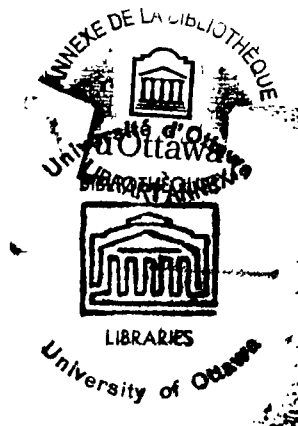


A COMPARISON OF THE STANZAIC LE MORTE ARTHUR
AND THE ALLITERATIVE MORTE ARTHURE APPLIED TO
THE STANZAIC-ALLITERATIVE AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE
AND GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

by

Michael M. Foley



Thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts,
University of Ottawa, in partial fulfilment
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

*Reper granted
October 7th, 1968
M. Marchand
Secretary*

August, 1968

UMI Number: DC53689

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform DC53689
Copyright 2011 by ProQuest LLC
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to acknowledge my debt and express my thanks to Dr. Raymond St-Jacques, my thesis director, not only for his excellent and constructive criticism, but also for his promptness, his patience, and, most especially, his understanding. I wish, secondly, to thank Dr. A. P. Campbell, who originally introduced me to the four poems studied here, and who has been my true friend as well as teacher over the years.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
PART ONE	
THE COMPARISON	15
I. THEME	19
II. TEXTURE	42
III. CHARACTER	63
IV. HERO	97
V. FORM	125
CONCLUSION	141
PART TWO	
THE APPLICATION	145
VI. AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE	145
VII. GOLAGROS AND GAWANE	171
CONCLUSION	168 & 202
CONCLUSION	205
BIBLIOGRAPHY	207

INTRODUCTION

Medieval romances constitute one of the most inclusive genres in the whole area of literature. How, indeed, is one to define a genre which includes works composed over a time span of several centuries, in several different countries, and dealing with the greatest variety of themes. Albert C. Baugh recognizes this variety and stresses the element of adventure as basic in the romance:

Under this heading literary historians have traditionally included narratives of the most diverse kind, ranging in subject matter from pious tales, suitably dressed up, to history or pseudo-history in fictionalized form, and varying from a few hundred lines to as much as twenty thousand. If we leave out of account, however, the more eccentric members of the group, it would not be too superficial to say that basically a romance is a story of adventure generally involving a considerable amount of armed combat. Love may or may not be an ingredient. When it is, it is often the occasion or the excuse for knightly prowess.¹

Dorothy Everett agrees with Baugh in seeing medieval romance as basically a narrative of adventure, and she goes on in her definition to point out some typical romance characteristics: "Medieval romances are stories of adventure in which the chief parts are played by knights, famous kings, or distressed ladies, acting most often under

¹ "The Middle English Romance: Some Questions of Creation, Presentation, and Preservation," Speculum, XLII (1967), 1-2.

INTRODUCTION

2

the impulse of love, religious faith, or, in many, mere desire for adventure."²

Romances are to the medieval world what western and detective stories are to the modern, and, as is the case with westerns and detective thrillers, relatively few romances manage to reach the status of great literature. Like our stories of cowboys and Indians the medieval stories of knights and ladies provide an escape, even though a somewhat different kind of escape: "One of their merits in the eyes of those for whom they were written must have been that they provided an escape from the failures or partial successes of life as it was lived by showing them that life idealized. The dresses and armour, the feasts and hunts, were cut to the pattern of things known, but on those patterns the romancer embroidered every splendour his imagination could conjure up."³

In medieval romance in general we find a great variety of materials treated in a great variety of ways.

² Essays on Middle English Literature (London: Osford University Press, 1955), p. 3.

³ Ibid., p. 8. For an authoritative listing of some of the most common elements in medieval romance, see Helaine Newstead, "Romances, General" in A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500, ed. J. Burke Severs (New Haven, Conn.: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967), pp. 11-12.

INTRODUCTION

3

Bypassing the long-standing and relatively superficial classification according to "Matters," we find several widely differing types of romance, which result from the fact that source materials are molded according to the artistic intentions of many diverse poets or groups of poets.⁴ A few examples will suffice to illustrate this fact.

First of all, under the broad heading of medieval romance we find not only the courtly chivalric narratives often written to please a female patron, but also the far less courtly but rather heroic and even epic narratives written to celebrate a nation's glory and with the function of inspiring young fighting men.⁵ In the former category would fall the French romances of Chrétien; in the latter the English alliterative Morte Arthure.

Secondly, especially on the Continent, we find the major types of allegorical romance. The Roman de la Rose of Guillaume de Lorris, for instance, leaves the field of external activity for the intricate psychological workings

⁴ For more on the "Matters" of medieval romance, see Albert C. Baugh, A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948), pp. 174-175.

⁵ See Anna Hunt Billings, A Guide to the Middle English Metrical Romances (New York: Haskell House, 1965), p. xvi.

INTRODUCTION

4

of love allegory, as Muscatine says: "Here the field of external vision is acutely narrowed; for the movements of knights, giants, and damsels in distress are substituted the movements of the soul itself, and one's attention is focused, not on a set of defeats and victories in field and bower, but on the minutest events in the progress of a single love affair, rendered through allegory."⁶ Side by side with this love allegory is the religious allegory in the Grail legend as treated in Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival, where the Grail is a symbol of the highest spiritual experience a Christian knight can have on this earth, and where we can detect a parable of the human pilgrimage through purifying fire to the attainment of a higher vision.⁷

Chaucer's Knight's Tale has recently been interpreted as a "sort of poetic pageant, its design expressing the nature of the noble life."⁸ Emphasizing the rich texture and symmetrical form of the poem, Muscatine

⁶ Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), pp. 13-14.

⁷ See William Thomas Hobdell Jackson, The Literature of the Middle Ages (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 115 & 135.

⁸ Muscatine, Chaucer, p. 181.

INTRODUCTION

5

detects a subsurface insistence on disorder and sees the impressive, patterned edifice of the noble life as a bulwark against the everthreatening forces of chaos, and in constant collision with them."⁹ In the form of a romance, then, Chaucer seeks to embody his vision of the struggle between noble designs and chaos and to affirm the true nobility of faith in the ultimate order of all things.

Finally, there are several relatively minor types of romance. One such minor type may be represented by the Anglo-Norman "ancestral romances" -- Waldef, Gui de Warewic, and Boeve de Haumtone -- spoken of by Dominica Legge as pieces written to glorify the founding and ancestry of certain noble families:

They were all apparently written to lend prestige to a family which, for one reason or another, could be regarded as parvenu. The hero is regarded as the founder of a family, and must preferably be a king, or become one at the end of the story. There must be a period of exile, if possible involving wanderings over sea, with mention of exotic places, their fauna, and other details.... The author may take an existing story and adapt it to his needs, or create a new one, or he may make use of genuine history. Whether his fable is derived from truth or fiction, he will ornament it with signs and wonders. At least one fight with a dragon is almost de rigueur. The burial of the hero in a monastery is almost universal. Courtoisie finds little place,

⁹ Muscatine, Chaucer, p. 190.

INTRODUCTION

6

and only lip service is paid to it. Since the object of writing at all seems to be to describe the founding of a family, marriage is bound to play an important part; love affairs outside matrimony are out of place.¹⁰

Another minor type may be the satirical romance exemplified, for instance, in Chaucer's Sir Thopas, and there are others.¹¹ All in all this broad variety of types in medieval romance is a result of centuries of evolution in several countries.

Medieval romance is the product of twelfth and early thirteenth-century France. Along with the troubadour lyric, the great cathedrals, and scholastic philosophy, it is a great product of the creative mind at work in this renaissance period.¹² Having reached a high degree of sophistication within a relatively short time, the romance started to branch out and continued to evolve along widely diverging lines, as Charles Muscatine points out:

¹⁰ Anglo-Norman Literature (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 174.

¹¹ For discussion and examples of "burlesque and grotesquerie" in some shorter Middle English romances, see Donald B. Sands, Middle English Verse Romances (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), pp. 5-6 & 313-371.

¹² See Baugh, A Literary History, p. 194.

INTRODUCTION

7

Between the Roman de Thebes (c. 1150) and the works of Chrétien de Troyes, scarcely a generation later, romance had reached a respectable degree of thematic and stylistic coherence. By the time of Guillaume de Lorris (c. 1234) its major potentialities as romance had all been fulfilled, and there were already beginning to appear, alongside a comparatively undisturbed main tradition, mutations and hybrids leading in a variety of directions: toward popular debasement, toward mystical religious sublimation, and toward comic and ironic reconstruction.¹³

From France the romance spread to other countries and other languages. A few French romances were written in England, but it is not until around 1250 that we find romances like King Horn and Havelok the Dane being written in English. The romance of love and chivalry exemplified by Chrétien de Troyes does not truly arrive in English until after 1300: "Most of the romances, and certainly the most popular, written in English before 1300 were concerned with English subjects and ... only after 1300 do we find stories of the Charlemagne and Arthurian cycles or of classical legend being adapted for a public that now preferred its entertainment in English rather than in French."¹⁴ Actually, most of the

¹³ Chaucer and the French Tradition, p. 11.

¹⁴ Baugh, A Literary History, p. 175. For an authoritative discussion of the linguistic background during this period, see Baugh, A History of the English Language (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957), pp. 150-188.

INTRODUCTION

8

English romances fall between 1350 and 1450, with occasional examples outside these limits in both directions.

The best Middle English romances were written during the period between 1350 and 1400, for it is here we find gems like Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and the romances of Chaucer. These great works, however, are exceptions rather than the rule, for as A. C. Gibbs reminds us, "in general the history of romance in England (with a few exceptions) is one of popular debasement ... and the finest English examples are produced in the fourteenth and even the fifteenth centuries, when the best poets in Europe are going on to other things."¹⁵

As we move into the early fifteenth century we find the English romancers becoming more and more interested in matters of antiquity, especially in old tales based on the adventures of the Greeks and Trojans and the Macedonian conqueror, Alexander the Great. Examples of this trend are Lydgate's voluminous Troy-Book (1412) and Siege of Thebes (1420). And in 1477 Caxton printed

¹⁵ "Introduction" in Middle English Romances, ed. A. C. Gibbs (London: Edward Arnold, 1966), p. 15.

INTRODUCTION

9

a number of romances, largely on classical themes.

In 1485 Caxton printed Malory's great reworking of Arthurian materials, the Morte Darthur, but apart from this the history of fifteenth-century English romance is one of declining literary value. The psychological probings of the French originals are replaced by an interest in nature description, fighting, and in some instances didacticism; but often the English poets had a weak sense of structure, which, as H. S. Bennett points out, made for more of quantity than of quality:

We can sympathize with these fifteenth-century authors who came into the field so late in the day, and who must have felt that all the best material had been used. They could only take the French romances and give them a new English form, sometimes by cutting out much introspection and conversation (Life of Ipomadon), or by giving them a strongly didactic note (Le Bone Florence, Parthenope). Often, however, they took the easiest course, and piled incident upon incident without much thought of structure (Generydes, Sir Triamour), so that long, rambling narratives resulted which relied on picturesque incident or elaboration of detail for their main effects (Le Bone Florence, Sir Cleges, the Squire of Low Degree). In a few romances there is a good sense of narrative (Le Bone Florence, Life of Ipomadon) or of dialogue (Sir Gawayne and Dame Ragnell, Sir Triamour), but on the whole, the romance form was living on its past.¹⁶

¹⁶ Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 164.

INTRODUCTION

10

Later evolution of the romance in Scotland runs roughly parallel to that of England. The Scottish writers have a similar tendency to prolixity along with an interest in classical themes, as is seen in a work like Henryson's Testament of Cresseid. Scottish as well as English verse forms in the fifteenth century generally fall into one or other of the following: either 1) stanzas and rhyming lines, often in imitation of Chaucer, or 2) the longer alliterative lines that were especially popular in the north and northwest of England.¹⁷

Keeping in mind the complex variety and the gradual evolution of Continental, English, and Scottish medieval romance, we will narrow our attention and select certain notable works for further, more concentrated study. We will seek, therefore, through a careful analysis and comparison to add significantly to our understanding and appreciation of four works: first, of two fourteenth-century English poetic treatments of the Death-of-Arthur story, the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur and the alliterative Morte Arthure, and second, of two shorter and later Arthurian poems, the Awntyrs of Arthure and Golagros

¹⁷ See Sir William Craigie, "The Scottish Alliterative Poems," Proceedings of the British Academy, XXVIII (1942), 217-236.

INTRODUCTION

11

and Gawane.¹⁸

We choose Le Morte Arthur and Morte Arthure for several reasons: (1) They are both written in verse and contain roughly 4000 lines, so that their respective authors faced comparable metrical and overall structural problems. (2) Both deal with Arthurian materials and so fall into the same category, the Matter of Britain, according to the traditional method of classification. (3) Not only do both poems belong to the Arthurian cycle but, as their titles indicate, both are concerned with the death of Arthur. (4) Le Morte Arthur and Morte Arthure were composed within forty years of each other in that golden period of Middle English literature between 1350 and 1400, and so because contemporary with each other are even riper for comparison. (5) Finally, both works have a relatively high literary quality among Middle English romances.

