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The Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* and Medieval Tragedy

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Helen, *Ion* and *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* are plays by Euripides in which the potential for tragedy and catastrophe, present throughout as a constant threat and probable outcome, is ultimately averted. This allows for a happy ending. Thus, for example, Iphigeneia in her role as priestess is to oversee the sacrifice of all Greek newcomers to the island, including Orestes, whom she does not at first realise to be her brother. In this instance, however, *anagnorisis* prevents rather than heralds the tragedy, so that the recognition of Orestes' identity averts the sacrifice and helps secure his and her escape back to Greece. The end result is consequently, as one critic has aptly titled it, catastrophe survived rather than suffered.[1] D. J. Conacher labelled these plays 'romantic tragedy.'[2] This title can, *mutatis mutandis*, be usefully applied to an otherwise unrelated text, the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, a text which, far from being a straightforward romance, exploits romance conventions only to highlight the essential tragedy of the Arthurian Legend.

Although a notable achievement in its own right, the Middle English stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur* (*c.* 1400) is nonetheless best known as one of the principal sources for the closing tales of Sir Thomas Malory's Arthuriad. It is usually classified as a romance.[3] Unlike Euripides' romantic tragedies, however, the stanzaic *Morte* successfully averts the possible tragedy of the first half of the poem, only to conclude in civil war, bloodshed and the deaths of most of the principal characters. This markedly unhappy ending runs counter to one of the expected outcomes of romance: the happy ending. And while an ending in death may not be an essential element of tragedy, it is certainly a common one. The progression from prosperity or well-being to hardship or despair is likewise common to a great variety of definitions of tragedy, including that of Chaucer's Monk:

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,

> As olde bookes maken us memorie,
> Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,
> And is yfallen out of heigh degree
> Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly.[4]

As we shall see, it is generically significant that such a pattern also occurs in the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*.

Classical Attic and Shakespearean dramatic tragedy have further been said to centre in part around the unfolding of a *lot in life* which takes place as it does principally because of the combination of characters' choices with events which, through gods or Fate or other actions, become necessary and catastrophic.[5] Indeed, the greatest heroes (whether of drama, epic or any other genre) are also by definition tragic heroes, and they are so precisely because the essence of their characters stipulates certain patterns of thought and conduct which result not only in their greatness, but also in their destruction or downfall and tragedy.[6] These patterns, too, can be found in the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, where chance and necessity, characters – both good or bad – and consequence, free will and fate all interconnect to destroy something the loss of which both audience and characters deeply regret. This 'irreversible loss of something supremely treasured', moreover, can be considered as one aspect of the essence of tragedy.[7]

The foregoing classical and dramatic examples are by no means proposed as direct sources for the Middle English stanzaic *Morte Arthur*; rather, they serve as parallels to illustrate that in many ways it is the opposite of romantic tragedy, raising the equally paradoxical spectre of a *tragic romance*. We should thus consider the *Morte Arthur* not as a straightforward romance, nor even as a romance which 'both celebrates and scrutinizes' chivalry,[8] but as a type of non-dramatic mediaeval tragedy coupled with traditional romance features and themes. Such a hybrid is best termed *tragic romance*. The evidence for this is most conveniently revealed by highlighting first those generic features which announce a romance, and subsequently those which announce a tragedy. The structure of my argument follows to a considerable degree the bipartite nature of the poem itself.

The poem opens by promising a tale of adventure:

Lordingis that ar leff And dere,
lystenyth and I shall you tell
By olde dayes what aunturs were
Amonge our eldris þat by-felle:
In Arthur dayes, that noble kinge,
By-felle Aunturs ferly fele.[9]

A few stanzas later we are told that 'knightis shall [at a turnement] worship wynne / To dede of Armys for to Ryde' (35-36). Tournaments are an accepted and common form of chivalric adventure in mediaeval literature and life both, and much of the early part of *Le Morte Arthur* is taken up with this tournament and its consequences, just as the second half focusses on the reality which stands behind tournaments, war. In fact, so strong is Launcelot's desire for adventure here that when a second tournament is called while he is still seriously wounded, he vows to go despite the consequences: 'Certis, though I dye this day, / In my bedde I wolle not lye' (376-77; cf. 366-67). Although Launcelot's wounds reopen and he cannot attend the tournament, his words and actions testify to the prominence of the adventure element.[10] There is some agreement amongst critics that chivalric adventure plays a key role in romance,[11] and the emphasis on this opening tourney and its consequences, together with the wars of the second half of the poem, all suggest that the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* will be a tale of adventure – and so, perhaps, a romance.

Yet it is important to note that the tournament is not Arthur's idea but Gaynour's, offered to Arthur as a solution to the problem of the court's declining honour (17-41). Further, the fact 'That ladyes and maydens might se [there] / Who that beste were of dede' (46-47) possibly suggests that, as is often in the case in romance, the knights are here inspired by their (wished-for) lovers. We get a sort of reverse corroboration of this trope when Launcelot, 'for love þat was . . . by-twene' him and the Queen (53-56), initially feigns illness in order to avoid the tournament and remain with Gaynour. The symbiotic – albeit contentious – connexion between love and physical prowess in mediaeval romance has often been commented upon by critics,[12] and even if Launcelot only stays behind to say goodbye to the Queen, as he later claims is the case (75-78), his actions here are significant. As we shall see, the wars in the second half of the poem likewise constitute an adventure,

and likewise centre in part around the interplay between love, ladies and adventure. As for the connexion between Launcelot and Gaynour, it is emphasized, and made all the stronger, by the fact that it continues even in death, both of their bodies being described as 'Rede and fayer' (3888), 'feyre and Rede' (3956).

