliterative Romances" in Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages (Hereafter, ALMA), ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 524, is one of many critics to suggest this

idea; see above: Chapter 1, n. 57. For the French version,
see La Mort le Roi Artu in The Vulgate Version of the
Arthurian Romances, Vol. 6, ed. H. Oskar Sommer (Washington,
D. C.: Riverside Press, 1913), p. 361.

[47]The dream of fortune in the French work occurs after
Arthur's career has made a dramatic turn toward disaster:
Gawain has already been killed, and in a vision he has warned
Arthur not to meed Mordred and to send for Lancelot. By
contrast, the portentous dream in Layamon's Brut occurs at
the same point as in the Morte Arthure. There are, however,
no other similarities to suggest any relation between the
dreams in these two works.

[48]John A. Yunck, The Lineage of Lady Meed: The Develop-
ment of Medieval Venality Satire (Notre Dame: Notre Dame
Press, 1963), p. 285, presents an illustration of "The Animal
Faces of Avarice" from the Hortus Deliciarum by Herrade de
Landsberg. In this illustration Avarice is in a cart at the
center of a wheel and is surrounded by several animals,
including the swine, wolf, and lion. From this illustration
and Yunck's comment are derived the symbolic associations
suggested in the text of this paper. It is not beyond the
realm of possibility that behind the Morte Arthure poet's
picture of Fortune is some illustration of Avarice (or Meed)
with such symbolic animals. The association of Fortune and
Avarice seems logical enough. Yunck, p. 295, comments, "Meed

--who is one of the rewards of fortune--is as amoral and unstable in her affections as <u>Fortuna</u> herself." Though they do not develop the idea, M. M. Banks, ed., <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u> (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1900), p. 150, and John Finlayson, ed., <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure</u>, p. 23, call attention to similarities between the descriptions of the <u>Morte</u> <u>Arthure's</u> Fortune and Langland's Lady Meed.

[49]John Finlayson, "Rhetorical 'Descriptio,'" 8-10.

[50]H. R. Patch, <u>The</u> <u>Other</u> <u>World</u>: <u>According</u> <u>to</u> <u>Descriptions</u> <u>in</u> <u>Medieval</u> <u>Literature</u> (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 222-3.

[51]Matthews, p. 35, attaches importance to the fact that "Alexander is given first place, contrary to both historical dating and literary tradition." The arrangement may be meant to emphasize the Alexandrian proportions of Arthur at this point in the poem. However, one should not set too much store by such evidence unless he is prepared to explain the chronological disorder in the list of Jewish heroes.

[52]Höltgen, "König Arthur und Fortuna," 38, relates the Nine Worthies to <u>De</u> <u>Casibus</u> tragedies.

[53]John Gower, <u>Mirour</u> <u>de</u> <u>L'Omme</u>, 1477-88, in <u>The</u> <u>Complete</u> <u>Works</u> <u>of</u> <u>John</u> <u>Gower</u>: <u>The</u> <u>French</u> <u>Works</u>, ed. G. C. Macaulay

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), p. 20. Larry Benson,
Art _and_ _Tradition_ _in_ _Sir_ _Gawain_ _and_ _the_ _Green_ _Knight_ (New
Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1965), p.
204, calls attention to this passage. Of interest is the
entire discussion of "Surquiderie" in the _Mirour_, 1441-728,
pp. 20-3, and Gower's discussion of the same sin in the first
book of _Confessio_ _Amantis_, 1883-1921, pp. 87-8.

[54]Matthews, 128. To be completely fair to Matthews,
we should note that he believes the poet's attitude toward
Arthur is "ambivalent" throughout the Poem: "The sinful
Arthur is also the poet's hero, 'oure kynge,' the greatest
of British rulers" (p. 126).

[55]Lumiansky, p. 110.

[56]Höltgen, p. 50.

[57]Finlayson, "The Concept," p. 266.

[58]Benson, "The Alliterative _Morte_ _Arthure_," 80.

[59]Matthews, pp. 124-5.

[60]Farnham, p. 187.

[61]Farnham, p. 193.

[62]Reinhold Niebuhr, _Beyond_ _Tragedy_: _Essays_ _on_ _the_
Christian _Interpretation_ _of_ _History_ (1937; rpt. New York:

Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), pp. x-xi. Underlying this argument is Niebuhr's idea of tragedy: "In true tragedy the hero defies malignant power to assert the integrity of his soul. He suffers because he is strong and not because he is weak. He involves himself in guilt not by his vice but by his virtue" (p. 157).

[63]Niebuhr, p. 168.

[64]Niebuhr, p. 169.

[65]Matthews, p. 136.

[66]Dorothy Everett, Essays on Middle English Literature, ed. P. Kean (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 65.

[67]Lumiansky, p. 114.

[68]George Clark, "Gawain's Fall: The Alliterative Morte Arthure and Hastings," TSL, 11 (1966), 89-95, suggests that the structure of the account of Gawain's fatal adventure against Mordred may have been inspired by accounts of the Battle of Hastings: "Most of the less authentic histories visualize Harold's whole army trapped at a stroke and slaughtered in a body as is Gawain's band" (92). The similarities are at best very general. Clark argues that the Morte Arthure poet "did not intend a literary allusion to the Battle of Hastings."

[69]Velma B. Richmond, _Laments for the Dead in Medieval Narrative_ (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1966), p. 63.

[70]The mention of "werdes" and the suggestion that Mordred is an agent of the divine scheme is an interesting touch that modifies our harsh judgment of Mordred. For a lengthy discussion which emphasizes (perhaps to an excess) the importance of fate or _wyrd_ in the poem, see Karl Heinz Göller, _König Arthur in der englischen Literatur des späten Mittelalters_, Palaestra, 238 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), pp. 104-5. Of this particular episode, Goller comments, "Ohne Modred von seiner persönlichen Schuld freizusprechen und dadurch die Verantwortung auf eine anonyme Macht abzuwälzen, gibt der Dichter doch zu verstehen, dass dieses Unheil vorausbestimmt war, und dass Modred zwar ein williger Parteigänger und Verräter, aber doch nur Werkzeug war: 'his werdes ware wroghte'" (p. 105).

[71]George Kane, _Middle English Literature_ (London: Methuen, 1951), p. 73.

[72]Matthews, p. 148. Almost without exception, the reviewers of Matthews' book objected strenuously to this argument. See, for example, John Finlayson, _MAE_, 32 (1963), 76, and K. H. Göller, _Anglia_, 79 (1961), 86.

[73]Helaine Newstead, Review of Matthews, The Tragedy
of Arthur, in Romance Philology, 16 (1962-3), 121.

[74]See Habicht, p. 96. For Habicht's analysis of
Arthur's movement from grief to action, see pp. 101-2.

[75]Concerning his father, Idrus tells Arthur: "He
es eldare than I, and ende salle we bothene;/ He salle
ferkke before, and I salle come aftyre" (4151-2). Dis-
cussing these lines, George Kane comments (p. 72):

> The wry callousness . . . here is not a super-
> fluous conceit but a sign of the poet's own deep
> response to the situation and character he has
> created, ironic because that character professes to
> dismiss emotion when emotion is at its strongest.
> The situation belongs to the standard pattern of
> heroic poetry in which a man is torn between two
> loyalties and makes his choice only at great cost.

[76]Richmond, p. 52.