There are somewhat different but equally good reasons for choosing the Awntyrs of Arthure and Golagros and Gawane: (1) Once more, of course, both are in verse

¹⁸ In the interests of clarity Le Morte Arthur and Morte Arthure will generally be referred to in this study as the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur and the alliterative Morte Arthure.

INTRODUCTION

12

and deal with Arthurian materials. (2) They have in common a new and unusual thirteen-line rhyming alliterative stanza which was especially popular in the north of England and in Scotland. (3) Both poems are shorter than Le Morte Arthur and Morte Arthure and represent new trends in the later Middle English romances, especially the concern with morality.¹⁹ (4) Golagros and Gawane, finally, is especially notable as typifying one of the more important romance trends in Scotland in the latter part of the fifteenth century.

Our method will be first to analyze and compare Le Morte Arthur and Morte Arthure under the headings of "theme," "texture," "character," "hero," and "form" in an attempt to arrive at a clearer and more detailed idea of what things most strongly interest each poet and of the particular manner each poet uses to convey his vision. We will be concerned with the spirit of each poem and the total impression each poem makes. Having done this, we will, in the second part of our study, examine the Awntyrs of Arthure and Golagros and Gawane

¹⁹ It is interesting that both the Awntyrs and Golagros are treated together briefly in this connection by William Matthews in his study of Morte Arthure. See The Tragedy of Arthur (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), pp. 152-170.

INTRODUCTION

13

in the light of this comparison.

Our study concentrates on theme, texture, character, hero, and form because these five elements reinforce each other and together constitute the total vision of the romance writer. That these five elements are of central importance in Middle English romance has been taken for granted by such scholars as Albert C. Baugh, Dorothy Everett, Charles Muscatine, and William Matthews.²⁰ Of course, different scholars emphasize different things. Baugh, for instance, pays close attention to theme with some attention to character and form; Everett is interested in character and texture; and Matthews concentrates on hero and form. In one of the very clearest, pithiest and best balanced scholarly treatments of the Knight's Tale, Muscatine discusses all six elements but concentrates his attention on texture and form.

Our approach will not be an a priori one. No attempt will be made to emulate the attitude of Matthews, for example, who throughout his book is engaged in an

²⁰ See Baugh, A Literary History, pp. 173 ff.; Everett, Essays, pp. 1 ff.; Muscatine, Chaucer, pp. 175 ff. and Matthews, The Tragedy of Arthur, pp. 94 ff.

INTRODUCTION

14

almost single-minded attempt to prove his thesis to the exclusion of all others. On the contrary, in the belief that the truth in its complexity often belies one-sided theories, we will make a determined effort to maintain an objective and balanced attitude.

PART ONE
THE COMPARISON

The stanzaic Le Morte Arthur comes down to us in a unique copy: British Museum Manuscript Harley 2252, copied in the late 1400's by two different scribes.¹ The poem itself was composed in the late 1300's, probably in the north West Midland region and by an unknown author. Because the dialect of the scribes differed somewhat from that of the poet, our extant manuscript contains characteristics of both Northern and Southern as well as West Midland dialects.² Le Morte Arthur consists of 3969 four-stress lines (if you allow for the 136 lines believed lost after line 1181) written in iambic meter in eight-line stanzas rhyming abababab. Of course there are variations on this rhyme scheme: some stanzas consist of only six lines, or even four; and as many as forty-two percent of the lines contain some kind of alliteration.

The ultimate source for at least part of Le Morte Arthur is the vast thirteenth-century French prose

¹ The present study is based on the following text: Le Morte Arthur, ed. J. Douglas Bruce, Early English Text Society (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1903).

² See Bruce, "Introduction," Le Morte Arthur, p. xxiv.

Lancelot which consists of four parts: (1-2) Lancelot, dealing with the life and deeds of Lancelot, and the deeds of Gawain, Agravayne, and other knights of the Round Table; (3) the Quest of the Grail; and (4) the Death of Arthur.³ Other possible sources might include the French Morte Artu, which came after and is indebted to the Lancelot.⁴ Like these earlier French works, the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur is a courtly-love romance.

Modern literary scholarship has not been concentrated on the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur. The poem has had, to be sure, its share of passing attention in histories of English literature and general works on Middle English romance; but there have been no book-length studies of the poem itself. Attention has been directed to such questions as date, authorship, dialect, and text. The most useful general comments are still those of John Edwin Wells in his Manual, but these comments only run to about four pages.⁵

³ See John Edwin Wells, A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1400 (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), pp. 46-49.

⁴ See J. Douglas Bruce, The Evolution of Arthurian Romance (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1958), p. 127.

⁵ See Wells, Manual, pp. 46-49.

Only one copy of the alliterative Morte Arthure is extant. It is in the Thornton Manuscript which was copied between 1430 and 1440 and today is kept in the library of Lincoln Cathedral.⁶ This poem was composed around 1360 somewhere in the north of England or south of Scotland, and the author is unknown. The work consists of 4346 long lines of alliterative verse in the Northern dialect.

It is hard to pin down any immediate and exclusive source for Morte Arthure, but the poem is clearly in the chronicle tradition. The version of the story that comes to the poem is that which was told first in Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae and subsequently in Wace's Roman de Brut and Layamon's Brut.

Modern scholarship has dealt a bit more kindly with the alliterative Morte Arthure than with the stanzaic poem. In 1960 William Matthews brought out the first and only book-length study in which he concentrated his attention on the moral aspect of the character of Arthur.⁷

⁶ The present study is based on the following text: Morte Arthure, ed. Edmund Brock, Early English Text Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1961 [for 1871]).

⁷ See The Tragedy of Arthur, especially pp. 115-150. Two earlier names are also worthy of mention here. In

Matthews has aroused some interest, which finds expression in reviews of his book and in short articles on peripheral aspects of the poem. A name that seems to dominate all others since 1960 is that of John Finlayson, who has written among other things an interesting and enlightening article on the Giant of St. Michael's Mount.⁸ All in all, though, significant critical comment on the alliterative Morte Arthure has been scarce indeed when one recalls the volumes that have been written on the other Middle English alliterative masterpieces -- Piers Plowman, Pearl, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

1930 J. P. Oakden devoted two pages of commentary to the poem in his voluminous study of alliterative poetry, and in 1955 Dorothy Everett devoted a bit more space to it in her collection of essays on Middle English literature. See J. P. Oakden, Alliterative Poetry in Middle English (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1930), pp. 35-38, and Everett, Essays, p. 65.

⁸ See "Arthur and the Giant of St. Michael's Mount," MAE, XXXIII (1964), 112-120. Also notable are Finlayson's "Rhetorical 'Descriptio' of Place in the Alliterative 'Morte Arthure,'" MP, LXI (1963), 1-11, and "Formulaic Technique in 'Morte Arthure,'" Anglia, LXXXI (1963), 372-393.

CHAPTER I

THEME

By theme here is meant that great idea or complex of ideas or particular philosophy of life which the author is attempting to express and which explains all of the parts of a work, their relationship to the whole, and the interrelationship of the parts.¹ To have a coherent grasp of theme is, therefore, to have a grasp of the most vital and all-encompassing element in a literary work; it is to be in contact with the core of the author's vision, that without which all else is meaningless. We will open our comparison of the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur

¹ "Sometimes used to indicate the subject of a work, the term theme is more frequently employed to designate its central idea or thesis." Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz, A Reader's Guide to Literary Terms (New York: The Noonday Press, 1960), p. 214 -- hereinafter cited as Beckson and Ganz. William F. Thrall, Addison Hibbard and C. Hugh Holman define theme as "the central and dominating idea in a literary work.... It is the abstract concept which is made concrete through its representation in person, action, and image in the work." A Handbook to Literature (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1961), p. 486 -- hereinafter cited as Thrall, Hibbard and Holman. See also M. M. Liberman and Edward E. Foster, A Modern Lexicon of Literary Terms (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1968), p. 117 -- hereinafter cited as Liberman and Foster -- and Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman and William Burto, A Dictionary of Literary Terms (Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1960), p. 68 -- hereinafter cited as Barnet, Berman and Burto.

and the alliterative Morte Arthure, therefore, by attempting to arrive at a clear formulation of their respective themes.² All other elements of our comparison in succeeding chapters should follow naturally from our findings on theme.

This chapter will consist of a three-pronged analysis and comparison of the two works as a means of working toward discovery of their respective themes. First, we will study the major concepts of Christianity, courtly love, and Fate as they are embodied in each work; second, we will examine an introductory passage from each

² No one has yet analyzed the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur with a view to arriving at a clear statement of its theme. Newstead, for instance, follows Wells in confining herself to the usual factual information and a few cursory observations on the style and structure of the work. See Wells, Manual, pp. 46-49 and Newstead, "Arthurian Legends" in Severs' Manual, pp. 51-53. In his study of the alliterative Morte Arthure, on the other hand, Matthews sees that poem as a tragedy of fortune dramatizing the process of sin and punishment, as portraying, in the words of Finlayson, "the fall of a great and Christian conqueror due to his desertion of that championship of justice and right which originally made him great." See Matthews, The Tragedy of Arthur, pp. 115-150 and Finlayson, "Arthur and the Giant of St. Michael's Mount," 112-120. We will have more comment on Matthews later. At this point suffice it to say that in his conscious attempt to prove a controversial theory Matthews has not succeeded in arriving at an objective statement of the all-inclusive theme of Morte Arthure based on careful analysis of the work itself.

work as furnishing an important initial glimpse of each work's basic conflict; and third, we will single out the main concerns of the major characters in each work. By this method we hope to arrive at a point where we will be able to make a clear statement of our two poems' respective themes.

Christianity is taken for granted in both poems, but only one or two generalizations are possible on the manner in which this concept is treated in each. In the stanzaic poem there is a greater influence of the Church as a formal institution. When civil war starts the Pope places Britain under an interdict which, along with the bishop's efforts, actually brings about a truce:

Into all landys northe and southe
 Off thys werre the word spronge,
 And yit at Rome it was full couthe,
 In ynglande was suche sorowe stronge;
 There-of the pope had grete Routhe,
 A lettre he selid with hys hande;
 Bot they accorded welle in trowthe,
 Enterdite he wolde the lande.

Then was a bischope at Rome,
 Off Rowchester, with-outen lese;
 Tylle ynglande he, the message, Come,
 To karllylle ther the kyng was;
 The popis lettre oute he nome
 In the paleis by-fore the desse,
 And bade them do the popes dome
 And holde yngland in Reste and pes.
 (ll. 2246-2261)

Later on, the Archbishop of Canterbury excommunicates Mordred and is forced to flee for his life. Guinevere

and Lancelot are sincere enough in their Christian repentance and renunciation of the world near the end, but we never witness either of them praying. Taken as a whole the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur does not have a deep and pervasive religious feeling.

The alliterative version presents a contrast in this respect, for in it we find no bishops or hermits and no formal activity of the institutional Church; instead emphasis falls on the personal religious devotion of the fighting knights in their struggle against the forces of evil. This notion of Christian versus anti-Christian pervades Morte Arthure. Arthur fights under the banner of the Virgin Mother and Child. Gawain too has a strong devotion to Mary, as he tells his knights:

"Whene we are moste in destresse, Marie we mene,
That es oure maisters seyne, that he myche traistez;
Melys of that mylde qwene, that menskes vs alle;
Who so meles of that mayde, myskaries he neuer!"
(ll. 2869-2871)

In his final battle Gawain again exhorts his men, promising them heaven as a reward:

"We are with Sarazenes be-sett appone sere halfes!
I syghe noghte for my selfe, sa helpe oure Lorde;
Bot for to see vs supprysede, my sorowe es the more.
Bes dowghtty to-daye, yone dukes schalle be youres!
ffor dere Dryghttyne this daye, dredys no wayne.
We salle ende this daye alls excellent knyghttes,
Ayere to endellesse joye with angelles vnwemmyde.
Thofe we have vnwittyly wastede oure selfene,
We salle wirke alle wele in the wirchipe of Cryste.
We salle for yone Sarazenes, I sekire yow my trowhe,

Souppe with oure Soueoure solemply in heuene,
In presence of that precious, prynce of alle other
With prophetes, and patriarkes, and apostlys fulle
nobile,
Be-fore his freliche face that fourmede vs alle!
Yondire to yone yaldsones, he that yeldes hyme euer,
Qwhylles he es qwykke and in qwerte vnquellyde with
handis,
Be he neuer mo sauede, ne socourede with Cryste,
Bot Sathanase his sawle mowe synke in-to helle!"
(11. 3795-3812)

In this speech, so typical of the alliterative poem and so alien to the stanzaic, fighting spirit, Christian faith and uncompromising self-righteousness are fused in a last desperate call to arms.