Nor is Gaynour the only prominent woman in the first half of the poem, for closely connected to the tournament instigated by the Queen is the Fair Maid of Ascolot, who has a more profound effect on the action of the poem than her relatively few physical appearances might suggest: not only does she love Launcelot, for instance, but in consenting to wear her token Launcelot, however unknowingly, compounds that love, thus paving the way for her eventual death. The token also convinces Launcelot's kin that he cannot be Launcelot, whereupon he is grievously wounded by Ector (289-312). Because the Maid claims Launcelot as her lover and holds his shield as proof of his affections (580-607), Gawayne tells Arthur and Gaynour that Launcelot has found a lover (635-47), and Gaynour subsequently upbraids Launcelot to the point that he leaves court (740-83). As a result, Gaynour is very nearly without a defender when she is accused of murdering Sir Mador's brother (1324-1434). Gaynour and the Maid are themselves linked not only by their love of Launcelot, but by the appearance of the Maid's death-barge, which interrupts and is interlaced with the account of Gaynour's trial. Arthur himself, it may be added, sees a connexion between the Maid's death-barge and adventure:

> Thedir I Rede now þat we go;
> Som *aventures* shalle we se thare;
> And yif it be with-in dight so
> As with-oute or gayer mare,
> I darre sauely say therto,
> By-gynne wille *auntres* or ought yare.
> (978-83; my emphases)

Instead of the usual chivalric adventure, though, Arthur and Gawayne encounter the lifeless body of the Maid of Ascolot, who has died through unrequited love of Launcelot (1064-95). We are thus confronted with two generic conclusions: not all romance adventures are necessarily chivalric; and many of those adventures are linked in some way or another to love or

women or both.[13] Both of these points fly somewhat in the face of the view that chivalric adventure is the essential and defining generic feature of romance, and suggest that romance can instead be best defined by the *combination* of adventure with love or women or both.

Another connexion between women and knightly adventures comes with the words of Bors, Lyonelle and Ector, all of whom complain to Gaynour of her undue influence over Launcelot; indeed, they curse her for driving Launcelot away and are glad that she now suffers in his absence:

> Madame, . . . by crosse on rode
> Thou art wele worthy to be brente;
> The nobleste bodye of flesshe and blode
> That euyr was yete in erthe lente
> For thy wille and thy wykked mode
> Out of oure companye is went
> (1350-55; cf. 1380-87; 1396-1403)

'Thou art wele worthy to be brente' (1351); 'We ar glade that thou it a-bye!' (1387); and 'Cursyde be he that the batalle take / To saue thy lyffe' (1402-03): these are strong words indeed, especially considering they are spoken by members of Arthur's court to their Queen, and therefore must be significant. It is also significant that the battle in which Launcelot comes closest to losing his life, a battle therefore which qualifies as one of the most important adventures of his life, is the battle with Mador to prove Gaynour's innocence (see esp. 1588-91). As Launcelot says on the day of the Queen's trial: 'I herde telle here of A fight; / I come to saue A ladyes lyue' (1566-67). Thus, while adventures of one sort or another do play a prominent role in the first half of the poem, those adventures are influenced to a considerable extent by love or women or both.

This is equally true of the second half of the poem, for just as the poem begins with Gaynour's suggestion of a tournament, so the second half of the story opens with Agrawayne's insistence that Launcelot and Gaynour's affair be made public (1672-87), and his subsequently informing 'the kynge with symple chere, / How Launcelot liggys by the quene' (1729-30). The remainder of the story is concerned with this affair, its public revelation and consequences; that is, it unfolds as it does precisely because of Launcelot's love of Gaynour, meaning that she is very nearly as central

to the plot as is he. To take one specific example, the only thing which ultimately prevents a peaceful reconciliation between Arthur and Launcelot and their followers is the fact that Launcelot has killed Gaheriet and Gaheries (1961-62), thereby earning Gawayne's undying enmity (see 2006-13, 2406-11, and 2668-91). Yet Gaheriet and Gaheries are killed whilst Launcelot is rescuing the Queen. Further, if the battle with Mador is important for being the adventure in which Launcelot comes closest to being killed, one of Launcelot's single greatest deeds of prowess, and thus again one of his most significant adventures, is his killing of Agrawayne and a dozen other knights to escape the Queen's bedchamber (1836-63). As P. J. C. Field notes of Malory's version of the scene, 'Escaping from [Aggravain's and Mordred's] trap by killing all but one of those involved is Launcelot's greatest feat of single combat.'[14] As in the earlier scene with Mador, Launcelot's great adventure here is directly dependent upon the woman he loves. This link between love and adventure is made even more explicit towards the end of the poem when Gaynour herself acknowledges that the love between her and Launcelot is responsible for the destruction of Arthur and the Round Table – responsible, that is, for the events of our story:

> Abbes, to you I knowlache here
> That throw thys ylke man And me,
> For we to-gedyr han loved vs dere,
> All thys sorowfull werre hathe be;
> my lorde is slayne, that had no pere,
> And many A doughty knyght And free. (3638-43)

Nor is it merely those women who are in love with Launcelot who are important, for it is noteworthy that when war between Launcelot and Arthur becomes inevitable, Launcelot does not send to his lands in Benwike for help, but rather

> To quenys and countesses fele he sende
> And grete ladyes of gentill blode,
> That he had ofte here landis deffende
> And foughten whan hem nede by-stode.
> Ichone her power hym lende,

And made hys party stiffe and goode;

quenys and countesses that Ryche were
Sende hym erlys with grete meyne;
Other ladies that myght no more
Sente hym barons or knyghtis free. (2032-41)

Launcelot's relationship with those knights who are his close friends or family is twice described as being one of master and men (673 and 1476), and Gawayne reminds us that 'Launcelot is kynges sonne full good' (1704). Despite all this, when he needs to raise an army he seeks the help of female allies. Launcelot's actions and the sex of his allies are all the more striking for being the invention of the English poet, the French *Mort le roi Artu* recording quite clearly that 'Puis [Lancelos] mande en Sorelois et el roiaume de la Terre Foreinne touz les *chevaliers* qu'il avoit serviz qu'il le secorent encontre le roi Artu.'[15] Other notable scenes involving women in the second half of the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* are Mordred's attempts to 'wedde' and 'bedde' Gaynour (2986-89), and Arthur's being taken away in 'shyppe . . . Full of ladyes' (3500-01).

As we have seen, then, the plot of *Le Morte Arthur* is driven by chivalric adventure, whether in the tournament and its causes and consequences in lines 1-1671, or the war and its causes and consequences in lines 1672-3971; yet we have also seen that throughout the poem those adventures are instigated by – or at the very least linked to – love or women or both. As noted above, the poem is usually classified as a romance, but the romance elements quite clearly emerge as the interaction of love, ladies and adventure. As we shall see, *Morte Arthur* is far from being a straightforward romance, but its typical romance classification, combined with those generic features which do belong to romance, confirm that, at least in this instance, romance should be defined by the *combination* of the element of adventure with those of love and ladies. Most romances also end happily; yet, as the final line of the opening stanza makes clear, the adventures recounted in our poem are to include much 'wo' as well as 'wele' (8). Indeed, the poet shows a 'consistent interest in the harsh contrast between "wele" and "wo"',[16] with the latter, atypically for romance, ultimately winning out. There is thus one further

prominent element to consider in *Morte Arthur*, one which on the surface at least seems out of place in romance: tragedy.