[77]As Larry Benson, "The Alliterative Morte Arthure,"
78, suggests: "When Arthur orders Mordred's children to be
slain, he is not merely indulging in an archaic passion for
complete revenge; he is doing his duty as a good medieval
king by seeing that 'No wykyde wede waxe, ne wyrthe one this
erthe.'" We might recall the similar attitude toward
vengeance expressed in Piers the Plowman, B-Text, ed. W. W.
Skeat (1869; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1950),
Passus III, 257ff.

[78]Donald R. Howard, *The Three Temptations: Medieval Man in Search of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 266-8, in discussing the concepts of time and space in *Sir Gawain*, *Troilus*, and *Piers Plowman*, offers this conclusion, appropriate also to the *Morte Arthure*:

> [E]ach poem returns us to a starting point, suggests a new beginning and an unpredictable future. We have passed across one stretch of time to another, none of it ever to be retraced; yet all of it is arranged in cycles which repeat a fundamental and predisposed pattern. . . . In each poem the events in time are irreversibly finished at the end of the poem, and time continues irreversibly. Yet in each poem it is implied that succeeding events on earth will repeat the conditions of life and reveal again the central truths enacted in the works itself.

[79]Of relevance here is another generalization about *Sir Gawain*, *Troilus*, and *Piers Plowman* by D. R. Howard, p. 300:

> [E]ach of these fourteenth-century poems, in spite of its emphasis on Christianity in its ascetical and eschatological aspects, presents at its heart what seems a very modern image of man striving after tangible, earthly goals. . . . Each [hero] succeeds in part and fails in part; but each author suggests that, while the final ends of the Christian life are of such transcendent importance as to make all else seem vain, there is still an essential dignity in man's striving for these limited, earthly goals, an irreducible worth in man's efforts on his own behalf.

Chapter 5

Edward III and Arthur

At the outset of this paper we discussed the tendency to find political comment in English Arthurian literature. Having established an interpretation of the Alliterative <u>Morte Arthure</u> from purely literary considerations, we shall now take up the problem of whether the poem has any relation to political events of the fourteenth century. As we noted earlier, both George Neilson and William Matthews have argued that the <u>Morte Arthure</u> contains an implicit comment on Edward III and his French campaigns, although they disagree on the nature of this comment. While Neilson finds in the poem an extended compliment to Edward, Matthews finds a "protest against the folly and unchristian cruelty of [the] unjustified wars"[1] of Edward. Before looking at these theories, we might consider that the very different times in which these scholars were writing may have had some influence on the attitudes with which they approach fourteenth century. Neilson was a Scottish nationalist in the early twentieth century, proud of Scotland's place in the glorious British empire and thus proud of the great British heritage. It is not surprising then that he sees in Edward's ambitions the dream of an empire on which the sun should never set. Writing in the mid-twentieth century, after Orwell and other disciples of Marx had taught men to sneer at the imperial dream, Matthews

not surprisingly views Edward's wars from the opposite end of
the telescope, as it were, and sees Edward's ambitions as
mean and petty and cruel. Interestingly, Matthews thus finds
congenial and useful for his purposes the Whig historians'
attack on Edward, especially as it is set forth by Bishop
Stubbs.

In examining the conflicting theories, we shall first
look at some of Neilson's and Matthews' arguments for the
allusions they find and attempt to judge the validity and
merit of these arguments. For we cannot discuss the possi-
bility of a political comment in the Morte Arthure until we
have decided whether any identification of Arthur and Edward
does, in fact, exist in the poem and, if it does, whether it
is as specific as Neilson and Matthews contend. Only when we
have established at least the possibility of such an identifi-
cation can we consider what, if any, attitude toward Edward
the Morte Arthure poet expresses and whether he proceeds
beyond an attitude to a comment. To understand this attitude,
we must necessarily consider the nature of the Hundred Years'
War and the particular circumstances in which it arose. Be-
cause much very valuable historical research has been completed
on this subject during the past three decades, we shall look
especially at the current historical understanding of the war
and of contemporary views on the war in the fourteenth century.

Arguments that a poem contains allusions to historical
events must inevitably assume an informed audience who will

recognize them. Undoubtedly with this idea in mind, Neilson suggests that the poem was written for reading before Edward and his court in London. This suggestion, however, has its foundation in very "brotel grounde." The alliterative poetry of the fourteenth century seems to have had no vogue whatever in the London court, if we can rely on the evidence of dialect studies and the words of Chaucer's parson. Moreover, there is little reason to suggest that Edward himself had much interest in literature of any sort or even in the arts in general.

> What cultural activity there was at his court was primarily due to Queen Philippa, . . . whose family (with their court at Valenciennes) had shown a notable interest in the arts. Through her patronage a number of Hainaulters were attracted to the English court; they included, for a while, Jean Froissart (c. 1337-c. 1404), André Beauneveu of Valenciennes, and Jean (alias Hennequin) of Liège.[2]

The English artists who received royal patronage, such as Chaucer and Gower, were of course writing in the tradition of French verse, rather than the native alliterative poetry. Thus, Neilson's idea that the Morte Arthure was written for Edward and the royal court--like its basis, his idea that the author was Sir Hew of Eglinton--has no factual support.

For whom then was the Morte Arthure intended? If, rejecting Neilson, we turn to Matthews for help, we discover that he offers no answer to this question. (Judging from

his book, we must suppose the question never occurred to him.)
All we can say from the evidence we considered in an earlier
chapter (see above, Chapter 1) is that the poem probably was
written for a baronial court or a household of the gentry,
somewhere in the northern counties. Other questions then
arise. How well informed would such an audience have been?
Would it have been well enough informed to recognize allusions
"so cryptic" that they can be discovered "only . . . by intent
scrutiny of the pattern of the romance?"[3] The likelihood that
they would is certainly not very great, unless the poet were
writing for an audience composed largely of first-hand witnesses
to the events. To take a specific instance: Neilson's argu-
ment that the battle in the vale of Sessoynes (1963-2385)
embodies a large-scale allusion to the battle at Crécy implies
that the poet's audience would recognize references to the
English strategy at that battle. To assume that an English
audience would know of the glorious English victory at Crécy
is certainly reasonable. To assume that the same audience,
unless we have clear evidence that it included the king or
his generals, would be familiar with the strategy is consid-
erably less reasonable.

Overlooking these difficulties for the moment, let us
now consider in careful detail Neilson's arguments for the
allusion to Crécy, with which Matthews concurs. The most
superficial facts suggest that such an allusion is unlikely.
Edward's battle at Crécy took place on August 26;[4] the Morte

Arthure poet tells us that the battle at Sessoynes "In the
kalendez of Maye . . . es be-fallene" (2371). Also, the
battle at Crécy occurred when Edward, who was leading his
army on a march through Ponthieu, decided to turn and face
Philip and his army, who had been following in pursuit. The
circumstances of the battle in the Morte Arthure are entirely
different: Arthur forces Lucius to face him in open combat
by preventing the Roman emperor from entering a walled city
where the latter had hoped to bide his time until reinforce-
ments from Lombardy arrived.