Another very important background concept apart from Christianity is courtly love.³ Courtly love as sung of by the troubadours, elaborated upon by the romancers, and finally codified in the De Arte Honeste Amandi of Andreas

3 Numerous books and articles have been written on the sources, development, reason for existence, and doctrine of courtly love. The historical development of the concept may be outlined in the following way. Growing out of southern France and originally influenced by the Moorish civilization of tenth and eleventh century Spain was a whole new system of ideas on the dealings between noble men and women. The new ideas spread in the twelfth century to northern France and England, especially under the patronage of Eleanor of Aquitaine. In the twelfth century Chrétien de Troies, especially under the patronage of Eleanor's daughter, Marie de Champagne, welded courtly love with Arthurian legend, and so dawned the great age of French courtly Arthurian romances. See especially Christopher Dawson, "The Origins of the Romantic Tradition" in Medieval Essays (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1959), pp. 188-211.

Capellanus consisted of four main principles:

- 1) Courtly love is sensual, yet uplifting and ennobling and productive of every virtue.
- 2) Courtly love is illicit and, for the most part, adulterous.
- 3) A love sensual and illicit must needs be secret.
- 4) Love must not be too easily obtained.

Courtly love was, of course, an elaborate system to which there are many auxiliary notions and conceits.⁴

Lancelot and Guinevere in the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur have a courtly love affair which is sensual, illicit, and secret. The secrecy is especially emphasized. When Guinevere, on the false information given her by Gawain, believes that Lancelot has forsaken her for the Maid of Ascalot, her chief concern is that he at least refrain from revealing the love that once existed between them:

⁴ Also, it would be inaccurate to claim that the practice of the troubadours, Chrétien, and the other romancers coincided on all points with the theory formulated by Andreas. See especially William George Dodd, Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1913), pp. 1-20. See also C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 1-43.

Allas! launcelot du lake,
 Sithe thou hast all my hert in wold
 Therlis doughter that thou wold take
 Off Ascalot, as men me told!
 Now thou leviste for hyr sake
 Alle thy dede of Armys bold,
 I may woefully wepe and wake
 In clay tylle I be clongyn cold.

But, launcelot, I be-seche the here,
 Sithe it nedelyngis shall be so,
 That thou nevir more discouyr
 The loue that hathe bene be-twyxe vs two.
 (ll. 744-755)

This strict secrecy is maintained not only in the interests of preserving personal reputation but even more in the interests of preserving life itself, for later, when the Lancelot-Guinevere affair becomes known, it is immediately decided that the Queen should be punished by burning at the stake. It is worth noting in passing that the fourth principle of courtly love is not slavishly followed in this poem. Guinevere's love is taken for granted from the start, and although Lancelot is willing to risk his life for her, there is none of the female superiority and male abjection to be found in a work like Chrétien's Le Chevalier de la Char.ette.

There is no courtly love in the alliterative Morte Arthure. In this poem Lancelot is an ordinary knight whom we see in action only twice, boasting at the King's war council in the Giant's Tower early in the narrative and then making good on these boasts in the thick of

battle against the Roman foes. Guinevere has an adulterous affair with Mordred, bearing a child for him while the King is away at war, but there is not the slightest hint of courtly love between Guinevere and Mordred. Their relationship is not even dramatically presented, except in one instance, when Mordred writes the Queen telling her to flee. The whole thing is of interest to the alliterative poet only insofar as it furnishes more damning evidence of Mordred's perfidious betrayal of his King.

A third background concept worthy of note, Fate, presented medieval philosophers with one of their most interesting and knotty problems. In the sixth century, Boethius -- in one of the most influential books of the Middle Ages, the Consolation of Philosophy -- had discussed Fate's relative power, manifestations, and relations to Divine Providence, Fortune or Chance, and Human Free Will. Boethius equated Fate with Destiny and saw it as the aggregate of all the blind, impersonal forces of the world. Fate or Destiny is superior to Fortune, which represents forces in the personal lives of human beings, but both Fate and Fortune are subject to

Divine Providence.⁵

There is no direct reference to any of these terms in the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur. There is in this work a brief treatment of Arthur's dream of a wheel, presumably the Wheel of Fortune, but the narrator shows no special interest in this aspect of his narrative, and the dream is left as something of an afterthought. The stanzaic poet does not communicate a feeling of dark foreboding, of a brooding Wyrd carrying events to an inevitable conclusion. The light romance narrative, though filled at times with pathos, quite naturally has nothing to even approach that deep awareness of the potent forces of Destiny to be found, for instance, in the Old English heroic poems, in the novels of Thomas Hardy, and to a lesser extent even in the alliterative Morte Arthure.

At least twice in the alliterative poem we find the old term, "Wyrd," being used. Sir Lottez uses it in his appeal to Destiny as a justification for the war he is about to wage: "It es owre weredes to wreke the wrethe of oure elders!" (l. 385) And near the end, after slaying Gawain, Mordred uses the term in his complaint against

⁵ See Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, Bk. IV, trans. W. V. Cooper (New York: Random House, 1943), pp. 91-100.

Personal Fortune, weeping "That euer his werdes ware wroghte siche wandrethe to wyrke" (l. 3889). More important than these random references and standing at the very center of the alliterative Morte Arthure is the elaborate treatment of the King's dream of the Wheel and its mysterious, fickle Lady. It is Lady Fortune, we presume, who finally brings the King down from earthly glory. Nevertheless, earlier in the poem the King had testified to the overall supremacy of Divine Providence:

"Crist be thankyde," quod the kynge, "and hys clere
 modyre,
 That yowe comforthede and helpede be crafte of hyme
 selfene;
 Skilfulle skomfytüre he skiftez as hym lykez,
 Is none so skathlye may skape, ne skewe fro his handez;
 Desteny and doughtynes of dedys of armes,
 Alle es demyd and delte at Dryghtynez wille!
 (ll. 1559-1564)

And so, we may conclude that whereas the stanzaic poet makes scant use of the concept of Fate, the alliterative poet is much more interested in it and seems to be in general agreement with Boethius that 1) Personal Fortune, 2) Fate, and 3) Divine Providence influence human affairs in ascending order of power, with Divine Providence ruling the first two.

Having examined the way in which the three major concepts of Christianity, courtly love, and Fate are embodied in our respective poems, we can now move on to

consider introductory passages in our two poems, because these passages set the stage for later action and furnish glimpses of the poems' respective themes by giving us early indications of the basic conflict each poem is to deal with. In these passages we get something of each poem in microcosm.

In three neat stanzas before we even reach line 70 the narrator of the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur clearly sets the stage for later action and expresses what things this work is primarily concerned with. We are introduced into the peculiar world of Arthurian courtly romance:

A turnement the king lett bede,
 At Wynchester shuld it be,
 Yonge Galehod was good in nede,
 The Chefteyne of the Crye was he,
 With knightis that were stiff on stede,
 That ladyes and maydens might se
 Who that beste were of dede
 Thrughe doughtynesse to have the gre.

Knightis Arme them by-dene
 To the turnemente to Ride,
 With sheldis brode and helmys shene
 To wynne grete honoure and pride.
 launcelot lefte withe the quene
 And seke he lay that ylke tyde;
 For loue that was theym by-twene
 He made in chessoun for to abyde.

The kynge satte vppon his stede
 And forthe is went vppon his way;
 Sir Agraveyne for such a nede
 At home by-lefte, for soth to say,
 For men told in many a thede
 That launcelot by the quene lay;
 For to take them with the dede
 He awaytes both nyght and day. (ll. 41-64)

Here we find stress laid on personal relationships, including the adventures and intrigues of individuals, rather than on the political relationships, or international intrigues of great empires. Here are the seeds, one might say, of later developments in the poem. All the characters owe personal allegiance to the King: it is he who calls the tournament; it is he who has dubbed all the knights; and it is before him that each seeks to prove his prowess. At the same time, from the very beginning we see the courtly love affair as a given fact.

Lancelot's two contradictory loyalties, to the King on one hand and to the Queen on the other, present him with a cruel dilemma which plagues him from the time the love affair is made public until the death of the King. Not only does it force him to fight his King and best friend but it causes him to make foolish speeches, such as the one spoken when he returns the Queen to the King under a flag of truce:

"Syr, I haue the broght thy quene
 And sau'd hyr lyffe with the Ryght,
 As lady that is feyre and shene
 And trewe is bothe day and nyght;
 Iffe Any man sayes she is noght clene,
 I profre me there-fore to feyght."
 (ll. 2382-2387)

In this instance Lancelot's cruel personal dilemma coupled with his instinctive desire to do noble deeds has led him

into an intellectually and ethically untenable position. More about Lancelot later, but this will at least indicate to some extent where the stanzaic poet's interest lies: his is a story of disrupted personal relationships and the personal crises and further unhappy consequences stemming from this disruption.

The alliterative poet concerns himself with much broader issues, and a glance at the early part of his poem will help us see this. After a few introductory lines we get our first picture of the Round Table:

Qwene that the kynge Arthur by conqueste hade wonnyne
 Castelles and kyngdoms, and contreez many,
 And he had couerede the coroune of the kyth ryche,
 Of alle that Vter in erthe aughte in his tyme,
 Orgayle and Orkenay, and alle this owte-iles,
 Irelande vtirly, as Occyane rynnys;
 Scathylle Scottlande by skylle he skyftys as hym lykys,
 And Wales of were he wane at hys wille,
 Bathe fflaundrez and ffraunce fre til hym seluyne;
 Holaund and Henawde they helde of hyme bothen,
 Burgoyne and Brabane, and Bretayne the lesse,
 Gyane and Gothelande, and Grece the ryche;
 Bayone and Burdeux he beldytt full faire,
 Turoyne and Tholus with toures fulle hye;
 Off Peyters and of Prouynce he was prynce holdyne,
 Of Valence and Vyenne, off value so noble,
 Of Eruge and Anyone, thos erledoms ryche;
 By conqueste fulle cruelle they knewe hym fore lorde,
 Of Nauerne and Norwaye, and Normaundye eke,
 Of Almayne, of Estriche, and other ynowe;
 Danmarke he dryssede alle by drede of hym seluyne,
 ffra Swynne vnto Swetherwyke, with his swerde kene!
 Qwenne he thes dedes had done, he doubbyd hys knyghtez,
 Dyuyssyde dowcherys and delte in dyuerse remmes;
 Mad of his cosyns kyngys ennoyntede,
 In kyth there they couaitte crounes to bere.
 Whene he thys rewmes hade redyne and rewlyde the popule
 Then rystede that ryalle and helde the Rounde Tabylle;

Suggeourns that sesone to solace hyme seluene,
 In Bretayne the braddere, as hym beste lykys;
 Sythyne wente in-to Wales with his wyes alle,
 Sweys in-to Swaldye with his snelle houndes,
 For to hunt at the hartes in thas hye lanndes,
 In Glamorgane with glee, thare gladchipe was euere.
 And thare a citee he sette, be assentte of his lordys,
 That Caerlyone was callid, with curius walles,
 On the riche reuare that rynnys so faire,
 There he myghte semble his sorte to see whenne hym
 lykyde;

Thane aftyre at Carlelele a Cristynmese he haldes,
 This ilke kyde conquerour, and helde hym for lorde,
 Wyth 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:
 Bot on the Cristynmesdaye, whene they were alle
 semblyde,

That comlyche conquerour commaundez hym seluyne
 That ylke a lorde sulde lenge, and no lefe take,
 To the tende day fully ware takyne to the ende.
 Thus one ryalle araye he helde his rounde table,
 With semblant and solace and selcouthe metes;
 Whas neuer wyche noblay, in no manys tyme,
 Mad in mydwynter in tha weste marchys! (ll. 26-77)

At this point the Roman messengers arrive. There is a sharp contrast here with the stanzaic poem. The alliterative is concerned not so much with the personal as the national. The setting is much more expansive, with the lists of conquered lands and long journeys. We see at the outset that history is to be made here. It is the first touch of what can only be called epic grandeur.⁶

⁶ Epic: "A long narrative POEM in elevated STYLE presenting characters of high position in a series of adventures which form an organic whole through their relation to a central figure of heroic proportions and through their development of EPISODES important to the history of a nation or race." Thrall, Hibbard and Holman, pp. 174-175.

is nothing to match the important council called by the King in the alliterative version:

"Bot I salle tak concelle at kynges enoyntede,
Off dukes and duspers and doctours noble,
Offe peres of the parlement, prelates and other,
Off the richeste renkys of the Rounde Table;
Thus schalle I take avisement of valiant beryns,
Wyrke aftyre the wytte of my wyes knyghttes:
To warpe wordez in waste no wyrchipe it were,
Ne wilfully in this wrethe to wrekene my seluene."
(11. 144-151)

Later, when the King is ready to leave on his military campaign, he gives explicit and elaborate orders to Mordred on precisely how the realm is to be managed in his absence:

"I am in purpos to passe perilous wayes,
To kaire with my kene mene, to conquere yone landes,
To owtttraye myne enemy, yif auenture it schewe,
That occupyes myne heritage, the empyre of Rome.
I sett yow here a soueraynge, ascende yif yowe lykys,
That es me sybb, my syster sone, Sir Mordrede hym
seluene,
Salle be my leuetaunte, with lordchipez ynewe,
Of alle my lele lege-mene, that my landez yemes."
He carpes tille his cosyne thane, in counsaile hym
leluene, --