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The foregoing analysis of the poem has in effect divided it into two unequal parts comprising lines 1-1671, and 1672-close, and one reason for the stanzaic *Morte*'s beauty lies in the rough symmetry between these two parts. Thus, for example, Agrawayne absents himself from the tournament at the beginning in order to catch the lovers (59-64), while Part II begins with his denunciation of the lovers to Arthur (1672-1735) and subsequent attempt to trap them in the Queen's chamber. There is also the contrastive parallel of the meeting between the living Launcelot and Gaynour near the poem's beginning (53-80), and the accounts of first one then the other of their two deaths at the poem's close. Both parts of the story also include a knight seeking vengeance for the murder of one or more of his brothers. Even Launcelot's fighting against Arthur's forces in the tournament in Part I serves as a foreboding parallel to the more earnest and severe war between his forces and Arthur's in Part II; consequently

> the apparently casual but disarming images of chivalry in the first half of the poem . . . intensify the pathos and heighten the devastating effect of the second half, where admiring cooperation and affectionate sportsmanship give way to mortal hatred and revenge.[17]

The symmetry between the two halves is flawed, however, by a singular difference, one which contributes to the pathos and foreboding: Mador's quest for vengeance and the possible burning of the Queen at the close of Part I ends happily, with the proving of Gaynour's innocence and much rejoicing (1620-21; 1636-47; 1656-59); Launcelot's rescuing of Gaynour in Part II, on the other hand, results in the deaths of Gawayne's brothers and the war with Gawayne and Arthur, and leads, ultimately, to the dissolution of the Round Table and tragedy. The tone for the remainder of the poem is in fact set in the striking image of the grieving Gawayne, running 'as he were wode' to see where the bodies of his brothers lie, and discovering 'The chambre flore Alle ranne on blode'

(1994-96). The scene is all the more poignant if Gawayne actually believes the squire's words of 1990-93, and runs through the castle while hoping against hope that Gaheriet still lives.

I intimated at the outset that, unlike Euripides' romantic tragedies, which ultimately avoid a tragic outcome, the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* moves from joy to bloodshed and sorrow, and one example of this occurs in the transition between the two parts of the poem. For with the seemingly successful resolution of the poisoned apple episode at line 1671, with the crisis averted and the court celebrating--appropriately enough – at Joyous Gard, we have what might be considered the happy ending of a shorter romance. Something similar to this, for instance, occurs in *Sir Launfal* or in *King Horn*. The stanzaic *Morte*, however, does not end here; rather, events *immediately* turn sombre again with Agrawayne's denunciation of the lovers and the Queen's second trial. And unlike the close of Part I, there is no joyous solution to this crisis. Considering that love affairs in mediaeval romance are supposed to end happily – as for instance do Launfal and Tryamour's, Orfeo and Heurodis', Gareth and Lyonesse's, or Horn and Rymenhild's – the tragedy is arguably all the greater for being secured *because* of the love between Launcelot and Gaynour. As Gaynour herself notes: 'Alle oure wele is tornyd to woo' (1823). It is also through unrequited love that the innocent Maid of Ascolot is destroyed, and this too is disturbing. 'Thus, love is shown in this case to have degenerated into a most destructive force, capable of leading to the downfall and ruin of a whole society.'[18] Even the fact that the crisis *is* happily averted in the first instance makes the remainder of the story, with its focus on civil war and the deaths of most of the principal characters, all the more poignant and tragic.

As is often the case in tragedy, the tragic events of the stanzaic *Morte* stem in part from the failure of best intentions or warnings. Thus, for example, Gawayne's, Gaheriet's and Gaheries' refusal to have anything to do with the denunciation of the lovers (1688-1723), and Gawayne's refusal to be party to the Queen's burning and Gaheriet's and Gaheries' refusal to bear arms there (1926-41), Bors' warning to Launcelot not to visit the Queen on the night that Agrawayne and Mordred and their fellows lie in wait (1772-83), or Launcelot's dismissal of this warning and failure to wear armour because he fears no treachery (1784-99 and 1802-03). It is also Launcelot's intention not to stay the night with Gaynour, but

to return shortly to Bors and his fellows (1788-93). The English poet here modifies the French original, in which Lancelos makes no such claim; indeed, his locking the door behind him, stripping naked and climbing into the Queen's bed immediately upon his arrival in her room strongly suggests the opposite.[19] We thus have further evidence of the importance to the plot of the stanzaic *Morte* of the love between Launcelot and Gaynour, as well as an illustration of the tragic elements of the poem. For

> The effect of Launcelot's mistaken belief that he can restrict himself to a brief visit is to show the fallibility of . . . human nature, and also to demonstrate, more powerfully than any direct method could, the extreme force of the passion that unites him and Gaynor.[20]

And while their affair or its consummation are not, in themselves, necessarily tragic, the consequences certainly are.

Another spectacular instance of good intentions run horribly foul comes when the traitorous Mordred is deemed by a council of the king's knights to be the best candidate 'steward . . . for to make, . . . To saue the Reme in trews and pees' (2511-20). The failure of intention, as well as the tragic irony of the knights' choice, are both emphasized by the fact that the willing election of Mordred is again the creation of the English poet; in the French, Mordres volunteers to look after Guenievre while Artus is away.[21] As one critic has noted, the English poet 'has a distinctively well-developed interest in the way that not only the unmistakable evil of malicious knights, but also the weaknesses and misjudgements of basically good characters combine with misfortune in a deadly process.'[22] Such a combination of events, characters, judgements and misjudgements strikes me as nothing if not tragic. The fact that both Gawayne (1692-95) and Launcelot (1885-87 and 2021-29) foresee the tragic consequences of the actions around them and yet are incapable of preventing them is equally poignant and, in the Greek, tragic sense, pathetic.