Neilson's main argument (and Matthews') for the allusion
involves the supposed similarity between the strategy of
Sessoynes and that of Crécy. Considering that the objectives
in the two battles were very different, we should hardly
expect to see the same strategy in both. Nevertheless, let
us consider what Neilson says. Quoting Morte Arthure 1986-94
(see below), he argues,

> The best possible commentary on this is the battle
> of Crécy. There were three 'battles,' two forming
> the front line, the third the reserve. 'The men
> at arms' (says Mr. Oman) 'all on foot, were formed
> in a solid line--perhaps six or eight deep--in the
> centre of the 'battle.' The archers stood in two
> equal divisions to the right and left of the men at
> arms.' Edward's array and Arthur's are thus es-
> sentially the same-- (1) three 'battles,' i. e.
> the 'cheeke' or 'fronnt,' the middleward, and the
> rearguard; (2) the flower of the knights on foot in
> the battlefront; and (3) the archers on each side of
> (4) the dismounted men at arms.[5]

If we look carefully at the poem, we shall see that Neilson
has taken the lines on which he bases his argument out of

their proper context. According to the full description of

his disposition of his forces, Arthur (who, incidentally,

seems not to be suffering the numerical disadvantage which

beset Edward at Crécy) divides his knights into "seuene grett

stales" (1980). Instead of paraphrasing the description, let

us simply reproduce it in full with numbers added to indicate

the disposition of the seven companies of British forces:

> (1)   Anely in the vale a vawewarde enbusches;
> Sir Valyant of Vyleris, with valyant knyghttez,
> Be-fore the kyngez visage made sich avowez,
> To venquyse by victorie the vescownte of Rome!
> ffor-thi the kynge chargez hym, what chaunce so
>   be-falle,
> Cheftayne of the cheekke, with cheualrous knyghttez,
> And sythyne meles with mouthe, that he most traistez;
> (2)   Demenys the medylwarde menskfully hyme
>   selfene,
> ffittes his fote-mene, alls hym faire thynkkes;
> (3)   On frounte in the fore breste, the flour of
>   his knyghtez,
> His archers on aythere halfe he ordaynede ther-aftyre
> To schake in a sheltrone, to schotte whene thame
>   lykez;
> (4)   He arrayed in the rerewarde fulle rialle
>   knyghtez,
> With renkkes renownnd of the Rounde Table,
> Sir Raynalde, sir Richere, that rade was neuer,
> The riche duke of Rowne wyt[h] ryders ynewe;
> (5)   Sir Cayous, sir Clegis, and clene mene of
>   armes,
> The kyng castes to kepe be thaa clere strandes.
> (6)   Sir Lott and sir Launcelotte, thise lordly
>   knyghttez,
> Salle lenge on his lefte hande, wyth legyones ynewe,
> To meue in the morne-while, ʒif the myste happynne;
> (7)   Sir Cador of Cornewaile, and his kene
>   knyghtez,
> To kepe at the karfuke, to close in ther othere:
> He plantez in siche placez pryncez and erlez,
> That no powere sulde passe be no preue wayes.
>   (1981-2005.)

This strategy of seven companies carefully arranged to

prevent Lucius' entry into the city and to force him to fight on open ground is far different from the arrangement of the three 'battles' or companies of the English army at Crécy.

In conclusion, we need consider only a few other details from Neilson's argument for the Crécy allusion and Matthews' corroboration of this argument. First, the reference to the "archers on aythere half" of the front line may owe its inspiration not, as they argue, to Edward's strategy at Crécy, but to these lines from Wace:

> Le bons servanz, _les bons archiers_
> E les vaillanz arbelastiers
> _Mist de douz parz defors la presse_
> Pur traire bien a la traverse.
>
> (12387-90; italics added.)[6]

Second, Matthews argument that "Genoese formed an important part of the opposed army in both engagements"[7] seems to be based on the assumption that the giants in _Morte Arthure_ 2111-34 are the same as those "geaunte of geene" mentioned in _Morte Arthure_ 559. That the poet expects a detailed memory of an item mentioned 1600 lines earlier is hard to believe. Finally, according to Matthews, the "most persuasive [argument] that the poet was envisaging an Anglo-French conflict is that in one line he refers to the enemy as being French—'and faughte with the frekkeste þat to Fraunce langez' (1. 2164)."[8] To understand the weakness of this argument, we must look at the line in its context:

> Sir Kayous, sir Clegis, with clene mene of armez,
> Enconters theme at the clyffe with clene mene of
>   armes,
> ffyghttes faste in the fyrth, frythes no wapene,
> ffelled at the firste come fyfe hundrethe at ones!
> And when they fande theym foresett with oure fers
>   knyghtez,
> ffewe mene agayne fele mot fyche theme bettyre;
> ffeghttez with alle the frappe, foynes with speres,
> And faughte with the frekkeste that to Fraunce
>   langez.
>
> (2157-64.)

Clearly, the subject of "faughte" is "they" who are "foresett with oure fers knyghtes" and who are, therefore, the Romans. The "frekkeste that to Fraunce langez" are, of course, forces from Arthur's French kingdoms.

With the weakness of these arguments now apparent, we can with good reason reject the identification of Sessoynes and Crécy and turn to the second major allusion on which Neilson and Matthews agree. This is the supposed reference to the sea-battle of Winchelsea or Espagnols-sur-Mer in the awkward mention of "Spanyolis" (3700) during the account of the battle between Arthur's British and Mordred's Danish fleets (3601-3711). To support the argument, Neilson offers a series of quotations from the description of the Winchelsea battle in several contemporary chronicles.[9] From the evidence of these quotations, Neilson concludes that "there is more of live chronicle of the fight of Winchelsea in the little finger of Morte Arthure than there is in the entire body of Laurence Minot's song of Les Espagnols sur Mer."[10] The weight of the evidence is, however, not so convincing as

Neilson would have us believe. As Finlayson points out,

> None of his parallels . . . demonstrates direct
> borrowing, and it could be pointed out that
> Froissart's account of another sea-battle, Sluys,
> contains much the same material. . . . Mediaeval
> sea-battles are fairly stereo-typed, whether
> described by chroniclers or poets, since they talk
> not of strategy, but of the shooting of arrows,
> hand to hand fights, and drowning men. Christine
> de Pisan, who was heavily indebted to Vegetius,
> describes sea-battles in terms which bear as much
> relationship to Morte Arthure's account as do the
> chronicles cited by Neilson.[11]

Moreover, as we noted earlier (see above, Chapter 1), another explanation for the reference to "Spanyolis" may be that the poet was inspired by some account of the English sea-battle with the Spanish off La Rochelle in 1372, even though the arguments against this possibility are three: the king was not present at La Rochelle; the latter battle culminated in an English defeat; and it took place off the coast of France, not England. Still, the generic elements of description of the La Rochelle battle, at which the English forces won renown for their valor, are the same as those in Froissart's account of Winchelsea and the Morte Arthure sea-battle. In the light of these considerations, we must admit that the possibility of an allusion does exist, although we may wonder why, if he intends an allusion, the poet avoids mention of a specific geographical location.