"I make the kepare, sir knyghte, of kyngrykes manye,
Wardayne wyrchipfulle, to weilde al my landes,
That I haue wonnene of werre, in alle this werlde
ryche;

I wylle that Waynour, my weife, in wyrchipe be holdene
That hire wante noo wele, ne welthe that hire lykes;
Luke my kydde castells be clenlyche arrayede,
There cho maye suggourne hire selfe, wyth semlyche
berynes.

ffannde my fforestez be ffrythede, o frenchipe for
euere

That nane werreye my wylde, botte Waynour hir seluene,
And that in the sesone whene grees es assignyde,
That cho take hir solauce in certayne tymes.
Chauncelere and chambyrleyne chaunge as the lykes,
Audytours and offycers ordayne thy seluene, --

most important lines in all of the poem are spoken by the knights relatively early, when Lancelot has left the court because of the Queen:

"Allas!" they seyde, "lancelot du lake,
That euyr shuld distow se the quene!"
And hyr they cursyd for his sake
That euyr love was them by-twene.
(ll. 796-799)

Recalling the good times, they are frustrated and enraged that the close bond of fellowship is disappearing and gradually being replaced by an even closer bond of enmity, which makes the tragedy complete. As events proceed in this direction Lancelot's close friend, Bors, finds his personal solution in jettisoning other friendships and attaching himself even more strongly to Lancelot:

"Dight we vs in Ryche Araye,
Bothe with spere And with shelde,
As swithe as euyr that we maye,
And Ryde we oute in-to the felde;
Whyle my lyffe laste maye,
Thys day I ne shall my wepen yelde;
There-fore my lyffe I darre wele laye
We two shall make hem all to helde."
(ll. 2134-2141)

There is also in the stanzaic version a certain interest in "aunturs" and in the knightly sport of the tournament, but this conventional romance interest quickly fades from the picture when the real trouble starts. Fighting for its own sake is not stressed as the highest of activities; actually, all the serious fighting is

THEME

37

regarded as a calamity to be stopped by any means possible, precisely because all the serious fighting is among old friends.

This attitude is in sharp contrast to that of the alliterative version, where war on a national scale is not only welcomed without horror but stressed as a noble activity of man. Fully thirty percent of the lines in the alliterative poem are devoted to actual fighting, without counting those devoted to preparations for battle, travel to and from the battlefield, and so on.

This interest in war is related to a birth of national consciousness which is indicated in the poem by an interest in history and in the creation of a national mythology. As in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight there are references to the story of the founding of Britain by Brutus. There is a nationalistic pride even in the sumptuous feast prepared for the Roman senator, a pride

which is demonstrated rather than diminished by Arthur's modest speech deprecating British hospitality. Arthur's knights are variously referred to as "our mene," "oure bolde mene," "oure syde," "oure pople," and "oure valyant biernez" (ll. 1399, 1434, 1492, 1875 & 1958).

The enemy is seen as exceedingly powerful, arrogant, and evil. The Emperor Lucius gathers a dreadful host from all over his empire:

Thane sir Lucius Lordlyche lettres he sendys
 Onone in-to the Oryente, with austeryne knyghtez,
 Tille Ambyganye and Oreage, and Alysaundre eke,
 To Inde and to Ermonyne, as Ewfrates rynnys,
 To Asye, and to Affrike, and Ewrope the large,
 To Irritayne, and Elamet, and alle thase owte ilez;
 To Arraby and Egipt, tille erles and other,
 That any erthe occupyes in thase este marches
 Of Damaske ane Damyat, and dukes and erles;
 ffor drede of his daungere they dresside theme sone;
 Of Crete and of Capados the honourable kyngys
 Come at his commandmente, clenly at ones;
 To Tartary and Turkey, whene tythynggez es comene,
 They turne in by Thebay, terauntez fulle hugge,
 The flour of the faire folke, of Amazonnes landes;
 Alle thate ffaillez on the felde be forfeite for euere!
 Of Babyloyne and Balwake the burlyche knyghtes,
 Bayous with theire baronage bydez no langere;
 Of perce, and of Pamphile, and Preter Iohne landes,
 Iche prynce with his powere appertlyche craythede;
 The Sowdane of Surrye assemblez his knyghtes,
 ffra Nylus to Nazarethe, nommers fulle huge;
 To Garyere and to Galilé they gedyre alle at ones;
 The Sowdanes that ware sekyre sowdeours to Rome,
 They gadyrede ouere the Grekkes See with greuouse
 wapyns,
 In theire grete galys, wyth gleterande schelde;
 The kyng of Cyprys on the see the Sowdane habydes,
 With alle the realles of Roodes, arayede with hyme one;
 They sailede with a syde wynde oure the salte strandez:
 Sodanly the Sarazenes, as theme selfe lykede,
 Craftyly ar Cornett the kynges are aryefede,

ffra the ceté of Rome sexti myle large.

Be that the Grekes ware graythede, a fulle gret
nombyre,

The myghtyeste of Macedone, with mene of tha marches,

Pulle and Pruyslande presses with other,

The lege-mene of Lettōw with legyons ynēwe:

Thus they semble in sortes, ^{et} summes fulle huge,

Sowdanes and Sarezene ow't of sere landes,

The sowdane of surry and sextene kynges,

At the cetee of Rome assemblede at ones. (ll. 570-609)

Rome is seen as having "Encrochede alle Cristyndome be

craftes of Armes" (l. 2036). Not only do many Saracens

fight on the Roman side, but their Sultan himself dines

with Lucius, the enemies of the British are also the

blackest enemies of Christianity, so that the war against

them is both nationalistic and religious -- almost, indeed,

a crusade. Such is the chief preoccupation of knights in

the alliterative poem.

Our findings to this point may be reviewed briefly.

First of all, the most important background concepts in

our two poems are the following: Christianity, which is

more superficial and institutionalized in the stanzaic

version and more pervasive and personal in the alliter-

ative; courtly love, which is present in the Lancelot-

Guinevere affair in the stanzaic version but totally

absent from the alliterative; and Fate, which is present

in its Christian-Boethian sense in the alliterative

version but absent from the stanzaic. Second,

introductory passages in each work give early indications

of the basic conflict in each: the stanzaic version presents the internal and external personal conflict faced by Lancelot and stemming from the clash of two contradictory personal loyalties, the courtly love and the feudal; the alliterative version presents the momentous conflict stemming from the aggressive designs of one nation upon another. Third and finally, while the leading characters of the stanzaic poem are almost obsessed with disrupted friendships, or intra-personal discord, their opposites in the alliterative poem are almost wholly absorbed in the pursuit of war, or international discord, with strong emphasis falling on religio-nationalistic loyalty to king and country.

We have now arrived at a point from which we can attempt a statement of themes. The theme of the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur may be succinctly expressed thus: Courtly love carries within itself the seeds of severe personal discord, for in a given situation the courtly love loyalty can conflict both with the feudal loyalty and with the loyalty of old friendships, so that, in spite of the best efforts of the noblest characters, a chain of unfortunate events stemming from discovery of a courtly love affair can destroy all the things that make for order and happiness within a closely-knit courtly circle.

THEME

41

The alliterative Morte Arthure puts emphasis in a different place; and its theme may be expressed thus: For men and nations the glory of this world is difficult to obtain and sweet to enjoy, but it passes quickly. Fate, subjected to Divine Providence and symbolized by Fortune's fickle Wheel, broods over the affairs of all men; consequently, in titanic martial struggles against the enemies of nation and religion just men can obtain great victory and glory, only to be abruptly dragged, through no apparent fault of their own, from the apex of personal and national glory to a catastrophe of suffering and death.

CHAPTER II

TEXTURE

Texture is a broad term applied to such elements in a work of literary art as tone, situation, imagery, and sound and movement.¹ It is by a study of texture that we get the clearest indication of the overall spirit of a poem; therefore, a look at this aspect of our two poems should logically follow our discussion of theme.

After a thorough discussion of tone we will examine situation, imagery, and sound and movement in Le Morte Arthur and Morte Arthure. In our treatment of tone we will include first, the respective authors' typical attitudes as they appear in the opening lines of each work, and second, the emotional impact of each work. Under situation we will discuss the peculiar world of each poem; and in imagery we will note both the quality and the type of images found in each. We will see the

¹ "Clearly a metaphorical term, TEXTURE suggests that a literary work can be likened to a tapestry, which has both a discernible design and a sensible density. It is as if one could, in the case of a novel, for example, see the pattern of its movements (STRUCTURE) and all but touch, taste, smell, and hear its life (TEXTURE)." Liberman and Foster, p. 116. See also Thrall, Hibbard and Holman, p. 486; Beckson and Ganz, p. 203; and Barnett, Berman and Burto, p. 46.

striking contrast in sound and movement presented by a juxtaposition of Le Morte Arthur and Morte Arthure.

The stanzaic Le Morte Arthur has the overall tone of a simple, straightforward narrative.² The opening lines effectively establish the approach that is to prevail throughout:

Lordingis that ar leff And dere,
 lystenyth and I shall you tell
 By olde dayes what aunturs were
 Amonge oure eldris that by-felle:
 In Arthur dayes, that noble kinge,
 By-Felle Aunturs ferly fele,
 And I shall telle of there endinge
 That mykell wiste of wo and wele.

The knightis of the Table Round,
 The sangrayle whan they had sought,
 Aunturs that they by-fore them found
 Fynisshid and to ende brought;
 Their enemyes they bette & bound,
 For Gold on lyff they lefte them noght.
 Foure yere they lyved sound,
 Whan they had these werkis wroght.
 (ll. 1-16)

Evident here is the author's low key approach to his

² "Tone, in literature, may be defined as the writer's or speaker's attitude toward his subject, his audience, or himself. It is the emotional coloring, or the emotional meaning, of the work, and is an extremely important part of the full meaning." Laurence Perrine, Sound and Sense (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), p. 135. See also Thrall, Hibbard and Holman, p. 487; Beckson and Ganz, p. 215; and Barnet, Berman and Burto, pp. 86-87.

TEXTURE

44

materials, his detachment and especially his avoidance of any kind of "high" style. Typical of the stanzaic poem is the tactful touch of sad wistfulness in the two lines:

"And I shall telle of there endinge/That mykell wiste of wo and wele."

The alliterative poem, in contrast with the stanzaic, is marked by a special dignity and solemnity. In the opening lines the work is stamped with overt religious feeling and a deep, pervasive sadness:

Here begynnes Morte Arthure. In nomine Patris et
Filij et Spiritus Sancti. Amen pur charite. Amen.

Now grett glorious Godde, thurgh grace of hym seluene,
And the precyous prayere of hys prys modyr,
Schelde vs ffro schamesdede and synfulle werkes,
And gyffe vs grace to gye, and gouerne vs here,
In this wrechyde werlde thorowe vertous lywynges,
That we may kayre til hys courte, the kyngdome of hevyn;
Whene oure soules schalle parte and sundyre fra the body
Ewyre to belde and to byde in blysse wyth hyme seluene;
And wysse me to werpe owte some worde at this tyme,
That nothyre voyde be ne vayne, bot wyrchiptille hyme
selvyne,

Plesande and profitabille to the popule that theme heres
Ye that liste has to lyth, or luffes for to here,
Off elders of alde tyme and of theire awke dedys,
How they were lele in theire lawe, and louede God

Almyghty,

Herkynes me heyndly and holdys yow styll,
And I salle telle yow a tale, that trewe es and nobyll,
Off the ryealle renkys of the Rownnde Table,
That chefe ware of cheualrye and cheftans nobyll,
Bathe ware in thire werkes and syse mene of armes,
Doughty in theire doyngs, and dredde ay schame,
Kynde mene and courtays, and couthe of courte thewes,
How they whanne wyth were wyrchippis many,
Sloughe Lucyus the lythyre, that lorde was of Rome,
And conquestyd that kyngryke thorowe craftys of armes;
Herkenes now hedyrwarde, and herys this storye.

(11. 1-25)

Through the careful sequence of 1) a blessing, 2) a prayer, and 3) an address to the audience before getting into his narrative, the alliterative poet through his long, sonorous, almost incantory lines of verse gives us the impression that something great is about to start. This is the dignified, solemn tone of epic.³

A second aspect of tone is the emotional impact of a work. A great appeal to the emotions in the stanzaic version is found in the estrangement of old knightly companions. In the beginning, although the seeds of tragedy are present and obvious, there is an atmosphere of great joy in mutual love and esteem; however, the joyous sequel to Lancelot's victory over Sir Mador in the trial by combat is but a last brief glimpse of happiness before the treachery of Agravayne initiates what is to be a chain of tragic events:

Welle they wyste that All was shente
And syr gawayne by god than swere:
"here now is made a comsemente
That bethe not fynysshid many A yere."
(ll. 1724-1727)

In his handling of the next few hundred lines the stanzaic poet is at his best. With a simple, sincere

³ For a detailed discussion of the solemn tone of secondary epic, see C. S. Lewis, A Preface to Paradise Lost (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 41.