The tragedy which they foresee but cannot prevent, moreover, stems in part from conflicting loyalties.[23] Nowhere is this more evident than in Launcelot's dilemma in fighting against his liege-lord to save his Lady and himself. As he himself laments:

Allas! . . . wo is me,
That euyr shuld I se with syghte
A-3eyne my lord for to be,
The noble kynge that made me knyght!
Syr Gawayne, I be-Seche the,
As thou arte man of myche myght,
In the felde let not my lorde be
Ne that thy-selfe with me not fyghte. (2142-49)

Considering that Launcelot's lady-love is also his king's wife, such a conflict is both inevitable and largely his own fault.[24] Nevertheless, as Bors is quick to point out in the face of Launcelot's many courtesies to Arthur during the battle, now that Launcelot and Arthur are enemies, Launcelot's continued loyalty and courtesy to Arthur are out place; worse than this, they are actively harming Launcelot's men and prolonging the war (2182-89). Banndemagew makes a similar remark: 'Syr, cortessye And your sufferynge / Has wakend vs wo full wyde' (2566-67). If Launcelot were less courteous, less than himself, the war and the bloodshed would be less severe. But Launcelot is incapable of being other than he is, and it is ironic but noble that his preventing Bors from slaying Arthur prolongs the war.[25] Launcelot's honour and nobility thus cause suffering and help to secure the tragedy. His *character* helps to secure tragedy. And this, as I have already suggested, is common to the greatest heroes, just as it is the source of their tragedy.[26]

Although it is not as pronounced in the stanzaic *Morte* as in Malory's Arthuriad, Gawayne too is subject to conflicting loyalties: he is happy to forgive Launcelot's adultery with the Queen, for instance, but cannot allow the deaths of his brothers to go unavenged (2006-13; 2332-39; 2406-27; 2676-89). Prior to this Gawayne 'is Launcelot's steadfast friend,' rejoicing that he has escaped mortal injury at the tournament (542-43), swearing to serve the Maid for love of Launcelot (604-07), and 'the first to offer to search for [Launcelot] when – oddly – his own mendacity has driven Launcelot from the queen.'[27] Yet so strong is Gawayne's later desire for vengeance that he twice challenges Launcelot to continue the fight even when he himself is wounded and cannot stand (see esp. 2814-33 and 2902-21). Gawayne's actions here are extreme, but the fact that after his death he appears to Arthur surrounded by lords and ladies for

whom he fought and who 'All semyd Angellys' (3196-3221; quotation from 3199) shows that we are not to castigate him too severely. Gawayne and Launcelot are themselves further linked by the fact that Gawayne in battle against Bors and Lyonelle, and Launcelot in battle against Gawayne, are each said to 'kyd he covde of werre' (2751 and, with some orthographic changes, 2892). This unity of description serves not only to recall their previous unity of friendship, but also to suggest that Gawayne, except for the extremity of his wrath, is not that far removed from Launcelot. Gawayne has been described as 'excellent yet destructive,'[28] but we must remember that just as it is his honour and loyalty which cause him to denounce Agrawayne and later refuse to be party to the Queen's burning, it is this same sense of honour and loyalty which drive the blood-feud with Launcelot. Gawayne's finest and foulest hours thus stem from the same qualities, qualities which are – as in the case of Launcelot – the very essence of his character and being. And as has already been said of Launcelot, this is the essence of his tragedy and of the poem's.

Gawayne's ghost comes to warn Arthur not to fight, and the fact that the final battle between Arthur and Mordred stems to a considerable extent from an accident of fate in the appearance of the adder likewise adds to the tragedy by introducing an element of unhappy chance. As one critic has observed, 'The appearance of the adder at the Battle of Salisbury, precipitating the catastrophe already prepared, typifies the coincidence of accident and human error in this *tragedy of consequence*.'[29] Attention is arguably drawn to the scene because the introduction of the adder is an addition of the English poet. Another addition which does emphasize the tragedy is the fact that whereas in the French Artus is warned not to fight Mordres by an archbishop, by Gauvain, and by prophetic inscriptions of Merlin's, and he rejects all their warnings, in the English poem when Gawayne appears in Arthur's Dream and warns him not to fight, Arthur attempts to heed the advice.[30] We thus have a further example of the failure of good intentions contributing to the overall destruction, for Arthur attempts to prevent, or at least postpone, the final battle and his death, but the attempt comes to naught. It may be that his heeding Gawayne's counsel in the English stanzaic *Morte* makes him look better than in the French *Mort Artu*,[31] but it also, I claim, draws attention to the subsequent destruction in such a way as to emphasize its poignancy and tragedy.

The sombre nature of the end of the story and the final battle are further exacerbated in the English poem by the unusually detailed and grim (and original) image of the looting of the corpses (3417-19).[32] The repetition of the 'besaunt, broche, and bee' phrase in both the looting scene and Arthur's Dream of Fortune's Wheel (3419 and 3179) further emphasizes the destruction, for the phrase occurs only in these scenes of sorrow and loss. In another poignant and sombre image, the injured Arthur and the injured Lucan grip one another so tightly when moving farther afield that Lucan, one of only two of Arthur's knights to survive the last battle, dies as a result (3430-41).[33] Nor is there any possibility of a delayed happy ending in some mystical future return for Arthur, for although he 'wende[s] a lytell stownde / In-to the vale of Avelovne' (3515-16) on 'A ryche shyppe . . . Full of ladyes' (3500-01), there to heal his wounds, Bedwere later discovers his tomb in a chapel (3526-57). The final image of the poem, with those few surviving hermit-knights standing over the tomb of Arthur and burying Gaynour alongside him, confirms this lack of hope.

With the death of Arthur and Gawayne and the bulk of the Round Table, much of our interest dies also, especially as the survival of Gaynour and Launcelot and his followers only increases our awareness of what and who has been lost. This seems to be the case even for the poet since, with the notable exception of the farewell scene between the lovers, the ostensibly religious movement at the poem's close is artistically inferior to the previous material.[34] Furthermore, although both Launcelot and Gaynour die religious ends, it is difficult to see their deaths as entirely or even adequately compensating for the tragedy of the deaths of Arthur and all his knights. For one thing, that destruction is kept firmly before us in Gaynour's acknowledgment (quoted above) that she and Launcelot are responsible for Arthur's death (3638-51). For another, the stanzaic *Morte* lacks any sort of accompanying Grail Quest to suggest that the affairs of this world are ultimately unimportant, leaving us with a more secular perspective and values. This is evident from the very outset, for whereas the French *Mort* opens by emphasizing the loss of many of Artus' knights in the Grail Quest, the stanzaic *Morte* mentions the Grail only in passing, and presents the quest itself as a great, successful, adventure.[35]

It is worth remembering that a focus on earthly adventure is evident even in the French *Mort*, for much of Lancelos' attitude in his concern for

secular glory 'is dictated by the narrative context of the romance', especially his disguises.[36] Yet this worldly perspective is emphasized all the more in the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, for 'The Middle English poem is human rather than religious in its values, and does not encourage us to regard divine love as a higher value than human love.'[37] This is particularly evident in the poet's addition of a final meeting between the lovers, in which Launcelot's sole reason for becoming religious is his love of Gaynour.[38] Thus, not only does he repeatedly protest that he will not be so untrue to her as to take a wife (3678-83), even if it is at her behest, but

> Syne we to-gedyr vpon thys mold
> haue led owre lyffe by day And nyght,
> Vnto god I yiffe a heste to holde
> The same desteny that yow is dyghte. (3684-87)

Having become religious only out of love for the Queen, Launcelot's secular motives are further apparent in his subsequently praying for a kiss before they part (3712-13). In light of this, his vow to 'euyr for [Gaynour] specyally pray' (3692) is perhaps not so much religious duty as a reflexion of who is on his amorous mind.