The next major allusion Neilson and Matthews find is in the episode of the Giant of St. Michael's Mount. Matthews states, "Arthur's freeing of the duchess of Brittany from the

imperialistically inclined giant . . . has some counterpart

in Edward's support in 1342 of the embattled Joan of Montfort

who fought so pluckily to uphold the tenure of her imprisoned

husband against the monkish but brutal Charles of Blois, his

rival in claiming the duchy of Brittany."[12] Matthews' views

notwithstanding, Arthur does not free the duchess, for she

is already dead and buried when he reaches the mountaintop

(see 979-80). The source of Matthews' rather farfetched

argument is of course Neilson, who, stretching logic beyond

its breaking point, links the abduction of the duchess with

the siege of fortresses in Brittany.[13] He further argues,

"As regards the picture of the qualities of the duchess, it

is enough to recall the words of Jehan le Bel, . . . declaring

that she had the heart of a lion..... and was a woman of

grand courage." Nowhere does he explain why the Morte Arthure

poet's description of this "gentileste jowelle" (862), who

"was flour of alle Fraunce" (860), leads him to believe she

had the heart of a lion. In the account of the seige of Metz,

Neilson finds further allusions to Joan (or Jeanne, as he

calls her). To make his point, Neilson arbitrarily insists,

"Read Lorayne as a poetic equivalent of Brittany." Then,

turning to the description of the ladies who come to beg

mercy of Arthur after his assault on the city, Neilson argues,

> Decisive tokens in the argument of identification
> of the lady who in lines 3044 and 3045 is called
> first "the duchess" and then "the Countess of

Crasyn" are not only that Jeanne . . . was both
Countess of Montfort and Duchess of Brittany, but
that Crasyn seems to be a form of Carhaix, the
name of a place adjacent to Hennebont, and also
one of the duchess's possessions.[14]

To this argument John Finlayson has replied, "Admittedly,
there are some difficulties at this part of the poem, but not
so difficult as to make Arthur a rescuer instead of an
aggressor. Here, he is simply showing mercy to the women of
the city he is besieging."[15] In addition, Finlayson notes
that "Crasyne" is undoubtedly the seneschal of Quercy
(alternative spellings: Cressyn, Kersin) "which was at one
time ridden through by the English on one of the _chevauchés_
which were such a prominent feature of the campaigns of the
Black Prince and Edward." Thus, we can see the identification
of Joan with the characters in the _Morte Arthure_ has no basis.

The seige of Metz has received differing interpretations
at the hands of Neilson and Matthews. The latter sees in it
an allusion to the seige of Calais. While he admits that for
the most part there are only "general similarities that might
be expected in any description of medieval sieges,"[16]
Matthews does urge that the incident with the "cowntas of
Crasyne" (3045) refers to "the most famous incident" at
Calais: "when all other pleas for mercy had failed, the
queen [Philippa] fell to her knees and persuaded the king to
forego his vengeance upon Calais and its citizens."[17] This
extremely romantic incident, reported uniquely by Froissart,

proves only that the <u>Morte Arthure</u> poet and Froissart were borrowing from the same stock of chivalric narrative conventions.

Neilson's theory concerning the siege of Metz is much more complex and imaginative than Matthews'. Commenting on the importance of Metz as "the chief commercial community of Lorraine," Neilson adds, "Moreover it was the city of its [the Holy Roman Emperor's] sovereign--that is, an imperial city of Charles IV., Emperor from 1346 until 1378."[18] Proceeding from this notion, Neilson builds an elaborate argument in which he associates Lucius with Charles IV and seems to suggest that Edward had dreams of becoming emperor:

> The poet understood how to play at <u>vice versâ</u>.
> Edward III., still in the splendour of Crecy,
> where he put Charles IV. to flight, had in 1348
> been chosen emperor by the dissatisfied body which
> had previously elected Charles IV.; and although
> Edward, "fearing perils, labours, and wars, refused
> the empire," an imperial coronation was a splendid
> might-have-been not without its aptness to embellish
> in poetical romance an Arthur who had already in
> him so much of Edward III. . . . Nor may it be for-
> gotten . . . that the mystic voice of seeming
> prophecy, quickened perhaps by the doings of the
> English companies in Italy, had said that Edward
> III. should be emperor.[19]

Neilson's theory is a tangled thread of historical mis-information. For example, his emphasis on Metz as "in some senses one of his [Charles'] capitals" is entirely misplaced. Consider that the Golden Bull, the imperial constitution promulgated by Charles in 1356, specified that the emperor "was to be elected at Frankfort, crowned at Aachen, and hold his first diet at Nuremburg."[20] His argument concerning the

supposed offer of the crown to Edward shows no understanding of the complex relations of England and France with the Empire and the political maneuverings behind these relations. In 1338 the emperor Lewis IV (of the Bavarian house of Wittelsbach) made Edward III the imperial vicar and "Philip of Valois was ousted from a prize he too had sought."[21] This appointment empowered Edward "to enforce service against France from the subjects of the Empire, associated him with a German policy of revindication of imperial rights in the west and was the crowning achievement of his diplomacy."[22] Obviously, self-interest motivated this alliance. Edward was maneuvering to collect allies for his inevitable was against Philip, for whom Lewis had no special affection because he thought Philip was in league with the pope against him. In 1346 Charles IV of the house of Luxemburg was elected emperor after Lewis was dethroned by Clement VI, a Frenchman and an old friend of Charles. At this time Lewis still cherished hopes of reclaiming the imperial title through military means (the means by which he had first gained it[23]). In 1347, however, Lewis died in a hunting accident. At that point "the Wittelsbach house and its remaining allies made efforts to secure a separate election and to challenge Charles in the same way as Charles had challenged Lewis."[24] The first choice of the Bavarians was Edward III. Bede Jarrett, one of Charles' biographers, comments on his refusal of their offer:

> Certainly already Edward III knew enough of the
> empire to refuse it. He had his own troubles and
> wars to manage. His heir, the Black Prince, was
> never very robust and could not take over this new
> crown. The French provinces under the English crown
> were already a weakness and a cause of financial
> embarrassment. What vast expenditure would not
> the empire drain from the depleted coffers of the
> English king![25]

Finally, we may consider the matter of Charles' conduct at the battle of Crécy, which Neilson mentions. Charles, shortly after his election as emperor, went to aid the French in response to the summons of his blind and blindly romantic father, John of Bohemia. The account of his conduct at Crécy, to which Neilson alludes, comes from Froissart: "The lord Charles of Bohemia, who had already signed his name as king of Germany, and bore the arms, had come in good order to the engagement; but when he perceived that it was likely to turn out against the French, he departed, and I do not well know what road he took."[26] Jarrett suggests that this inglorious account may have been a slander promulgated by the French. "Charles and Philip were never personally friendly to each other; and Froissart was likely to learn only the French version of Charles' share in the fighting."[27] Thus, we seem to be left with no solid reasons for accepting Neilson's theory. Certainly the Morte Arthure poet's use of the title, "The emperour of Almayne" (3210), does suggest he envisions his Arthur in the dimensions of a Holy Roman Emperor, though he probably intends no specific reference to Charles.