TEXTURE

46

tone he manages to convey a feeling of sadness for the present, but a sadness that becomes doubly poignant in its awareness of a golden past which can never again be. As one scene follows another, men die, and Lancelot becomes the enemy first of Arthur and then of Gawain. As the tragedy continues to deepen, the waves of emotion roll in upon the reader in the repetition of a phrase which soon becomes a simple, persistent refrain: "That evyr yet thys werre be-gan!" (ll. 2205, 2395, 2443 & 2675)

The main emotional impact of the alliterative Morte Arthure stems from the heroic and glorious rise of King and Empire in war, and, of course, the betrayal leading to the catastrophic fall of both. Following fast upon the heels of his greatest triumph, Arthur has his dreadful dream and its baleful but accurate interpretation. From this point the tragedy unfolds with the return to England, the sea battle, the death of Gawain, the death of Mordred, and finally the death of Arthur himself. Here is nothing like the quiet pathos of the stanzaic poem. The fall of the alliterative Arthur has all the bitterness of grand tragedy, for not merely human life but the greatest of earthly glory is brought to ruin here. And when the emotions aroused by this epic

TEXTURE

47

tragedy have reached their climax and are allowed to subside, we experience an appropriate release, cleansing, or catharsis.⁴

In a word, therefore, the stanzaic poem, being a tragedy of disrupted personal relationships, is characterized by a simple, natural, and genuinely moving pathos; however, the alliterative poem, being a tragedy of warfare in the rise and fall of an empire, is characterized by a much greater dignity and pathos appropriate to such a catastrophe. If the stanzaic poem is something of a ballad tragedy in its brevity and simplicity, the alliterative poem is something of an epic tragedy in its completeness and sophistication.

⁴ Catharsis is that process by which "the spectator's emotional conflicts are temporarily resolved and his inner agitations stilled by having an opportunity vicariously to expend fear and pity upon the tragic hero.... R. B. Sharpe, in Irony in the Drama, suggests that the hero of a TRAGEDY comes before its conclusion to represent to the spectator 'what Jung calls a symbol and Fraser a scapegoat -- that is, a human figure upon whom we are able to load our emotions, from our loftiest to our lowest, our hopes, and our sins, through such a deep and complete emotional identification that he can carry them away with him into heaven or the wilderness and so free us of the burden and the tension of keeping them for ourselves. This empathic identification is ... catharsis.'" Thrall, Hibbard and Holman, p. 74. See also Liberman and Foster, pp. 16-17, and Oscar Mandel, A Definition of Tragedy (New York: New York University Press, 1961), pp. 62-69.

Moving from tone to situation we find another basic difference between our two poems. The events of the stanzaic poem take place in the completely unrealistic world of romance. In the first few lines we get references to the days of King Arthur and to the semi-mystical search for the Holy Grail. It quickly becomes obvious that this is the conventional, imaginary world of towering castles, lovely ladies, knights in shining armor, and of more or less of the other paraphernalia common to Arthurian legends as developed by the court poets.

Notwithstanding the absence of Merlin, some of the most notable items in Le Morte Arthur's world of romance are its wonders. Knights are always ready for new "aunturs" and they are not left disappointed. In the two Lancelot-Gawain fights Gawain's strength is seen as increasing to its peak around the hour of noon; and after Arthur's final battle there is the whole wondrous episode involving Sir Bedevere, Arthur's sword, the lake, and the three mysterious ladies who bear Arthur away on his last voyage. Finally, we must not forget the lovely young Lady of Ascalot and her unfortunate yearning for Lancelot, subsequent heartbreak, and wondrous voyage of death.

The stanzaic world is apparently free of economic necessity. When Lancelot rides off to the forest there is no mention of what he ~~eats~~ while staying there. Arthur and Gawain gather an army and pursue Lancelot, but no mention is made of provisions for that army. The poet seems interested not in the realistic conditions of an actual world but in the general story of knights and ladies in an extra-terrestrial world of the imagination.

This is all quite different from the realistic, earthly world of the alliterative Morte Arthur. Despite the presence of a few giants, camels, elephants, and the miraculous healing waters given to Gawain by Priamus in that poem, the real world continually insists on intruding itself in vivid sights and sounds. A comparison of sea voyages in each poem will illustrate this. First, take the stanzaic Lancelot in his flight to his own lands:

To the Ioyus Gard, the Ryche towne,
 Rode Launcelot, the noble knyghte;
 Busked hem and made A bowne,
 As men that were of myche myght,
 Withe spere in hand and gonfanowne
 (lette they nouthur day ne nyght)
 To An heuen hight kelyon;
 Ryche galleys there they fande dyght.

Now ar thay shyppyd on the flode,
 launcelot And hys knyghtis hende;
 Wederes had they feyre and goode
 Wher hyr wille was for to wende,
 To An hauen there it stode
 As men were leueste for to lende;

TEXTURE

50

Off benwike blythe was hyr mode,
 Whan Ihesu cryst hem thedir sende.
 (ll. 2460-2475)

This may be contrasted with the alliterative Arthur's crossing of the Channel to fight the Romans. First, all provisions must be safely loaded:

Thane bargez theme buskez, and to the bannke rowes,
 Bryngez blonkez one bourde, and burlyche helmes;
 Trussez in tristly trappyde stedes,
 Tentez, and othire toylez, and targez fulle ryche,
 Cabanes, and clathe-sekkes, and coferez fulle noble,
 Hukes, and haknays, and horsez of armez;
 Thus they stowe in the stuffe of fulle steryne knyghtez.
 (ll. 729-735)

Then it is time to set sail:

Qwene alle was schyppede that sholde, they schounte
 no lengere,
 Bot ventelde theme tyte, as the tyde rynnez;
 Coggez and crayers than crossez thaire mastez,
 At the commandment of the kyng, vncouerde at ones.
 Wyghtly one the wale thay wye vp thaire ankers,
 By wytt of the watyre-mene of the wale ythez,
 ffrekes one the forestayne fakene theire coblez,
 In floynes, and fercostez, and Flemesche schyppes,
 Tytt saillez to the toppe, and turnez the lufe,
 Standez appone stere-furde, sterynly thay sondene,
 The pryce schippeze of the porte prouene theire depnesse,
 And fondez wyth fulle saile ower the fawe ythez;
 Holly with-owttyne harme thay hale in bottes,
 Schipe-mene scharply schotene thaire portez,
 Launchez lede apone lufe, lacchene ther depez,
 Lukkes to the lade-sterne, whene the lyghte faillez;
 Castez coursez be crafte, whene the clowde rysez,
 With the nedylle and the stone one the nyghte tydez;
 ffor drede of the derke nyghte thay drecchede a lyttille,
 And alle the steryne of the streme strekyne at onez.
 (ll. 736-755)

We get here not only a clear and lively account of the action, complete with mention of a great variety of tangible objects -- arms, horses, tents, sails, anchors,

ships -- but there is a special interest in how things were done. For the stanzaic poet a few lines are simply necessary to get Lancelot across the water to his own lands; but for the alliterative poet the episode has great interest in its own right. It is important and interesting to know how the horses clattered aboard, how the sails were raised, and how the ships were steered.⁵

The alliterative poet never forgets the exigencies of the real world. As the battle rages he interjects a simple but significant note that certain knights need to "changene theire horsez" (ll. 1405 & 2985). It stands to reason that any horse would be exhausted after carrying his master plus a hundred pounds of armor for a couple of hours in the thick of battle. In another scene we find knights feeding their horses, and in still another the King sends out a foraging expedition to obtain food for the fighting men:

"The Fraunche-mene enfeblesches, ne farly me thynkkys!
They are vn-fondyde folke in tha faire marches,
ffor theme wantes the flesche and fude that theme lykes.
Here are fforestез faire appone fele halues,
And thedyre feemene are flede with freliche bestes!

⁵ This close touch with actual material things -- good tools, good craft, good meat and drink -- is another mark of epic. See Charles S. Baldwin, Three Medieval Centuries of Literature in England, 1100-1400 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1932), p. 24.

Thow salle foonde to the felle, and forraye the mountes;
 Sir fforawnt and sir Florydas salle folowe thi brydylle;
 Vs moste with some fresche mette refresche oure pople,
 That are feedde in the fyrthe with the froyte of the
 erthe.

Thare salle weende to this viage sir Gawayne hym
 selfene,

Wardayne fulle wyrchipfulle, and so hym wele semes;
 Sir Wecharde, sir Waltyre, theire wyrchipfulle knyghtes,
 With alle wyseste mene of the weste marches;
 Sir Clegis, sir Clarybalde, sir Clarymownde the noble,
 The capytayne of Cardyfe clenlyche arrayede.
 Goo now, warne alle the wache, Gawayne and other,
 And weendes furthe on your waye withowt tyne moo wordes."
 (ll. 2484-2500)

Turning now from situation to imagery we might examine first the general bareness or richness of imagery, and second the general kind of imagery peculiar to each poem.⁶ The stanzaic Le Morte Arthur is characterized by an extreme bareness or thinness of imagery which sets the poem in contrast not only to its alliterative counterpart but even to its French source.⁷ The narrative is typified by conventional stereotyped phrases: for example, a lady "rede as blossom on brere" may be in trouble "withouten lees" which makes her knightly champion "as breme as any wilde bore" so that to rescue her he "springis forthe as

⁶ Imagery is used here in its simplest sense as "the representation through language of sense experience." Perrine, Sound and Sense, p. 45.

⁷ See Douglas Bruce, "Introduction," Le Morte Arthur, p. xxix.

TEXTURE

53

sparke on glede" (ll. 179, 275, 724, 780, 835, 2742, and others).

The stanzaic poet is not eager to describe rich banquets, even though he has at least three opportunities to do so. Here is one of his banquets:

Tho to the castelle gonne they fare,
 To the lady fayre and bright;
 Blithe was the lady thare
 That they wold dwelle with hyr that night;
 hastely was there soper yare
 Off mete and drinke rychely dight.
 Onne the morow gonne they dyne & fare,
 Both launcelott and that other knight.
 (ll. 249-256)

There is interest neither in the ceremony of sitting and eating nor in the beauty, variety, and richness of the dishes served.

Compare with this the elaborate feast prepared by the alliterative Arthur for his Roman guests:

Sone the senatour was sett, as hyme wele semyde,
 At the kynges owne borde; two knyghtes hym seruede,
 Singulere sothely, as Arthure hym seluyne,
 Richely on the ryghte hannde at the Rounde Table;
 Be resoune that the romaynes whare so ryche holdene,
 As of the realeste blode that reynede in erthe.
 There come in at the fyrste course, be-for the kynges
 seluene,
 Bareheuedys that ware bryghte, burnyste with syluer,
 Alle with taghte mene and towne in togers fulle ryche,
 Of saunke reale in suyte, sexty at ones;
 fflesch fluriste of fermysone with frumentee noble,
 Ther-to wylde to wale, and wynlyche bryddes,
 Pacokes and plouers in platters of golde,
 Pygges of porke despyne, that pastured neuer;
 Sythene herons in hedoyne, hyled fulle faire;
 Grett swannes fulle swythe in silueryne chargeours,

TEXTURE

54

Tartes of Turkey, taste whame theme lykys;
 Gumbaldes graythely, fulle gracious to taste;
 Swyne bowes of wylde bores with the braune lechyde,
 Bernakes and botures in baterde dysches,
 Thareby braunchers in brede, bettyr was neuer,
 With brestez of barowes, that bryghte ware to schewe;
 Swyne come ther sewes sere, with solace ther-after,
 Ownde of azure alle ouer and ardant them semyde,
 Of ilke a leche the lowe launschide fulle hye,
 That alle ledes myghte lyke that lukyde theme apone;
 Thane cranes and curlues craftyly roasted,
 Connygez in cretoyne coloureds fulle faire,
 ffesauntez enflureschit in flammande siluer,
 With darielles endordide, and daynteez ynewe;
 Thane clarett and Creette, clergyally rennene,
 With condethes fulle curious alle of clene siluyre;
 Osay and algarde, and other ynewe,
 Rynisch wyne and Rochelle, richere was neuer;
 Vernage of Venyee vertuause and Crete;
 In faucetez of fyne golde, fonode who so lykes;
 The kynggez cope-borde was closed in siluer,
 In grete goblettez ouergylte glorious of hewe;
 There was a cheefe buttlere, a cheualere noble,
 Sir Cayous the curtaise, that of the cowpe seruede;
 Sexty cowpes of suyte fore the kyng seluyne,
 Crafty and curious, corune fulle faire,
 In ouer-ilk a party pyghte with precyous stones,
 That nane enpoysone sulde goo preuely ther-vndyre,
 Bot the bryght golde for grethe sulde briste al to
 peces,
 Or ells the venyme sulde voyde thurge vertue of the
 stones. (ll. 170-215)

Notice first the ceremonial, solempne quality of this
 banquet, and second, the brilliant imagery appealing not
 only to the sense of taste but also to sight in such words
 as "syluer," "golde," "azure," and "ardant."⁸ Such

⁸ There is much attention to the solempne in the
 alliterative Morte Arthure, and the word itself is used at
 least five times (ll. 514, 525, 1948, 3196 & 3805). C. S.
 Lewis comments on this kind of ceremonial, ritualistic
 quality: "This quality will be understood by any one who

brilliance of description is also found in Arthur's dream of the dragon and bear as well as in the several descriptions of natural scenery not paralleled in the stanzaic poem. (see ll. 920-930, 2501-2512, 2670-2677, & 3230-3249). In general, then, if the stanzaic poem reminds us of a thin, clear piece of embroidery on white linen, the alliterative poem reminds us of an elaborate and exquisite design woven in clear bright colors on heavy fabric so as to constitute a rich tapestry.