It has been claimed that even Gaynour, who takes the lead in their separation, speaks of their love 'with discernable pride' and no regret; that 'it is Guinevere's difficulty in letting Lancelot go that makes the farewell scene so poignant.'[39] Even if Gaynour is emotional and nostalgic but firmly repentant, Launcelot, whose reasoning and motives are clearly earthly and who is acting one last time to please Gaynour, is not. Furthermore, the highly emotional manner in which they part (3722-39) once again emphasises the earthly and physical nature of their love. The culmination of this earthly emotion is the lament uttered by Launcelot upon parting from his lover: 'Ryghtwosse god! what is my Rede? / Allas! for-bare, why was I borne?' (3740-41).[40] Launcelot does in fact die some few years hereafter, shortly before Gaynour herself dies, and although he does not in this case starve himself to death grovelling on the tomb of Arthur and Gwenyvere, as is the case in Malory's version of events,[41] the description of both lovers' dead bodies as 'Rede and fayer' and 'feyre and Rede' (3888 and 3956) calls to mind one final time their earthly, physical union.

Admittedly Launcelot is sung to his rest by flights of angels (3876-79), but as we have seen, the rest of the poem is predominantly secular in its focus. Furthermore, in another parallelism both in the poem in general and between Launcelot and Gawayne in particular, Launcelot's being escorted unto Heaven by angels is – but for the direction of travel – the mirror image of Gawayne's being escorted to Earth surrounded by angels when he comes to warn Arthur (3196-99). And since Gawayne's motives right up until the moment of his death remain markedly secular, Launcelot's heavenly escort cannot in itself be taken either as his or the poet's disparagement of secular affairs or earthly existence. We must look elsewhere for corroboration of such condemnation, and in doing so we find that the evidence for such a view is decidedly slim. In addition to that already discussed, it must further be remembered that Launcelot only turns to religion when Arthur and Gawayne and the Round Table fellowship are dead and Gaynour denied him. A comment made of the French *Mort Artu* is consequently equally appropriate to the stanzaic *Morte*: for Launcelot, 'There can be no effective renunciation . . . of his chivalric world, until it disappears with the deaths of Gawain, Arthur . . . and Lionel', and with Gaynour's renunciation of him.[42] As such, it is questionable to what degree he truly turns his back on such a life or repents of secular affairs. Also, even after Launcelot and Gaynour have taken religious vows 'there is a sense that their love . . . endures. *It sustains them until death* and leaves no sense of sin.'[43] In this sense, as has already been observed, Launcelot undertakes one final adventure for love of Gaynour, showing one last time in the poem the connexion between adventure and love and ladies.

The archbishop-cum-hermit's lament to Bors that 'The beste *knyght* hys lyffe hathe lorne' (3892; my emphasis), stands in sharp contrast to his French counterpart's ascetic assertion that 'penitance vaut seur toutes choses.'[44] Like the prayers of Bors and his companions for this 'gentyll *knyght*' (3945; my emphasis), the hermit's words remind us of Launcelot's knightly and worldly career and character. The same is true of Ector's seven-year search for his brother Launcelot (3909) and arrival at Launcelot's funeral; together with the other knight-hermits' laments, this arrival and Ector's severe grief (3930-35) remind us of the company of Round Table Knights and thus of the earthly fellowship which has been destroyed over the course of the poem. Further, both in the French *Mort*

and the Middle English stanzaic poem, 'Lancelot's funeral is a seignorial one, with loud lamenting over the body as it rests in the . . . chapel, where it receives the honour due to so great a knight.'[45] The very close of the poem, moreover, reminds us that both Arthur and Gaynour are dead and buried (3964-65); even the *explicit* (and title), which is in a different ink but the same hand as the previous section of the poem,[46] draws attention to the death of Arthur. Although the *explicit*-title may reflect an earlier and much altered version of the poem, it nonetheless remains true that however much Launcelot may seem to dominate the narrative itself, the central focus of the poem overall is Arthur, his kingdom, his knights – of whom Launcelot is but the most prominent – and their destruction.[47] Furthermore, Launcelot's character and actions, and thus those aspects of the plot affected by Launcelot, are themselves considerably affected by his earthly love of Gaynour. This, too, widens the poet's focus. Such a focus is also dominantly secular, 'too secular for its tragic emotion to be totally dissipated by a few last-minute optimistic messages from the next world.'[48]

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Pure or unmixed genres are quite rare in literature. Generic mixture is, consequently, much the more common. Sometimes the expected generic mixture takes the form of, say, a comic scene or interlude in the midst of a tragedy, as is the case in the grave-digger scene in *Hamlet* or the Old Man recognition scene in Euripides' *Electra*. In such cases the subsidiary generic elements do not change the dominant overall genre of the work in question. At other times, though, the generic mixture becomes so pronounced as to challenge or affect the work's principal genre, and this is the case in the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*. Although a few critical studies have been content to highlight the work's tragic elements while still calling it a romance,[49] *romance* is a misleading classification for this work, raising the wrong expectations. Nor do we have a tale encapsulating some sort of undefinable spirit of romance in a world which we recognize as almost but not quite our own. The motives and actions driving the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* are all too common and recognizable in this world: love; jealousy; petty hatred; vengeance; conflicting loyalties; good and bad intentions and characters; all contributing to the tragic dissolution of an ideal fellowship.

We even see 'Ryght to wronge goo' (2966) when Mordred wins over the general populace through bribery (2962-69; 3158-59).