The final major narrative incident in which Matthews and

Neilson find an allusion is the relation of Guenevere and Mordred. Despite the fact that this relation has a long literary tradition behind it, both Neilson and Matthews contend that the poet had in mind the relation of Isabella, Edward's mother, and Roger Mortimer. Associating Arthur with Edward and Guenevere with Edward's mother demands some rather large logical jumps and raises some bizarre possibilities of interpretation that we shall not explore. The only concrete argument with any force offered to support the supposed allusion is the mention of Wallingford (4203, 4217) which, Matthews claims, "is a castle associated with Edward II and Edward III."[28] He also finds particular associations of the castle with Gaveston, Edward II, and Isabella. However, John Finlayson tells us, "From 1361 until her death in 1385 it was inhabited chiefly by Joan of Kent, the wife of the Black Prince."[29] Given this fact, one can hardly suppose that a poet writing in the second half of the fourteenth century should expect an audience to associate the castle with Isabella.[30]

After this review of the main evidence on which the idea is based, we can conclude with reasonable confidence that the Morte Arthure does not contain a series of specific and detailed allusions to the reign of Edward III. Clearly, the poet did not have Edward's life and activities constantly in mind when he was creating his portrait of Arthur. This conclusion, however, does not exclude the possibility that

Edward in some very general way influenced the poet's conception of Arthur. Considering the well known tendency among medieval poets to describe events from long ago in contemporary terms, there will probably always persist a temptation to find some significance in such evidence as the lists of place-names Neilson compiles from the poem.[31] John Finlayson, commenting on these lists, shrewdly observes,

> . . . given that these names do not all occur at the section of the chronicle on which the main plot of the poem is based; that Edward III had directly promoted the Arthurian revival in England; and that the most recent, memorable connection of those places was with a monarch frequently compared to Arthur, it is not unreasonable to assume that a poet writing a heroic poem, concerned with national conquest, may have been prompted to embroider his tale with additional place-names associated with England's latest great conqueror, rather than that he chose them by the merest coincidence. Whether their occurrence in the poem was intended to evoke memories of these events is very much more doubtful.[32]

These place-names, along with the possible allusion to Winchelsea or La Rochelle and the well established fact that medieval authors frequently used contemporary events in embellishing stories from the past, permit no more decisive statement than John Finlayson's conclusion that "All we can safely assert . . . is that there is a reasonable possibility that certain events of Edward's reign had a peripheral influence on the poet."[33]

Because of this possibility, we shall now turn to a few brief considerations of Edward III and the nature of political conditions during his reign. To begin, we must understand

that neither in England nor in France was there a modern,
sophisticated concept of nationalism at the outset of the
conflict known to us as the Hundred Years' War. As Kenneth
Fowler comments, "In the early history of the two countries we
are faced with a past that is Anglo-French, rather than
English or French, and the process of national development
was by no means completed by 1337."[34] The ultimate origins
of the Hundred Years' War may be traced to the long-standing
problem of English and French feudal relations in the wealthy
province of Aquitaine, which was in the early fourteenth cen-
tury only beginning to be an issue involving national
sovereignty. Despite nearly a century of diplomatic efforts,
all attempts to solve this problem were unsuccessful. "There
could be no easy solution to Anglo-French relations," Kenneth
Fowler reminds us, "as long as the king of England, sovereign
in his own isle, was a vassal of the king of France for the
duchy of Aquitaine. If in theory it was possible to distin-
guish between his separate capacities, in practice it was
not."[35] Why this long disputed problem should give way to
large-scale hostilities in the reign of Edward III is a
matter too complex for complete exposition in a paper of this
length. Suffice it to say that along with the fact that
negotiations between the French and English concerning Gascony
reached an impasse in 1336, there was the additional problem
of Philip VI's support for the Scottish nationalists, which
jeopardized Edward's pretensions in Scotland. May McKisack,

however, in her most articulate, detailed, and well reasoned
study of the causes of the war, suggests that political
considerations may not in the end have been the foremost
reason for the war:

> The lure of adventure and the hope of gain, a
> mingling of high spirits, greed, and courage drew
> Edward and his subjects into war; and the fact
> that the captains and kings enjoyed it was not the
> least important reason why the war was fought.
> Concern for 'rights', we may infer, came second.[36]

The proposition that Edward went to war to press his
claim to the French throne is an idea that resists easy
disposition, and one which we must consider because it bears
directly on a discussion of the Morte Arthure. Matthews,
for example, asserts that both Arthur's and Edward's "wars
began with disputes over homage and casuistical British
claims to lordship abroad, Arthur claiming through Constantine
and others of his remote ancestors, Edward through Isabella
his mother."[37] The patronizing, modern attitude implied by
Matthews' use of the word casuistical does not indicate much
in the way of an understanding of this very thorny fourteenth
century political issue. Moreover, it obscures the distinc-
tion between the legitimacy of the claim and the reasons for
advancing it. Virtually all modern historians follow Edouard
Perroy's argument that the conflict between England and France
was not "a quarrel essentially dynastic"[38] in origin, and some
even regard the claim as only a "tactical device, never taken
really seriously, and easily thrown over for territorial
concessions."[39] However, few really dismiss the claim so

easily. Even Perroy, who believes that Edward III advanced his claim "by way of reply to the confiscation of his fief," Aquitaine, by Philip of Valois, argues that there was some legitimacy to Edward's claim and states, "The fact remains that, though it arose indirectly, the dynastic question envenomed and complicated the conflict and in the long run, under Henry V of Lancaster, took precedence over the feudal question."[40] It is even more difficult to dismiss the claim as mere casuistry since the publication of John Le Patourel's very forceful argument that Edward did indeed have not only a serious claim to the French throne, but also "good faith in his claim."[41] Using the evidence of treaty revisions and military campaigns, Le Patourel suggests that Edward, up to 1359, may have intended to pursue the French throne "province by province, adjusting his methods to the individual circumstances of each."[42] For want of more conclusive evidence, however, we can only agree with McKisack's estimate of Edward's intention:

> It may be surmised, perhaps, that though the French Crown represented the summit of Edward's hopes he had little expectation of attaining it, and that, in the sphere of practical politics, his principal objectives were sovereignty in a greatly extended Gascony, destruction of the Franco-Scottish alliance, retention of Calais as an English possession, and maintenance of his influence in Flanders.[43]

Whatever the motives and objectives in his war with France, there can be no doubt that Edward III scored amazing successes in both military and political spheres. For our concerns, Edward's political achievement is his most important

success. When Edward in 1330 wrested control of his kingdom from his wicked mother Isabella and her ambitious lover, Roger Mortimer, England was in a very sorry condition. For years the energies of the kingdom had been absorbed by civil disorder stemming from conflicts between the peers of the realm and the weak, ineffectual Edward II. The three-year rule by the queen and her rapacious lover had merely prolonged the disorder and strife.

> The prestige of the medieval monarchy had never been lower than in those years of calamity and usurpation. The task confronting Edward was nothing less than the "restoration of the . . . monarchy both at home and abroad." His achievement can only be measured by the depth to which the country had fallen.[44]

Modern historians are virtually unanimous in their praise of Edward's achievement in restoring the prestige of the English monarchy and in bringing England to a foremost position among the countries of western Christendom. In the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, Stubbs and other Whig historians condemned Edward as "a warrior; ambitious, unscrupulous, selfish, extravagant, and ostentatious."[45] Studies of Edward's reign conducted in the past half-century have now corrected the balance, and the achievements of Edward are now seen in a vastly more favorable light.