A consideration of the specific kinds of imagery found in the two poems will throw more light on the general texture of each. The best imagery of the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur has a quality exemplified in the delicate fine shimmering gossamer of the Lady of Ascalot's little sailboat:

A feyre Ryuer vndyr the toure yode,
And sone there-in sonne they see
A lytelle bote of shappe full good
To theyme-ward with the streme gon te;

really understands the meaning of the Middle English word solempne. This means something different, but not quite different, from modern English solemn. Like solemn it implies the opposite of what is familiar, free and easy, or ordinary. But unlike solemn it does not suggest gloom, oppression, or austerity.... A great mass by Mozart or Beethoven is as much a solemnity in its hilarious gloria as in its poignant crucifixus est.... The solempne is the festal which is also the stately and the ceremonial, the proper occasion for pomp." Lewis, A Preface to Paradise Lost, p. 17.

TEXTURE

56

There myght none feyrer sayle on flode
 Ne better forgid as of tree.

Whan kynge Arthur saw that sighte,
 he wondrid of the Riche apparrayle
 That was aboute the bote I-dighte,
 So Richely was it coueryd sanz fayle,
 In maner of voute with clothis I-dighte,
 Alle shynand as gold as yt ganne sayle.
 Than sayd Sir Gawayne the good knight:
 "This bote is of a ryche entayle."
 (ll. 962-975)

The stanzaic knights and ladies are depicted simply and clearly in their conventional romance context so that they constitute a beautiful tableau of pearl-white figures followed by others in green:

Launcelot and the quene were cledde
 In Robes of A Riche wede,
 Off Samyte white, with syluer shredde,
 yuory sadyll and white stede,
 Saumbues of the same threde,
 That wroght was in the heythen thede;
 launcelot hyr brydelle ledde,
 In the Romans as we Rede;

The other knyghtis euerychone
 In Samyte grene of heythen lande
 And in there kyrtelles Ryde Allone,
 And Iche knyght a grene garlande,
 Sadillis sette with Ryche stone,
 Ichone A braunche of olyffe in hande,
 All the felde A-boute hem schone;
 The knyghtis Rode full loude synghand.
 (ll. 2356-2371)

It will be enlightening to go from this picture of delicate loveliness to view the fighting knights of the alliterative Morte Arthure. Take, for example, the following situation. In the process of transferring

TEXTURE

57

prisoners of war from one place to another, the British knights are faced by enemy forces sent to intercept them. The British prepare themselves before the battle begins:

And than the Bretons brothely inbrassez theire
scheldeze,
Braydez one bacenetez, and buskes theire launcez.
Thus he fittiez his folke, and to the felde rydez,
ffif hundreth one a frounte tewtrede at onez!
With trompes thay trine, and trappede stedes,
With cornettes and clarions, and clergialle notes;
Schokkes in with a schakke, and schontez no langere,
There schawes ware scheene vndyr the schire eynez.
And thane the Romayne rowtte remowes a lyttill,
Raykes with a rerewarde thas realle knyghttez;
So raply thay ryde thare, that alle the rowte rynggez,
Of ryues and rannke stele, and ryche golde maylez.
(11. 1753-1764)

Note the thoroughly masculine nature of this scene. There is boisterous, hurly-burly activity along with its distinctively sharp, vivid sounds and the emphasis on weaponry.

Descriptions of wounding in battle are quite common in the alliterative poem and almost completely absent from the stanzaic. There are two kinds of description of this type, and the difference between them should be pointed out. The first kind dwells on details of cutting through armour, of rings of mail flying, of long cuts, and of red blood flowing over rich clothing. This kind of description is found in the chivalrous fight of Sir Priamus and Gawain:

Thane granes the gome fore greefe of his wondys,
 And gyrdys at sir Gawayne, as he by glentis;
 And awkeward egerly sore he hym smyttes;
 An alet enamelde he oches in sondire,
 Bristes the rerebrace with the bronde ryche,
 Kerues of at the couter with the clene egge,
 Anentis the avawmbrace, vrayllede with siluer!
 Thorowe a dowble vesture of veluett ryche,
 With the vanymous swerde a vayne has he towchede!
 That voydes so violently that alle his witte changede!
 The vesere, the aventaille, his vesturis ryche,
 With the valyant blode was verrede alle ouer!
 (ll. 2562-2573)

The second and much more gruesome kind of description occurs in all the general battles of Morte Arthure, where no attempt is made to conceal the outright butchery. Heads, arms and legs are chopped off and internal organs are impaled on the ends of swords or lances. Take these examples:

With a launce of Lettowe he thirllez his sydez,
 That the lyuer and the lunggez on the launce lengez.
 (ll. 2167-2168)

.....
 With that stelene brande he strake of his hede. (l. 2129)

.....
 And at the bake of the blonke the bewelles entamede.
 (l. 2203)

It is interesting to note that the picturesque and less distasteful kind of description of the Priamus-Gawain episode is associated with more truly chivalrous conduct, while the barbaric kind of description in the general battles of Morte Arthure is associated with war in its non-chivalrous aspect.

TEXTURE

59

To turn from imagery to sound is to turn to an exclusive consideration of the alliterative Morte Arthure.⁹ The alliterating sounds are especially useful in attaining an onomatopoeic effect if they are carried on from line to line. And the poet successfully exploits these potentialities of his medium. Take, for instance, this account of how the British archers discharged their arrows in battle:

Thane Bowmene of Bretayne brothely ther-aftyre
Bekerde with bregaundez of ferre in tha laundez,
With flonez fleterede thay flitt fulle frescly ther
frekez,
ffichene with fetheris thurghe the fyne maylez:
Siche flyttynge es foule that so the flesche derys,
That flowe o ferrome in flawnkkes of stedeze.
(ll. 2095-2100)

The fifteen "f" sounds within a mere four lines insistent-ly convey the fleeting sounds of hundreds of arrows. Wit-ness too the following account of an onslaught by giants:

With clubbez of clene stele clenkked in helmes,
Craschede doune crestez, and craschede braynez;
Kyllede coursers and couerde stedes,
Choppode thurghe cheualers one chalke-whytte stede.
Was neuer stere ne stede myghte stande them a-gaynez,
Bot stonays and strykez doune, that in the stale houys.
(11. 2113-2118)

The harsh "k" sounds vividly convey the shock of armed conflict, and in the "ch" sounds in the fourth line we

9 There are no startling sound effects in Le Morte
Arthur because that poem by its very nature is not so
concerned with boisterous martial activity.

can actually hear the chopping described by the words. There are numerous other examples of onomatopoeia in Morte Arthure, especially in the naval and land battles that so interest the poet. The poem's dialect, which is similar to that of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight in its preponderance of rough sounds, is very suitable for depiction of vivid battle scenes:¹⁰

Finally, each poet has his own particular manner of conveying the feeling for movement, especially the swift violent movement of men engaged in armed conflict. A brief comparison of battle scenes in the respective poems will illustrate this fact. The simple stanzaic account of Arthur's last battle with Mordred actually resembles the ballad "Chevy Chase":¹¹

¹⁰ For a good short study of the sounds of the Northwest Midlands dialect in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight see Francis Berry, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," in The Age of Chaucer, ed. Boris Ford (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961), pp. 148-153.

¹¹ One might recall, for instance, these lines from "Chevy Chase":

And throwing straight their bows away,
They grasped their swords so bright;
And now sharp blows, a heavy shower,
On shields and helmets light.

They closed full fast on every side--
No slackness there was found;
And many a gallant gentleman
Lay gasping on the ground.

Quoted from Heroic Ballads, ed. Horace Mann (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1890), p. 159.

TEXTURE

61

There was many A spere spente,
And many A thro word they spake;
many A bronde was bowyd and bente
And many A knyghtis helme they brake;
Ryche helmes they Roffe and rente;
The Ryche rowtes gan to-gedyr Rayke,
An C thousand vpon the bente;
The boldest or evyn was made Ryght meke.
(11. 3368-3375)

This tells us about the battle quickly and smoothly; but juxtapose with it the following alliterative account of how the new British knights joined their first battle:

With cornuse and clariones theis newe made knyghttez
Lythes vn-to the crye, and castez in fewtire;
fferkes in one a ffrounte one fferaunte stedeze,
ffellede at the fyrste come fyfty att ones!
Schotte thorowe the schilttrouns, and scheuere de launceze,
Laid doune in the lumppe lordly biernez!
And thus nobilly oure newe mene notez theire strenghez.
(11. 1809-1815)

Here is the energy, rush, or vigorous movement so typical of the alliterative poem, filled as it is with wild charges, disorderly retreats and bloodthirsty pursuits.¹²

12 For a more extended example of the wild movement of the battle scenes in Morte Arthure, see ll. 1303-1509. It is not only in accounts of battles that we get the impression of swift movement in the alliterative poem. Possibly the best example is in the headlong flight of the Roman messengers from Britain to Rome:

So they sped at the spoures, they sprangene their
horses,
Hyres theme hakenayes hastily there-aftyre;
So fore reddour they redene, and risted theme neuer,
Bot if they luggede vndire lynd, whills theme lyghte
failede;
Bot euere the senatour for-sothe soghte at the gayneste.
By the seuende day was gone the cetee thai rechide;
Of alle the glee vndire Gode so glade ware they neuere,

TEXTURE

62

All this feverish martial activity combined with the taunting speeches stamps Morte Arthure with a heroic quality which sets it quite apart from its stanzaic counterpart. Whereas the stanzaic poem, whose primary concerns lie elsewhere, merely tells us about a battle, the alliterative poem allows us to almost feel the clash of arms.

As of the sounde of the see and Sandwyche belles!
Wythowttyne more stownntyng they schippide their
 horsez,
Wery to the wane see they went alle att ones;
With the mene of the walle they weyde vp their ankys,
And fleede at the fore flude, in Flaundres they rowede,
And thorughe Flaundes they founde, as theme faire
 thoghte,
Tille Akyne in Almayne, in Arthur landes;
Gosse by the Mount Goddarde fulle greuous wayes,
And so in-to Lumberdye, lykande to schewe;
They turne thurghe Tuskayne, with towres fulle heghe,
In pris appairelles theme in precious wedez;
The Sonondaye in suters thay suggourne their horsez,
And sekis the Seyntes of Rome, be assente of knyghtes;
Sythyne prekes to the pales with portes so ryche,
Thare sir Lucius lenges with lordes enowe;
Lowttes to hym lufly, and lettres hym bedes
Of credence enclosyd, with knyghtliche wordes.
 (11. 483-506)

CHAPTER III

CHARACTER

Under the general heading of character here we mean primarily two things: 1) standards of personal behaviour, and 2) type of characterization. William Thomas H. Jackson comments on the importance of standards of personal behaviour in the romance: "The great writers of romance also set up within this idealized world an idealized code of behaviour It is not likely that the romances reflect a real-life code of ethics, but the fact that they were writing fiction made it possible for the great writers of romance to set before their readers standards of conduct which could and did act as a model for noble behaviour. It is this feature of the genre which constitutes its greatest and most enduring quality"¹

Type of characterization in the romance has been commented upon by many critics who generally agree in stressing the simplicity of romance characters. Baugh, for example, writes: "The characters of medieval romance are poorly differentiated. They are types rather than individuals. The hero conforms to a pattern, that of the ideal knight,

¹ The Literature of the Middle Ages, p. 70.

and within the pattern there is little room for individual variation. Lancelot, Tristan, Gawain -- they are hardly distinguishable, although we can occasionally recognize Lancelot by catching a glimpse of Guinevere in the background, or Tristan if he is contriving a secret meeting with Iseult."² Helaine Newstead echoes Baugh: "The effort to idealize chivalry produces simplified characters, either heroes or villains, without psychological subtleties"³ The aim, then, of this chapter is to examine and compare the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur and its alliterative counterpart, first, on standards of personal behaviour peculiar to each poem. In the stanzaic poem our attention will focus on the noble ideal of cortaysye; in the alliterative poem it will focus on that set of characteristics which constitute the warrior mystique.

The stanzaic Le Morte Arthur presents us with a completely conventional, idealized world of noble knights and lovely ladies. All the qualities of chivalry are assumed here; the famous lines of Chaucer's Knight's Tale describe the accepted knightly code:

² A Literary History, p. 174.

³ "Romances, General" in Severs' Manual, p. 11.

CHARACTER

65

That is to seyen, trouthe, honour, knyghthede,
 Wysdom, humblesse, estaat, and heigh kynrede,
 Fredom, and al that longeth to that art.
 (ll. 2789-2791)⁴

There is the usual interest in "aunturs" and in the sporting activity and honor to be won in tournaments. Every knight recognizes the special virtues to be practiced as a member of his noble caste. He must be loyal to his lord, generous to those subject to him, and courageous in fighting, always ready to defend the rights of the weak and to uphold Mother Church. These are the conventional virtues.