In a wide-ranging and persuasive essay, Helen Cooper argues that the fifteenth-century English prose romances, with their focus on bloodshed, kin-killing and unhappy endings, run so counter to the usual romance conventions as to affect the very nature of the genre.[50] As we have seen, this failure of the happy ending and shift from calamity avoided to calamity manifest is not confined to the prose romances, for it also characterizes the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*. So markedly un-romance-like is the stanzaic *Morte*, in fact, that its overall structure has been said to resemble tragedy; one critic has even labelled it a 'tragedy of consequence'.[51] The tragic elements of the poem, moreover, are not confined to a few subsidiary scenes, but are rather prominent throughout; and tragedy, as Cooper observes, is very nearly the generic 'opposite of romance'.[52]

It has however been argued that since the word *tragedy* itself was relatively uncommon in the Middle Ages, particularly in England, so tragedy as a concept or genre was uncommon. Thus, to take a specific example not far removed from our current subject, the alliterative *Morte Arthure* is said not to be a tragedy. The one exception, it is claimed, is Chaucer, who does know of and write tragedies.[53] This, however, is to let the tail wag the dog, for one need not explicitly use the word *tragedy* in order to understand either the genre or the concept. The concept at least was certainly familiar to Homer, for tragedy – as an ethos or outlook, as distinct from a dramatic narrative genre (in verse) – dominates the *Iliad*. So far as I am aware, though, the word *tragodia* itself (τραγωδία) never occurs in the poem.[54] Nonetheless, the *Iliad* can be seen as, *inter alia*, the tragedy of Achilles,[55] while 'the Homeric scholia explicitly regard their author as, at least in one aspect of what they see as a complex literary character, a tragedian'.[56] Plato, too, in his discussions of poetry, considers Homer to be essentially tragic, even describing him as 'the first, the teacher and leader of all those fine tragedians'.[57] Consider, too, how Achilles' words to Priam, that man is doomed to hardship and unhappiness while for the gods alone there is joy, can justifiably be considered the 'tragic moral' of the *Iliad*.[58]

As we have seen, the poet of the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* similarly understands and portrays the tragic without using the word tragedy itself.

This is possible regardless of whether he had any knowledge, directly or through a Latin intermediary, of Homer, Sophokles, or Aristotle, or of Boethius or Chaucer or the *artes poeticae*. But perhaps the best rebuttal of this argument against a wide-spread knowledge of tragedy in the Middle Ages and denying the application of the word to the alliterative *Morte Arthure* comes from the critic who generated it, for he concludes by conceding: 'If we are not allowed to call [the alliterative *Morte*] a tragedy in intent, that is, as written in a genre of tragedy or drawing on medieval notions of tragedy, we are permitted to call it tragic in effect.'[59] To rephrase a well-known maxim, a tragedy by any other name is still a tragedy.

Of course, it might also be objected that the mediaeval world-view makes tragedy impossible. Certainly religious salvation or the promise of a Christian afterlife have been seen as being detrimental to tragedy.[60] Even the critic who calls the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* a 'tragedy of consequence' comes close to this view in concluding that the poet's proffered solution to the tragic conflicts inherent in the poem and in life is to withdraw entirely from this world.[61] Hence, it is claimed, Launcelot and Gaynour's move to penitence and religion at the poem's close, and Launcelot's becoming 'an overtly religious figure, the priest overseeing a lay group in the chapel where Arthur and his queen [sic] are buried.'[62] Such, however, is not really the case; as we have seen, Launcelot's (if not also Gaynour's) motives even in the midst of this ostensibly penitential movement remain firmly secular, and his 'lay group' is actually a re-enacting and re-forming of an *earthly* fellowship, something made clear by the prominence of Arthur's tomb and the motives of Bors and his fellows in rejoining Launcelot.

Both Bedwere and Launcelot, for instance, join the archbishop-hermit when they learn that the tomb he keeps is that of their lord Arthur (3550-57; 3772-85), and Bors, seeking Launcelot rather than Arthur, does effectively the same thing when he discovers his 'lord Lancelot du Lake' (3802-17 and 3924). The same is true of the seven nameless followers of Launcelot who 'had sought there *frend*' and who 'had neuyr none wyll / A-way to wend, / Whan they herd of *Launcelot* nevyn' (3819-23; my emphases). Ector, too, 'hys *broder* dere, . . . vij yere / A-fore had *hym* sought' (3908-09; my emphases), and although he cannot rejoin the living Launcelot, he is at least able to remain with his fellow knights and to pray

at Launcelot's tomb (3946-49) – just as Launcelot and Bedwere before him were able to rejoin Arthur at Arthur's tomb. The reunion of Launcelot, Bors and (*mutatis mutandis*) Ector also recalls that earlier, happier reunion – 'A merier metinge might no man se' (450)--when Bors, Ector and Lyonelle searched for and then dined with Launcelot amidst much jocular camaraderie (432-503). Once again, however, there is a notable difference between the otherwise similar scenes, for by the closing reunion all of Arthur's knights are dead, and Lyonelle has died seeking vainly for Launcelot (3794-3801). We are thus reminded not only of the fellowship of earthly knights, but especially of its destruction. So strong is this emphasis on fellowship throughout the poem that it has been argued that the principal character, the principal focus, is not Launcelot or Gaynour, Gawayne or Arthur, but rather the company of Round Table Knights and 'the spirit of Arthurian chivalry embodied' in them.[63] There is some truth in this, provided that we remember the role of love and women in shaping both that chivalry and its actions.

Unlike the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*, then, the poet of the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* is not promoting a rejection of worldly values. Rather, he is acknowledging that, at least for the characters in this poem, tragedy and the sufferings of this mortal coil can neither be avoided nor repudiated. Least of all can they be ignored. The exception proves the rule, for while the archbishop-hermit laughs to see Launcelot enter heaven (3866-81), he does not, like Troilus, laugh at those left alive on earth.[64] And as we have seen, it is this same archbishop-hermit who subsequently recalls Launcelot's career as an earthly knight, not religious exemplar, as in the French. We cannot even say that Launcelot's and Gaynour's religious ends offer a happy ending while the deaths of Arthur and Gawayne and the rest offer an unhappy ending, for one of several tragic poignancies at the poem's close is that the only way Launcelot and Gaynour ultimately can be united in their love is through separation: 'Lancelot and Guinevere are driven to union in religion, but it is tragic that that is the only union finally possible for them.'[65] Even more significantly, although Launcelot and Gaynour *may* be able to rise to another level – and even this is debatable as far as the bulk of Launcelot's thoughts and motives are concerned – others, like Gawayne and Arthur and Lyonelle and Ector, cannot. For them, the poem remains tragic, giving 'powerful expression to the deep sense of mutability informing the whole Arthurian

legend. The tragic machinery of change works quickly, decisively, and with finality.'[66] It does not, however, evoke any sense of *contemptus mundi*. Consequently, the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, far from being a straightforward romance, is a poem which exploits romance conventions only to highlight the essential tragedy of the Arthurian Legend, both in general and in this particular telling of the tale. Such a poem is best characterized as a *tragic romance*. As a result, it is closer both in spirit and genre to the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, which has been characterised as a tragedy, than has thus far been realised.[67]

Quite obviously, such a poem considerably affected Malory's view of the Arthurian Legend when he composed the work which he entitled *The Hoole Book of Kyng Arthur and of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table*,[68] and which we know as *Le Morte Darthur*. That Malory used the stanzaic poem as the principal source for the closing tales of his Arthuriad is well known, but in light of the present argument, it seems that Malory's debt to the stanzaic *Morte* is even greater, for he borrowed not only the *matière* of the poem, but much of the *sen* as well.