Among these achievements was Edward's uniting and rallying of the kingdom behind himself and his cause. Perhaps, as has been suggested recently, not only the chivalric temper of

the times but also the economics of the period worked in Edward's favor. To explain "why Edward III found it easy to secure support from nobles and gentry for a cause not dissimilar from that for which his grandfather Edward I was unable to enlist interest," Denys Hay suggests that "the general economic regression of the early fourteenth century . . . made paid service in the king's army, not to speak of the opportunities for booty and ransom, attractive in the fourteenth century as they had not been in the thirteenth."[46] Furthermore, Hay is probably correct in his estimation of the men who fought for the king: "The soldiers in Edward III's armies were men on the make, and military considerations seldom clouded their selfish intentions." All the more amazing then is Edward's successful management of these men and their loyalties. As McKisack reminds,

> . . . the discipline and morale of the English armies were magnificent and without parallel in contemporary Europe and the king who knew how to control and inspire the ranks also knew how to choose his officers. We hear nothing of jealousy or contention among them; their loyalty to Edward persisted to the end. The principal commanders who served him in his first campaigns . . . were with him in his last.[47]

Surely, McKisack is right when she suggests that Edward "understood better than his grandson, and better than some of his modern critics, how little a policy of peace, retrenchment, and reform was likely to appeal to the knightly classes among his subjects."[48]

The attitude of the commons toward Edward and his

campaigns has been the subject of some considerable dispute among modern historians. The evidence of this attitude does not point clearly in a single direction, and, therefore, does not permit easy interpretation. It is a gross oversimplification to say as Matthews does, in terms too emotional for the occasion, that "as Edward's . . . fata morgana year after year bled his countrymen white, criticism of his senseless and profitless campaigns increased."[49] Interestingly, Matthews offers no contemporary evidence to support this idea. To be sure, the commons were heavily taxed to support the continuing costs of the war, and taxation, then as now, was not popular. Yet despite their criticism of administrative mismanagement by the king's councillors, the commons repeatedly voted to Edward the taxes he requested. In this connection it is interesting to consider the "peroration" of Peter de la Mare, a knight of the shire, acting as spokesman for the commons before a group of peers during the Good Parliament of 1376:

> "Lords" he said "and magnates, by whose faith and industry the government of the kingdom ought to be carried out. I will by no means try to conceal from your wisdom how weighed down the common people have been by the burden of taxes. . . . All of which they would bear cheerfully if the king or kingdom seemed to get any advantage or profit from it. It would also have been tolerable to the people if all that money had been spent in forwarding our military affairs, even though these had been unsuccessful. But it is obvious that the king has neither received advantage nor the kingdom any return from it. And so, because the public was never told how such great sums of money were spent, the common people are demanding a statement of

accounts from those who received the money, for it
is not credible that the king should need such an
infinitely large sum if his ministers were loyal."[50]

Such criticism has nothing to do with the conduct of the wars.
It simply implies that, in view of the staggering amounts of
wealth accumulated in English victories, "if the king had
better councillors and servants, he need levy no subsidies
because the war should pay for itself."[51]

H. J. Hewitt, in his story of Edward's organization of
the war effort, attempts to examine public opinion in the
period from 1338 to 1362. From a very skillful and cautious
survey of contemporary evidence, Hewitt builds a strong case
for Edward's consciousness of public opinion. For example,
such evidence as Edward's requests to the native bishops "to
order 'preachings, prayers and processions' in their
dioceses"[52] on behalf of impending expeditions suggests
that Edward was attempting to mold public opinion in favor
of the war. Furthermore, Hewitt argues that in Edward's
employment of the native church, as well as royal proclama-
tions and messages, we can see that the king's general policy
involved "the use of a rudimentary news service and the
association in men's minds of the efforts of the expedition-
ary forces with God's providence."[53] Despite the strains of
taxation and "waves of annoyance and even anger over spies,
purveyors, and returned soldiers,"[54] the period of Edward's
continental campaigns, according to Hewitt, was for "the
majority of the people . . . a period of confidence and

occasionally of elation."[55]

That Edward's immense popularity declined somewhat
during "his final years of voluptuous senility"[56] is beyond
dispute. Yet even during this period and afterward, as
Hewitt notes, there was no widespread condemnation of Edward
and his campaigns:

> . . . in the closing years of the reign when adver-
> sity and defeat were falling on English arms, men
> looked back with pride to the period which ended at
> Bretigny and the Treaty of Calais. 'The king of
> England was for many years spirited and gracious
> in victories,' declared Thomas Brinton, bishop of
> Rochester. 'In his days, England might have been
> called a kingdom among kingdoms: so many victories
> were gained, so many kings captured, so many
> territories occupied . . . God was wont to be
> English . . . How often a few years ago, our
> princes crossed the seas to defend our rights and
> won many triumphs over their enemies.'[57]

To understand the full importance of these nostalgic comments,
we must remember that Bishop Brinton was an outspoken critic
of conditions at the royal court, including the influence
of Alice Perrers, during the latter years of Edward's
reign.[58] Moreover, he may have had some significant role
in the activities of the Good Parliament of 1376, which
resulted in the impeachment of William Latimer, the king's
chamberlain, and several other court officials. These
comments are, in fact, imbedded in sermons that lament
the desperate plight of the kingdom during the period of
Edward's decline.[59] That Bishop Brinton might condemn the
failures of this period and yet look back with favor upon
the earlier glories of the reign probably gives some clear

indication of the attitude toward Edward prevalent at the

time. To corroborate this conclusion, we might recall

Froissart's description of the reaction to Edward's death:

> On 21 June 1377, the gallant and noble King Edward
> III departed this life, to the deep distress of the
> whole realm of England, for he had been a good king
> for them. His like had not been seen since the days
> of King Arthur. . . . So King Edward was embalmed
> . . . and carried thus at a slow march through the
> city of London, the face uncovered. To witness and
> hear the grief of the people, their sobs and screams
> and lamentations on that day would have rended any-
> one's heart.[60]

It seems reasonable then to conclude that if the portrait

of Arthur in the _Morte Arthure_ was to any appreciable extent

influenced by Edward III, the poet probably looked upon the

Plantagenet king with an entirely favorable attitude. The

most striking similarities between Edward and the Arthur of

the poem indicate that the _Morte Arthure_ poet, if he was

influenced by the broad outlines of Edward's career, saw in

the Plantagenet king a great national hero. Edward, like the

Arthur of his poem, reacted forcefully and positively--as an

Englishman would see it--to a tyrannous power that was menacing

his control of his lands in France. Part of the reaction to

this menace, in the cases of both Edward and Arthur, was an

assertion of their own claims to the throne occuped by the

tyrannous power. In the wars that ensued, Edward and Arthur

brought their native kingdoms to a position of unparalleled

strength and renown.

To proceed beyond these very few and very general

similarities of Edward and Arthur is unsafe and unwise.
In this chapter we have seen that the arguments so far
advanced for a more specific identification have little
basis in the poem itself or in the facts of fourteenth
century history. Thus, we have little reason to believe
that the poem, either explicitly or implicitly, embodies
a specific comment on Edward. Our analysis in the preceding
chapters revealed that the _Morte_ _Arthure_ is rich in meaning
and that it contains moral and philosophical implications
for all men--kings, knights, and commons. With its view of
the temporality of human greatness, the _Morte_ _Arthure_ does
of course offer a comment relevant to the activities of
Edward III, but only insofar as that comment is relevant
to all human dreams of greatness. If the portrait of
Arthur in some general way reminded a contemporary audience
of Edward III, the effect of the association was undoubtedly
to reinforce poignantly and dramatically the vision of the
poem.

NOTES

[1] William Matthews, *The Tragedy of Arthur* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 192.

[2] Kenneth Fowler, *The Age of Plantagenet and Valois: The Struggle for Supremacy, 1328-1498* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), p. 191.