But in the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur one virtue is clearly emphasized. This virtue is given special notice here not because of its absolute uniqueness, for it was common in most medieval romances, but because it is almost totally lacking in the alliterative version, and this indicates a fundamental contrast in the whole spirit of the two poems. This quality was by medieval writers called cortaysye. In his discussion of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, A. C. Spearing mentions the term:

Now cortaysye was a leading ideal among the aristocratic classes of medieval Europe. It is an extremely rich and fluid concept, and for that reason

⁴ The Complete Works of Chaucer, ed. Fred N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1957), p. 44.

CHARACTER

66

it is difficult to define. It meant the kind of behaviour current in or appropriate to courts, and it could cover the whole range of behaviour from politeness (what we should call courtesy), through elegant conversation about love with persons of the opposite sex, to the conduct of a real love-affair. (Hence the Lady's assumption [in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight] that courtly conversation is simply a prologue to love-making.) The unifying element in this range of activity seems to be an attitude towards women: deference, or even devotion.⁵

The stanzaic Le Morte Arthur is characterized by the presence of women, and, as in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, there are courtly conversations between knight and lady. The Lady of Ascalot falls into love with Lancelot when she first sees him, and though he cannot return her love he practices cortaysye by consenting to be her champion:

"Sithe I of the ne may haue more
 As thou arte hardy knight and fre,
 In the turnement that thou wold bere
 Sum signe of myne that men might se."
 "lady, thy sleve thou shalte of-shere,
 I wolle it take for the love of the;
 So did I neuyr no ladyes ere
 Bot one that most hathe lovid me."
 (ll. 209-216)

With Guinevere Lancelot carries cortaysye a step further:

Thre dayes in courte he dwellid there
 That he ne spake not with the quene:
 So myche prees was Ay hym nere;
 The kyng hym lad and courte by-dene.

⁵ Criticism and Medieval Poetry (London: Edward Arnold, 1964), p. 35.

CHARACTER

67

The lady, bright as blossom, on brere,
 Sore she longid hym to sene;
 Wepinge was hyr moste chere,
 Thoughe she ne durste hyr to no man mene.

Than it felle vppon a day,
 The kinge gan on huntyng Ride
 In-to the foreste hym to playe,
 With his knightis be his syde;
 launcelot longe in bed laye,
 With the quene he thought to byde;
 To the chamber he toke the way
 And salues hyr with mekell pryde;

Friste he kissyd that lady shene
 And salues hyr with herte fre,
 And sithe the ladyes all by-dene,
 For Ioye the teres Ranne on ther ble.
 (ll. 720-739)

The Lady of Ascalot's behavior with Lancelot may be compared with that of the Lady of the Castle in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. The whole Lady of Ascalot episode exists for its "feminine" interest, its purpose being to create a tension between Lancelot's faithfulness as a courtly lover and his cortaysye. It is notable that even though Lancelot manages himself very well in that episode the Lady of Ascalot still accuses him of "churlish manners" (l. 1083) because of his refusal to make love to her.

Gawain too engages in courtly conversation and confesses that at one time he paid suit to the capricious young Lady of Ascalot. He, like Lancelot, is a formidable fighting man, but this manly prowess does not forbid his being "corteyse and hend" (l. 623). When Guinevere is to

CHARACTER

68

be burnt for her love affair with Lancelot, Gawain refuses to be present, not because he believes she is innocent of the charge, but because she is a woman:

The kyng Arthure that ylke tyde
 Gawayne And gaherys for sent;
 here Answeres were noght for to hyde,
 They ne wolde noght be of hys assente;
 Gawayne wolde neuyr be nere by-syde
 There Any woman shuld be brente.
 (ll. 1934-1939)

Besides having the interest and ability for genteel courtly conversation with ladies and the willingness to fight for ladies in tournaments, the knights of the stanzaic version are ready to champion them in more serious situations, as Bors consents to and Lancelot does for Guinevere in her trial by combat. Much interest centers around this trial of Guinevere for her alleged murder of a Scottish knight. One by one she importunes all the important knights of the Round Table except Arthur and Lancelot to champion her, and each suppresses his nobler instincts and refuses in the belief that she 1) is guilty, and 2) has driven Lancelot from their midst. When Lancelot decides to come and defend her, the reader is meant to experience a surge of relief and joy somewhat akin to that felt by a modern movie audience when the cry goes up: "The cavalry is coming!"

CHARACTER

69

The main thing to be remembered from all this is what may be called the "feminine fact." Women are present here; they are highly respected; and courtly conversation and dalliance with them is not considered a frivolous waste of time. Each courtly lady expects her knight to be exclusively devoted to her and to champion her when the occasion demands it. This courtly and "feminine fact" about the stanzaic poem sets it in direct contrast to the alliterative which is rather heroic and masculine, as we shall see later.

The all important presence of ladies and the consequent necessity of cortaysye on the part of knights in the stanzaic poem is perhaps most clearly illustrated in Guinevere. Guinevere is one of the central characters in the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur. She has a tremendous influence on the key male characters, Arthur and Lancelot. Very early in the narrative, for example, Arthur heeds her advice in calling a tournament:

Tille on a tyme that it by-felle
 The kinge in bed lay by the quene,
 Off Aunturs they by-ganne to telle,
 Many that in that land had bene:
 "Sir, yif that it were youre wille,
 Of a wondir thinge I wold you mene,
 How your courte by-gynnyth to spill
 Off doughty knightis all by-dene;

Syr, your honour bygynnys to falle,
 That wount was wide in world to sprede,

CHARACTER

70

Off launcelott and of other all
 That euyr so doughty were in dede."
 "Dame, there-to thy counsell I calle:
 What were best for suche a nede?"
 "yiff ye your honoure hold shalle,
 A turnement were best to bede.

For-why that Auntre shall by-gynne
 And by spoke of on euery syde.
 That knightis shall there worship wynne
 To dede of Armys for to Ryde.
 Sir, lettis thus youre courte no blynne
 But lyve in honour and in pride."
 "Certys, dame," the kinge said thenne,
 "Thys ne shall no lenger abyde."
 (ll. 17-40)

The profound influence of Guinevere on Lancelot through their courtly love affair is, naturally, obvious at every step of the narrative. It is because of Guinevere that he rides off into the forest in anger and sorrow; it is to save her that he fights Mador; and it is to save her from burning that he and his followers are forced to kill their friends and start an irrevocable civil war.

Guinevere plays a prominent role in every important event in the stanzaic poem, from the Lady of Ascalot episode to the final repentance. And late in the poem she confesses to her abbess that all the sorrowful events that have preceded can be traced to the love which existed between her and Lancelot:

"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.
 (ll. 3638-3641)

CHARACTER

71

Turning to the alliterative version we find a sharp contrast, for the alliterative poet completely ignores cortaysye and gives us only two brief glimpses of Guinevere as a very down-to-earth woman who is duly respected and honorably treated by her husband. We first see her lamenting Arthur's departure for war:

"I may wery the wye, thatt this werre mouede,
That warnes me wyrchippe of my wedde lorde;
Alle my lykyng of lyfe owte of lande wendez,
And I in langour am lefte, leue ye for euere!
Whyne myghte I, dere lufe, dye in your armes,
Are I this destanye of dule sulde drye by myne one!"
(ll. 699-704)

.....
And then cho swounes fulle swythe, then he hys
swerde aschede,
Twys in a swounyng, swelte as cho walde!
(ll. 715-716)

Almost three thousand lines pass by before we hear Cradok tell Arthur of her adultery with Mordred, and we catch our last glimpse of her fleeing to a nunnery to escape the wrath of Arthur:

Than cho yermys and yee at yorke in hir chambire,
Gronys fulle grysely with gretand teres,
Passes owte of the palesse with alle hir pryce maydenys,
Towarde Chestyre in a charre thay chese hir the wayes,
Dighte hir ewyne for to dye with dule at hir herte;
Scho kayres to Karelyone, and kawghte hir a vaile,
Askes thare the habite in the honoure of Criste,
And alle for falsede, and frawde, and fere of hir
louerde! (ll. 3911-3918)

There are no courtly conversations, no knightly championing of ladies and no courtly love in the alliterative Morte Arthure, and the role of Guinevere is reduced to a

minimum. The interests of the alliterative poet, and presumably of his audience, tend in a different direction, and his knights measure up to a different standard of personal conduct.

The knights of the alliterative Morte Arthure are medieval Christian knights, just as are their counterparts in the stanzaic version. Both belong to an aristocratic military caste and respect the virtues of courage, loyalty, generosity and the rest. But there is a difference of emphasis between the two groups. Whereas the stanzaic poet is not so interested in the fighting qualities of his knights, the alliterative poet is intensely so: his knights live by a code which may be called the warrior mystique.

The warrior mystique is an aristocratic military code which exists side by side with Christianity in the chansons de geste and which at least partially resembles the old Germanic code observable in a poem like Beowulf.⁶ Warriors are proud of their noble ancestry and fiercely loyal to their leader, expecting generosity from him in

⁶ The alliterative Morte Arthure has been compared to the chansons de geste. See Finlayson, "Formulaic Technique in 'Morte Arthure,'" 372.

return. Love of war and a reckless physical courage are accompanied by a wild ferocity and bloody cruelty in battle. Zoé Oldenbourg, in her book on the crusades, speaks of this almost religious "mystique of war" as it appears in the chansons de geste:

The chansons de geste are obsessed with the constant, almost mystical exaltation of strength, courage, and vital energy. They are full of prodigious deeds of valor, adversaries vanquished by the dozen, descriptions of horses, armor, and weapons, and a cruelty that is both grim and joyous. Brains are dashed out, bowels ripped open, hands lopped off, teeth smashed, and knights cleft from chin to chine, and more often than not this orgy of blood and violence comes to its logical conclusion in the violent death of the hero.... Men like these could never have brought themselves to believe that this was not the virtue most prized by God. Their love of physical strength and physical courage was also a kind of religion, a conscious burning faith which sometimes clashed with the other.⁷

Oldenbourg goes on to point out that under the code weapons are loved more fervently than lovely ladies, since warfare is the main goal of life. And the enemy is always the same: "The Saracen, strong, brave, and fierce and always vanquished in the end, was the ideal adversary of the medieval warrior's imagination, replacing the adversary who was only too real, the everyday enemy: the neighboring duke, count, or even bishop one happened to be fighting at the time. To be truly heroic, the hero must

⁷ The Crusades, trans., Anne Carter (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 36-37.

have a clear conscience; he must be fighting to defend his country and his faith."⁸

If cortaysye has a prominent place in the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur, the warrior mystique completely dominates the alliterative Morte Arthure. Knights of the Morte Arthure are proud of their ancestry and resent any attempt by others to question it. When the king of Syria insinuates that Sir Clegis may not be of noble ancestry, he is haughtily answered:

Thane sais the kyng of Surry, "Alls saue me oure
Lorde!
Yif thow hufe alle the daye, thou bees noghte delyuered,
Bot thow sekerly ensure with certeyne knyghtez,
That thi cote and thi breste be knawene with lordez,
Of armes of ancestrye, entyrde with londez."
"Sir kyng," sais sir Clegys, "fulle knyghttly thow
askez:
I trowe it be for cowardys thow carpes thes wordez:
Myne armez are of ancestrye enueryde with lordez,
And has in banere bene borne sene sir Brut tyme;
At the cité of Troye that tymme was ensegede,
Ofte seene in asawtte with certayne knyghttez,
ffro the Borghte broghte vs and alle oure bolde elders,
To Bretayne the braddere, with-in chippe-burdez."
(ll. 1687-1699)

In battle the lowborn archers have their day, but all truly important fighting is done by these noble horsemen; they are the backbone of the Empire's military forces.

If the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur gives passing mention of knightly courage and the fear of being branded a coward,

⁸ The Crusades, p. 39.

CHARACTER

75

the alliterative poem dramatically emphasizes this knightly trait in a dozen scenes. Any mention of fear is simply unheard of, and the idea of even a tactical withdrawal is very unpopular. When a retreat is suggested to Sir Cadbor in the face of overwhelming odds, he voices the majority view:

"Nay," quod Cadour, "'so me Criste helpe!
It ware schame that we scholde schone for so lytylle!
Sir Lancelott salle neuer laughe, that with the kyng
 lengez,
That I sulde lette my waye for lede appone erthe;
I salle be dede and vndone ar I here dreche,
ffor drede of any doggesone in yone dyme schawes!"
(ll. 1718-1723)

Later, when similar counsel is offered to Sir Gawain in a similar situation his answer is like an echo:

"I grawnte," quod sir Gawayne, "so me God helpe!
Bot here are galyarde gomes that of the gre seruys,
The kreuelltest knyghttes of the kynges chambyre,
That kane carpe with the coppe knyghtly wordes;
We salle proue to-daye who salle the prys wyne."
(ll. 2745-2750)

On the positive side, highest admiration is reserved for impulsive, even reckless bravery. In the midst of the enemy camp as a messenger, Gawain retaliates for an insult by beheading the offender in full view of all. Gawain meets his death in the final battle by leading his small band in a rash assault on Modred's whole army. On occasion this wild courage is balanced by a leader's great love for his men and his concern for their safety; thus the King rebukes Sir Cador for his rashness leading

CHARACTER

76

to the deaths of fourteen knights, and Gawain in the final battle weeps bitterly when he sees the danger for his followers.