NOTES

[1] Ann Pippin Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived: Euripides 'Plays of Mixed Reversal*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1971. I am indebted to Richard Cunningham, P. J. C. Field and John Finlayson for their comments on this paper.

[2] D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1967; pp. 14-15.

[3] See, e.g., Robert W. Ackerman, 'English Rimed and Prose Romances,' *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis, Oxford, Clarendon, 1959; pp. 480-83 and 490; Helaine Newstead, 'Arthurian Legends,' *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, ed. J. Burke Severs, New Haven, Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967; pp. 51-52; and Carole Weinberg's discussion of the poem in the section entitled 'Dynastic Romance', pp. 100-11 in *The Arthur of the English*, ed. W. R. J. Barron, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1999.

[4] Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Prologue of the Monk's Tale', *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed., Boston, Houghton, 1987; ll. 1973-77. See also Aristotle's comments on the same tragic pattern: Aristotle, *The Poetics of*

Aristotle, trans. and commentary Stephen Halliwell, London, Duckworth, 1987; ch. XIII.

[5] Michael Ewans, 'Patterns of Tragedy in Sophokles and Shakespeare', pp. 438-57 in *Tragedy and the Tragic*, ed. M. S. Silk, Oxford, Clarendon, 1996.

[6] Kevin S. Whetter, 'The Tragedy's the Thing: Achilles and Cú Chulainn as Models of the Consummate Hero', pp.134-43 in *Celebratio: Thirtieth Anniversary Essays at Trent University*, ed. Janet P. Bews, Ian C. Storey and Martin R. Boyne, Peterborough, Ontario, Trent University, 1998. Cf. Ewans *passim*. This is not necessarily the same thing as a tragic flaw.

[7] Stephen Halliwell, 'Plato's Repudiation of the Tragic', pp.332-49 in *Tragedy and the Tragic* (as in n. 5); p. 339.

[8] Weinberg p. 100; see also p. 101.

[9] *Le Morte Arthur*, ed. J. Douglas Bruce, London, Oxford University Press, 1903 (EETS es 88); 1-6. All references are by line number to this edition; subsequent references will be made parenthetically in the text. I do not reproduce the editor's square brackets around emendations, nor his italicization of contractions. I have capitalized the first letter of *launcelot* at 1704, 1730, 3823 and 3924, and of *gawayne* at 2146, and altered the punctuation of 3684-87.

[10] Cf. Sherron E. Knopp, 'Artistic Design in the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*', *ELH* 45 (1978): 563-82; 571-72.

[11] See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1953, pp. 123-42; A. C. Gibbs, ed., *Middle English Romances*, London, Arnold, 1966; pp. 4-5, 7-8 and 14; John Finlayson, 'Definitions of Middle English Romance', *Chaucer Review* 15 (1980-81): 44-62, 168-81.

[12] See, e.g., Robert W. Hanning, 'The Social Significance of the Twelfth-Century Chivalric Romance', *Medievalia et Humanistica* ns 3 (1972): pp. 3-4, 8, 13, and 24; Cesare Segre, 'What Bakhtin Left Unsaid: The Case of the Medieval Romance', pp. 23-46 in *Romance: Generic Transformation from Chrétien de Troyes to Cervantes*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Marina Scordilis Brownlee, Hanover, UP of New England, 1985; pp. 35-36; and Simon Gaunt, 'Romance and Other Genres', *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000; p. 46.

[13] Cf. Schmidt and Jacobs, ed., *Medieval English Romances: Part Two*, London, Hodden, 1980; p. 3 and p.5. But see pp. 25-26, where they deny a central role for love in the stanzaic *Morte*.

[14] P. J. C. Field, 'Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur'*, in *Arthur of the English* (as in n. 3, *supra*); p. 240.

[15] *La Mort le roi Artu*, ed. Jean Frappier, 3rd ed., Genève, Droz, 1964; §106, ll. 9-11; my emphasis.

[16] Flora M. Alexander, '"The Treson of Launcelote du Lake": Irony in the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur'*, in *The Legend of Arthur in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. B. Grout et al, Cambridge, Brewer, 1983 (Arthurian Studies 7); p. 20.

[17] Knopp, p. 575.

[18] Ján Šimko, 'Modernity of the Middle English Stanzaic Romance *Le Morte Arthur*', in *Arthurian and Other Studies presented to Shunichi Noguchi*, ed. Takashi Suzuki and Tsuyoshi Mukai, Cambridge, Brewer, 1993; p. 158.

[19] See *Mort Artu* §89.20 - § 90.4.

[20] Alexander, p. 22, who sees this as one of several examples of irony in the tale. This may be true, but the irony is nevertheless a tragic irony.

[21] *Mort Artu* §129.5-31. For the irony of the scene see Alexander p. 23, who does not, however, consider the irony to be tragic.

[22] Alexander p. 27; see further p. 21; Knopp p. 580; and Weinberg p. 110.

[23] On conflicting loyalties cf. Weinberg pp. 100 and 104-05; Tadahiro Ikegami, 'The Structure and Tone of the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*', in *Arthurian and Other Studies* (as in n. 18, *supra*) p. 174; and Richard A. Wertime, 'The Theme and Structure of the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur'*, *PMLA* 87 (1972): 1075-82; pp. 1075-76 and 1080. Ikegami is following Eugène Vinaver (*The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 3rd ed. rev. P. J. C. Field, Oxford, Clarendon, 1990; 1621), although at that point Vinaver is talking specifically of Malory's Arthuriad, where, it may be added, the conflict is even more pronounced than in the stanzaic *Morte*.

[24] Cf. Šimko p. 160.

[25] On the irony of Launcelot's actions prolonging the war here cf. Šimko p. 160.

[26] See *supra*, including n. 6. Karen Pratt ('Aristotle, Augustine or Boethius? *La Mort le Roi Artu* as Tragedy', *Nottingham French Studies* 30.2 (Autumn 1991): 81-109; p. 97) makes a similar comment about Lancelos in the French *Mort*.

[27] Wertime pp. 1077-78.

[28] Ikegami p. 175. The remainder of the sentence is my own.