[3] George Neilson, "The Baulked Coronation of Arthur in 'Morte Arthure,'" *N&Q*, 9th Ser., 10 (1902), 404.

[4] Edouard Perroy, *The Hundred Years War*, trans. W. B. Wells (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965), p. 119.

[5] George Neilson, *'Huchown of the Awle Ryale'* the *Alliterative Poet* (Glasgow: James MacLehose & Sons, 1902), p. 59. C. W. C. Oman's description of Crécy, from which Neilson quotes, may be found in *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen & Co., 1898), p. 605.

[6] We might note, incidentally, that this present case and the relation of Mordred and Guenevere are the only instances in which the source provides sufficient reason to set aside the evidence supporting the identification of Edward and Arthur.

[7] Matthews, p. 185.

[8]Matthews, p. 186.

[9]Neilson, 'Huchown,' pp. 61-2.

[10]Neilson, 'Huchown,' p. 62.

[11]Finlayson, "Morte Arthure: The Date," p. 627, n. 19.

[12]Matthews, p. 185.

[13]Neilson, "'Morte Arthure' and the War of Brittany," N&Q, 9th ser., 10 (1902), 163.

[14]Neilson, "'Morte Arthure' and the War of Brittany," 164. At the start of this particular argument, Neilson tells us, "Shift the scene from Metz to Hennebont in Brittany, and again the details of history almost to a fraction fall into line with the romance." Neilson's procedure of random association is most unconvincing.

[15]John Finlayson, "Morte Arthure: The Date and a Source for the Contemporary References," Spec, 42 (1967), 632.

[16]Matthews, p. 186.

[17]Matthews, p. 186. The anonymous editor of Sir John Froissart, Chronicles of England, France, Spain, and the Adjoining Countries, trans. Thomas Johnes, Vol. 1 (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1868), p. 188, in a footnote to the account of this incident offers a comment he attributes

to "La France sous les cinqs Premiers Valois, par M. Levesque, pp. 518, &c." In this comment is the following: "Froissart alone among his contemporaries relates this remarkable fact: and the simplicity of his style may give even to fable the appearance of truth." Pierre Charles Levesque, La France sous les Cinqs Premiers Valois (Paris: De Bure l'aîné, 1788) seems to be the source of the comment.

[18]Neilson, "The Baulked Coronation," 381.

[19]Neilson, "The Baulked Coronation," 404.

[20]Bede Jarrett, The Emperor Charles IV (New York: Sheed & Ward Inc., 1935), p. 177. If Charles had any personal attachment to a city, it was probably Prague; see Jarrett, pp. 77-90.

[21]Kenneth Fowler, The Age of Plantagenet and Valois: The Struggle for Supremacy, 1328-1498 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), p. 49.

[22]Fowler, p. 49. In this passage Fowler is paraphrasing May McKisack, The Fourteenth Century, 1307-1399 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 122.

[23]"Yet when the election took place on October 19, 1314, it placed Frederick of Habsburg, Frederick the Handsome as they called him, at the head of the empire; next day, however, another election by the dissentient princes was also held, in which Lewis . . . was elected to the empire. This

double election was made possible only because there were
two rival claims to two of the electoral votes. . . . For
eight years this war of succession dragged on, till in 1322
Lewis defeated and captured Frederick the Handsome."
(Jarrett, The Emperor, pp. 97-8.)

[24]Jarrett, The Emperor, p. 111.

[25]Jarrett, The Emperor, p. 112.

[26]Froissart, trans. Johnes, Vol. I, p. 166.

[27]Jarrett, The Emperor, p. 109.

[28]Matthews, p. 184.

[29]Finlayson, "Morte Arthure: The Date," 628.

[30]Neilson's idea that the poet should wish to remind
Edward III of his mother's unfortunate liaison with Mortimer
is preposterous. In dealing with Mortimer, "Edward III
decided to ignore her liaison with Mortimer and the only
charge laid against him in connexion with her was of having
caused discord between the queen and the late king" (McKisack,
p. 102).

[31]Neilson, 'Huchown,' p. 64.

[32]Finlayson, "Morte Arthure: The Date," 628. Dis-
cussing royal messages sent back to England, H. J. Hewitt,

The Organization of War Under Edward III, 1338-62 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), p. 155, observes, "They convey more meaning today than they can have done at the time they were received in England for, in the absence of maps and other goegraphical information, many place-names had little or no significance."

[33]Finlayson, "Morte Arthure: The Date," 638.

[34]Fowler, p. 14.

[35]Fowler, p. 48.

[36]McKisack, p. 126.

[37]Matthews, p. 185.

[38]Perroy, p. 69.

[39]John Le Patourel, "Edward III and the Kingdom of France," History, 43 (1958), 173.

[40]Perroy, p. 69.

[41]Le Patourel, p. 176.

[42]Le Patourel, p. 185.

[43]McKisack, p. 148.

[44]B. Wilkinson, Constitutional History of Medieval England, 1216-1399, Vol. 2: Politics and the Constitution,

1307-1399 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), p. 28. Wilkinson is quoting from an earlier work of his, The Chancery under Edward III (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1929), p. 98.

[45]William Stubbs, The Constitutional History of England, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887), p. 393.

[46]Denys Hay, Europe in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries (London: Longmans, 1966), pp. 157-8.

[47]McKisack, p. 148.

[48]McKisack, p. 250.

[49]Matthews, p. 188. Regarding this statement, it is worth considering a comment by K. B. McFarlane on historians with "a preference . . . for the oracular phrase, the foggier and the shoddier the better. The assertion, for example, that England had been 'bled white' by 1340 is no substitute for a balance sheet, however rough, and to judge from what happened in the next two decades seems exaggerated. Precision may be difficult to attain, but we ought to do better than that" ("War, The Economy and Social Change: England and the Hundred Years War" in "War and Society, 1300-1600," Past and Present, 22 (1962), 3-4.

[50]This passage, which appears in Wilkinson, pp. 216-7,

is a translation of a portion of <u>Chronicon Angliae</u>, ed. E. M.
Thompson, Rolls Series, 64 (London: Longmans & Co., 1874),
p. 73.

[51]McKisack, p. 248.

[52]Hewitt, p. 161.

[53]Hewitt, p. 163.

[54]Hewitt, p. 175.

[55]Hewitt, p. 177.

[56]C. Warren Hollister, <u>The Making of England</u>, <u>55</u>
<u>B. C. to 1399</u> (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1966), p. 203.

[57]Hewitt, p. 178.   This is not to say there was never
any criticism of Edward's campaigns and his imperial ambitions.
Matthews, pp. 87-8, 92, has argued forcefully that Richard
de Bury's <u>Philobiblon</u> and Gower's <u>In Praise of Peace</u> may
contain specific criticism of Edward's wars.

[58]For a full discussion of Bishop Brinton's attitudes
and activities, see Sister Mary Aquinas Devlin, ed., <u>The</u>
<u>Sermons of Thomas Brinton, Bishop of Rochester</u> (<u>1373-1389</u>),
Camden Society, Third Series, Vols. 85-6 (London: Office of
the Royal Historical Society, 1954), pp. xxiv-xxvii.