[29] W. R. J. Barron, *English Medieval Romance*, London, Longman, 1987; p. 147, my emphasis. See further Knopp pp. 580-81; Alexander p. 21; and Edward Donald Kennedy, 'The Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*: The Adaptation of a French Romance for an English Audience', pp. 91-112 in *Culture and the King*, ed.

Martin B. Shichtman and James P. Carley, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994; p. 100.

[30] For the differences between the French and English scenes contrast *Mort Artu* §172.12-15, §176.17-37, and §§177.7 - 178.42 with *Morte Arthur* 3196-3303.

[31] Such is the argument of Kennedy pp. 99-100.

[32] Malory's version is even bleaker, for he adds that the looters kill those 'that were nat dede all oute' (Malory, *Works* (as in n. 23, *supra*) 1238.3). P. J. C. Field, 'Malory and the Battle of Towton', pp. 68-74 in *The Social and Literary Contexts of Malory's Morte Darthur*, ed. D. Thomas Hanks, Jr, Cambridge, Brewer, 2000 (Arthurian Studies 42); *passim*, argues that this detail may derive from Malory's experience of a particular battle.

[33] Pratt p. 108 sees the same scene in the French *Mort Artu* as Artus' 'final tragic act.' The poignancy of the English version is hardly lessened even if Kennedy p. 97 is correct and Lucan effectively kills himself in the effort of lifting the wounded Arthur, rather than dying because of Arthur's embrace or (as seems most likely) the combination of that embrace with his own exertions.

[34] For this last point see Wertime p. 1081.

[35] Contrast *Mort Artu* §§ 1 - 3.38 with stanzaic *Morte* 9-16, and see Kennedy p.92.

[36] Faith Lyons, '*La Mort le roi Artu*: An Interpretation', in *Legend of Arthur in the Middle Ages* (n. 16, *supra*); p.140.

[37] John Beston and Rose Marie Beston, 'The Parting of Lancelot and Guinevere in the Stanzaic "Le Morte Arthur"', *Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 40 (1973):249-259; p. 255.

[38] MS Palatinus Latinus 1967, a fragmentary MS of the French *Mort*, does contain a scene (printed as an appendix in Frappier's edition of the *Mort*) in which the lovers meet one final time, but it is quite different in structure and tone from the scene as it occurs in our poem, and most critics agree that the ME version is original.

[39] Beston and Beston pp. 250 and 252.

[40] Cf. Weinberg p. 111. The emotion of the ME scene is quite foreign to the Palatinus MS version: see *Mort Artu*, pp. 264-65; and Beston and Beston pp. 256-57.

[41] Malory, *Works* 1257.1-12; and see Vinaver's comments on 1622-23 and n. to 1255.14-1257.11. This is Malory's addition, and it adds to the poignancy of his version of events.

[42] Lyons 145. See further Pratt pp. 91 and 100.

[43] Barron, *Romance* p. 146; my emphasis. Such a statement argues very much against Barron's later view of the poet's religious and ironic treatment of material.

[44] *Mort Artu* § 202.36-37.

[45] Lyons p. 148; *Mort Artu* §§ 202.46 - 203.21.

[46] See Bruce, ed., *Morte Arthur*, footnote to the *explicit*.

[47] Cf. Knopp pp. 566-67 and 576-77.

[48] Pratt p. 108. Pratt is speaking only of the French *Mort*, but the conclusion is even more appropriate to the English poem. I must therefore disagree with Schmidt and Jacobs (*Medieval English Romances* pp. 6 and 23) who see in Launcelot's and Gaynour's ends the happy ending of romance.

[49] E.g., Šimko pp. 153-68, who argues that the poem is structured along the lines of a 'multi-layered tragedy' (p. 154), but whose title and conclusion both style it a romance; Knopp pp. 563-82, esp. pp. 578 and 580-81; and Kennedy pp. 91-112.

[50] Helen Cooper, 'Counter-Romance: Civil Strife and Father-Killing in the Prose Romances', pp. 141-62 in *The Long Fifteenth Century*, ed. Cooper and Sally Mapstone, Oxford, Clarendon, 1997.

[51] For the comparison of the poem to tragedy in general see Šimko pp. 153-68; for the classification as a 'tragedy of consequence' see Wertime p. 1075.

[52] Cooper, 'Counter-Romance', p. 146.

[53] See H. A. Kelly, 'The Non-Tragedy of Arthur', pp. 92-14 in *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature*, ed. Gregory Kratzmann and James Simpson, Cambridge, Brewer, 1986; Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1993 (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 18): esp. pp. xiii-xiv, 170-75, and 218-22; and idem, *Chaucerian Tragedy*, Cambridge, Brewer, 1997 (Chaucerian Studies 24). The claim that the alliterative *Morte Arthure* is not tragic comes in 'Non-Tragedy' (passim).

[54] Penelope Murray has very kindly confirmed this for me, and also supplied the Greek form of *tragodia*.

[55] See, e.g., C. M. Bowra, *Ancient Greek Literature*, London, Butterworth, 1933; p.22.

[56] Malcolm Heath, *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy*, London, Duckworth, 1987; p. 4.

[57] See Plato, *Plato's Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1974, X, 595c1; cf. 607a3. See further Halliwell, 'Plato's Repudiation' pp. 332-49; esp. pp. 340-41.

[58] See Homer, *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1951; XXIV, 525-33; E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1951; p. 29. The quotation is from Dodds.

[59] Kelly, 'Non-Tragedy', p. 114.

[60] I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, 5th ed., London, Kegan Paul, 1934; p. 246.

[61] Wertime pp. 1076 and 1080. Cf. Barron, *Romance* pp. 46-47; Alexander p. 27.

[62] Wertime pp.1080. *Pace* Wertime, however, Gaynour is not buried in the chapel next to Arthur until *after* Launcelot has died and been buried somewhere else; indeed, Launcelot dies *before* Gaynour (see 3887-3961).

[63] Knopp pp. 566 (for the quotation) and 576.

[64] See Chaucer, 'Troilus and Criseyde', *The Riverside Chaucer* (cf n. 4 *supra*) V, 1807-27.

[65] Beston and Beston p. 255.

[66] Wertime p. 1081.

[67] For the classification of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* as a tragedy see William Matthews, *The Tragedy of Arthur*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1960; esp. pp. 94-114; John Finlayson, ed., *Morte Arthure*, London, Arnold, 1967; pp. 11-14; and Mary Hamel, ed., *Morte Arthure*, New York, Garland, 1984; pp. ix-x.

[68] Malory, *Works* 1260.16-17.