[59]The first comment "rex Anglie, qui per multos annos ita fuerit animosus et in victoriis graciosus" (Sermon 16, Vol. 85, p. 62) appears in a sermon that, according to Devlin (p. 60), "was preached . . . sometime between 1373 and 1377." As in other sermons which belong to the last years of the reign of Edward III, Brinton "alludes to the weakened condition of the kingdom and the ignominious defeats and losses sustained by the army which formerly was brave and victorious." The second and third comments appear in the following passage from a sermon which, as its editor notes (p. 333), "reveals the emotions of a patriotic Englishman and ecclesiastic who laments the unhappy state into which England had fallen in 1370's." It was probably "delivered in 1378 or one of the years immediately following the death of Edward III in 1377."

> Tempore regis mortui regnum Anglie regnum regnorum potuit appellari, quia tot victorias habuit, tot reges captiuauit, et tot dominia occupauit quod exponi potuit de eo illud Prouerbiorum 16, Inimicos conuertit ad pacem. . . . Sed timeo quod propter peccata nostra omen nostrum deficit. Regnum ruit, et Deus qui solebat esse Anglicus, a nobis recessit quia Expectauimus pacem et non est bonum. (Sermon 73, Vol. 86, p. 339.)

The final comment, "Quociens paucis annis euolutis principes nostri quasi forciores cerui nos et ius nostrum ad defendendum mare transierunt et de aduersariis viriliter triumpharunt non est opus recitare" (Sermon 28, Vol. 85, p. 112), appears in a sermon preached to a convocation of the clergy in 1373.

[60]Jean Froissart, _Froissart: Chronicles_, trans. Geoffrey Brereton (Baltimore: Penguin, 1968), pp. 195-6. This passage does not appear in the Johnes' translation of Froissart from which we have taken quotations elsewhere in this paper. (Evidently the translators were working from different versions of Froissart's first book.)

from Sir John Froissart: <u>Chronicles</u> <u>of</u> <u>England</u>, <u>France</u>, <u>Spain</u> <u>and</u> <u>the</u> <u>Adjoining</u> <u>Countries</u>, Vol. 1, translated by Thomas Johnes (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1868), pp. 394-6.

CHAPTER CCXLVII.

The king of France was so strongly advised by his council, and so strenuously entreated by the Gascons, that an appeal was drawn up, and sent to Aquitaine, to summon the prince of Wales to appear before the parliament of Paris. . . . When this appeal from the said barons and lords of Gascony had been well drawn out, and reduced to writing, after different corrections in the best possible manner by the wisest of the French council, and after it had been very fully considered, they resolved that it should be signified to the prince of Wales, that they summoned him to appear in person, in the chamber of peers at Paris, to answer the complaints made against him and attend the judgment: to which effect, orders were given to an eloquent lawyer, that the business might be more properly done, and a very noble knight of Beauce, called Caponnel de Caponnal.

These two commissioners left Paris with their attendants, taking the road towards Bordeaux. They passed through Berry, Touraine, Poitou, Saintonge, and came to Blaye, where they crossed the Garonne: from thence they went to Bordeaux,

where the prince and princess at that time resided, more than
at any other place. . . . On the following day, at a proper
hour, they went to the abbey of St. Andrew, where the prince
of Wales kept his court.

The knights and squires of the prince received them
kindly, out of respect to the king of France, by whom they
said they were sent. The prince of Wales was soon informed
of their arrival, and ordered them to be brought to him.
When they came into his presence, they bowed very low, and
saluted him with great respect (as was on every account his
due, and they well knew how to pay it), and then gave him
their credential letters. The prince took them, and, after
having read every word, said, "You are welcome; now communi-
cate all that you have to say to us." "Respected sir," said
the lawyer, "here are letters which were given to us by our
honoured lord the king of France; which letters we engaged on
our faith to publish in your presence, for they nearly relate
to you." The prince upon this changed colour, from his great
difficulty to conjecture what they could relate to: the
barons and knights who were with him were equally astonished:
but he restrained himself, and added, "Speak, speak: all
good news we will cheerfully hear." The lawyer then opened
the letter and read, word for word, the contents of it, which
were:

"Charles, by the grace of God king of France, to our
nephew the prince of Wales and Aquitaine, health. Whereas

several prelates, barons, knights, universities, fraternities
and colleges of the country and district of Gascony, residing
and inhabiting upon the borders of our realm, together with
many others from the country and duchy of Aquitaine, have come
before us in our court, to claim justice for certain grievances
and unjust oppressions which you, through weak counsel and
foolish advice, have been induced to do them, and at which
we are much astonished. Therefore, in order to obviate and
remedy such things, we do take cognizance of their cause, in-
somuch that we, of our royal majesty and sovereignty, order
and command you to appear in our city of Paris in person, and
that you shew and present yourself before us, in our chamber
of peers, to hear judgment pronounced upon the aforesaid
complaints and grievances done by you to your subjects, who
claim to be heard, and to have the jurisdiction of our court.
Let there be no delay in obeying this summons, but set out as
speedily as possible after having heard this order read. In
witness whereof, we have affixed our seal to these presents.
Given at Paris, the 25th day of January, 1369."

* * * * *

CHAPTER CCXLVIII.

When the prince of Wales had heard this letter read, he
was more astonished than before. He shook his head; and after
having eyed the said Frenchmen, and considered awhile, he
replied as follows: "We shall willingly attend on the appoint-

ed day at Paris, since the king of France sends for us; but it will be with our helmet on our head, and accompanied by sixty thousand men." The two Frenchmen, upon this, fell on their knees, saying, "Dear sir, have mercy, for God's sake: do not bear this appeal with too much anger nor indignation. We are but messengers sent by our lord the king of France, to whom we owe all obedience (as your subjects in like manner do to you), and to whom it is proper we should pay it: therefore, whatever answer you shall wish to charge us with, we will very willingly report it to our lord." "Oh no," replied the prince, "I am not in the least angry with you, but with those who sent you hither. Your king has been ill advised, thus to take the part of our subjects, and to wish to make himself judge of what he has nothing to do with, nor any right to interfere in. It shall be very clearly demonstrated to him, that when he gave possession and seisin of the whole duchy of Aquitaine to our lord and father, or to his commissaries, he surrendered also all jurisdiction over it; and all those who have now appealed against us, have no other court to apply to but that of England, and to our lord and father. It shall cost a hundred thousand lives, before it shall be otherwise." On saying this, the prince quitted them, and entered another apartment, leaving them quite thunderstruck.

. . .

The prince of Wales was much cast down by this appeal

which had been made against him. His knights and barons were not in better spirits: they wished, and even advised the prince to kill the two messengers, as a salary for their pains; but the prince forbade it to be done. His thoughts, however, were ill-inclined to them: when he heard they were set out, and had taken the road towards Toulouse, he called sir Thomas Felton, the high steward of Rouergue, sir Thomas de Pontchardon, sir Thomas Percy, his chancellor the bishop of Rhodez, and several others of his principal barons; of whom he asked, "Have these Frenchmen that are gone away any passports from me?" They answered, that they had heard nothing about it. "No," replied the prince, shaking his head; "it is not right that they should so easily leave our country, and go to relate their prattle to the duke of Anjou, who loves us little, and say how they have summoned us personally in our own palace. They are, upon due consideration, messengers from my vassals, the earl of Armagnac, the lord d'Albret, the earls of Perigord, Comminges and of Carmaing, rather than from the king of France; so that, for the vexation they have given us, we consent they should be detained and thrown into prison." The council of the prince were well pleased on hearing this, as it was before their advice, and said it had been too long delayed.

. . . .

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