Between the knight and his lord there is a powerful bond demanding staunch loyalty from the knight. Mordred's sin, of course, is one of disloyalty fostered by ambition. If Mordred embodies the negative side of this coin, Sir Idrus embodies the positive. During the heat of the final battle he is advised to leave the King's side and go to the rescue of his father, and his answer is reminiscent of the speech of Beowulf's one faithful companion in the fight with the fire dragon:

"He es my fadire in faithe, for-sake salle I neuer,
He has me fosterde and fedde, and my faire bretherene,
Bot I for-sake this gate, so me Gode helpe,
And sothely alle sybredyne bot thy selfe one;
I breke neuer his biddynge for beryne one lyfe,
Bot euer bouxvme as beste blethely to wyrke!
He commande me kyndly, with knyghtly wordes,
That I schulde lelely one the [the King] lenge, and one
noo lede elles;
I salle hys commandement holde, yif Criste wil me thole!
He es eldare thane I, and ende salle we bothene;
He salle berkke be-fore, and I salle come aftyre:
Yiffe hyme be destaynede to dy to-daye one this erthe,
Criste comly with crowne take kepe to hys saule!"
(11. 4142-4154)

This loyalty is reciprocated by generosity on the part of the lord. Before battle Sir Cador bears witness to King Arthur's generosity in a speech which echoes those of the Battle of Maldon in its evocation of the comitatus

CHARACTER

78

In the warrior code there is no doubt or ambiguity as to where and when and how this courage and loyalty is to be put to best use. This is a military order, and therefore the be-all and end-all of its existence is war, indeed, not war as a regrettable necessity, but war as a highly exciting opportunity to prove one's manhood. After the King has been provoked by the Roman messengers the feeling of most of Arthur's knights is summed up by Sir Cadbor:

"I thanke Gode of that thraa that vs thus thretys!
Yow moste be traylede, I trowe, bot yefe ye trett
 bettyre:
The lettres of sir Lucius lyghttys myne herte!
We hafe as losels liffyde many longe daye,
Wyth delyttes in this lande with lordchipez many,
And forelytenede the loos that we are layttede:
I was abaischite, be oure Lorde, of oure beste berness,
ffore gret dule of deffuse of dedez of armes!
Now wakkenyse the were! wyrchipide be Cryste!
And we salle wynne it agayne by wyghtnesse and
 strenghe!" (ll. 249-258)

The King takes counsel, and one by one each of his vassals rises to pledge enthusiastic support for a war.

It becomes clear that revenge is one of the strongest motives for war. The King himself seeks vengeance for a personal insult once perpetrated against him by the Roman Emperor. And King Aungers, one of Arthur's vassals, has a similar motive:

Than answerde kyng Aungers to Arthure hym seluynе,
"Thow ought to be ouerlynge ouer alle other kynges,
ffore wyseste, and worthyeste, and wyghteste of hanndes.

CHARACTER

79

The knyghtlyeste of counsaile that euer corone bare;
I dare saye fore Scottlande, that we theme schathe
lympyde,
Whene the Romaines regnede, they raunsounde oure eldyrs,
And rade in their ryotte, and rauyschett our wyfes,
With-owttyne resone or ryghte refte vs oure gudes;
And I salle make myne avowe deuotely to Criste,
And to the haly vernacle, vertuus and noble,
Of this grett velany I salle be vengede ones
On yone venemus mene, wyth valiant knyghtes!
I salle the forthire of defence fosterde ynewe,
ffifty thowsande mene, wyth-in two eldes,
Of my wage for to wende, whare so the lykes,
To fyghte wyth thy ffaa mene, that vs unfaire ledes."
(11. 288-303)

The council is about to break up when Sir Lottez voices the feelings in the breast of Lancelot and presumably of all the other knights. He rejoices:

Thane laughs sir Lottez, and alle one lowde meles,
 "Me likez that sir Lucius langes aftyre sorowe;
 Now he wylnez the were, hys wanedrethe begynnys,
 It es owre weredes to wreke the wrethe of oure elders!
 I make myne a-vowe to Gode, and to the holy vernacle,
 And I mayose the Romaynes, that are so ryche haldene,
 Arayed in theire riotes on a rounde felde,
 I ~~salle~~ at the reuerence of the Rounde Table
 Ryde throughte alle the rowtte, rereward and other,
 Redy wayes to make, and renkkes fulle rowme,
 Rynnande on rede blode, as my stede ruschez!
 He that folowes my fare, and fyrste commes aftyre,
 Salle fynde in my fare-ways many ffay leuyde!"
 (11. 382-394)

To all of this the King sets his stamp of approval:

"A! A!" sais the Walsche kyng, "wirchipid be Criste!
Now schall we wreke fulle wele the wrethe of oure
elders...." (ll. 320-321)
"Alweldande God wyrchipe you alle!" (l. 397)

In actual battle the knights are as good as their word; they fight with a wild ferocity exemplified in one

CHARACTER

80

of the grisly duels fought by "Gawayne the gude":

Thane sir Gawayne the gude appone a graye stede,
He gryppes hym a grete spere, and graythely hyme
 hittez;
Thurghe the guttez in-to the gorre he gyrdes hyme ewyne,
That the groundene stele glydez to his herte!
The gome and the grette horse at the grounde lyggez,
ffulle gryseliche gronande, for grefe of his woundez.
 (11. 1368-1373)

And there is more to come. Time after time the warriors give long boastful speeches, charge wildly into the melee, and chop their enemies to pieces with glee.

To ferocity is added a cruelty that can only be called barbaric. The immediate aftermath of victory in battle is for Arthur's men an orgy of bloodshed whose sole aim appears to be the extermination of all their enemies. The following is typical:

Thare myght mene see the ryche ryde in the schawes,
To rype vpe the Romayne ruydlyche wondyde,
Schowttes aftyre mene, harageous knyghttez,
Be hunndrethez they hewed doune be the holte eynys!
Thus oure cheualrous mene chazez the pople;
To a castelle they eschewed a fewe that eschappede.
(11. 1876-1881)

It is tempting for the twentieth-century reader to see moral irony in all this, to think of the poet as skilfully implying his disapproval of this barbarous activity. Such a thing is possible, but there is no internal evidence to support such a view. On the contrary, time after time we are faced with the poet's

evident feeling for the joy of war, its challenge to professional skill, its appeal to the spirit of adventure and to the desire for glory, the aesthetic, almost spiritual satisfaction which it might afford. Such is the personal code or warrior mystique and the heroic, masculine spirit it gives to the alliterative Morte Arthure.

It is interesting at this point to turn from examination of codes of personal conduct to have a look, secondly, at type of characterization in our respective poems. To what extent, we may ask ourselves, does each set of characters come through to the reader as plausible human beings? Does either poem contain two-dimensional figures, unforgettable portraits, or supernatural or grand personages? The answers to questions like these can throw immediate light on our comparison and hopefully prepare the way for further discoveries later on.

In our attempt to determine the type of characterization, we will examine each poem on the following basic points: 1) the question of motivation, 2) intensity of feelings expressed by leading characters, 3) type of hero, and 4) type of villain.

One of the most important words we meet in any study of characterization is motivation. Do the people we read about have clear reasons for their actions? On this question of motivation the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur, like many romances, leaves *much unaccounted for*. In the poisoning of the Scottish knight episode, for instance, why does the squire wish to kill Gawain? Why does Agravayne wait so long before betraying Lancelot? And why does Arthur abruptly decide to follow Lancelot and make war on him, even after Guinevere has been returned? It should be added, however, that Gawain's important pursuit of revenge against Lancelot in Le Morte Arthur is clearly motivated by the killing of ~~Gawain's three~~ brothers. The point is that in the stanzaic poem there is little interest in character for its own sake; primary interest is instead concentrated on the working out of events in the narrative. This relatively slight attention to character motivation and plausibility is not necessarily a literary flaw in the context of romance.⁹

The alliterative Morte Arthure has good character motivation. Reasons for the two major actions of that

⁹ See Baugh, A Literary History, p. 174, and Newstead, "Romances, General" in Severs' Manual, p. 11.

poem, the initial provocations by Lucius and the consequent British military campaign, are made abundantly clear through dialogue of the chief personages concerned, especially in the scene of King Arthur's war council. Lucius arrogantly seeks glory and wealth; Arthur seeks to defend himself and his people and obtain revenge for past wrongs. Arthur proposes to do this by conquering his enemies and reestablishing his rule over Rome, which he claims was once ruled by his ancestors. Minor actions all along the way in Morte Arthure, with the sole possible exception of the Gawain-Priamus encounter, are likewise clearly motivated by such warrior traits as loyalty, courage, and vengeance.

In depth and intensity of feeling exhibited by its characters the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur is easily surpassed by the alliterative Morte Arthure. Intensity of feeling in the respective poems is nowhere more measurable than in expressions of hatred and determination to seek vengeance for some offense. On one hand, the stanzaic Gawain will fight Lancelot to avenge the deaths of his three brothers:

Off swounynge whan he myght A-wake,
 The hardy knyght, syr gawayne,
 Be god he sware and loude spake,
 As man that myche was of mayne:
 "Be-twixte me And launcelote du lake

CHARACTER

84

Nys man in erthe, for sothe to sayne,
 Shall trewes sette and pees make,
 Er outhur of vs haue other slayne."
 (ll. 2006-2013)

On the other hand, the alliterative Arthur swears his oath of vengeance on Mordred for the slaying of Gawain:

"Here I make myn avowe," quod the kynge thane,
 "To Messie, and to Marie, the mylde qwenne of heuene,
 I salle neuer ryvaye, ne racches vn-cowpylle
 At roo ne rayne-dere, that rynnes appone erthe;
 Neuer grewhownde late glyde, ne gossehawke latt flye,
 Ne neuer fowle see fellide, that flieghes with wenge;
 ffawkone ne formaylle appone fiste handille,
 Ne yitt with gerefawcone rejoyse me in erthe;
 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 theme
 likes!" (ll. 3997-4008)

There can be no mistaking the depth and intensity of feeling here. The careful enumeration of pleasures to be foregone pending vengeance helps bring into focus for the reader the picture of a powerful figure with gritted teeth who will do precisely what he says he will do. There is something here of what Milton had in mind when he spoke of "Deliberate valour breathed, firm and unmoved."¹⁰ The stanzaic poem has nothing to match it.

¹⁰ Paradise Lost, Book I, l. 554, in The Portable Milton, ed. Douglas Bush (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 248.

CHARACTER

85

Where the stanzaic poem has anger the alliterative has rage. The stanzaic Mador, for example, is angry about the death of his brother, but the anger is not striking or memorable. In similar vein the stanzaic Gawain, in spite of his wounds, continues to defy Lancelot:

"Traytour And coward, come A-gayne,
Whan I Am hole And goynge on hye;
Than wylle I prove with myght and mayne,
And yit A thow woldyst nyghe me nye,
Thow shalt wele wete I am not slayn."
(ll. 2829-2833)

This is but a pale reflection of the alliterative Arthur, his eyes shining like coals, his heart burning with rage, overcoming the Roman messengers with a single glance and defying the thirty-foot giant of St. Michael's Mount.

One of the most interesting points of comparison in our two poems is the manner in which joy is expressed. In the stanzaic version joy is almost childlike in its guileless simplicity. Early in the poem the court is seen as a joyful, almost fairy tale setting:

Than was the quene glade I-noghe
Whan she saw launcelot du lake,
That nyghe for Ioy she felle in swoughe
Bot as the lordys hyr gan vp take.
The knyghtis All wepte and loughe,
For Ioye as they to-gedyr spake;
Withe Syr mador, with-uten woughe,
Full sone acordement gon they make.
(ll. 1632-1639)

The spirit of joyfulness finds different expression in the alliterative poem where elaborate feasts and boisterous

CHARACTER

86

revelling is the order of the day.

Finally, the predominant emotion in both poems is, of course, sorrow. The stanzaic characters express their sorrow at different points, but the final parting of Lancelot and Guinevere furnishes us with a climactic scene where the sadness of the two lovers finds its strongest expression:

What helpeth lenger for to spelle?
 With that they gan departe in twene,
 But none erthely man covde telle
 The sorow that there by-gan to bene;
 Wryngyng ther handis and lowde they yelle,
 As they neuyr more shuld blynne,
 And sythe in swonne bothe downe they felle;
 Who saw that sorow euyr myght in mene.

But ladyes than with mornynge chere,
 In-to the chambyr the quene they bare,
 And All full besy made theym there
 To cover the quene of hyr care.
 Many Also that with lancelot were,
 They comforte hym with rewoffull care;
 Whan he was coveryd, he toke hys gere
 And went from thense with-outen mare.
 (ll. 3722-3737)

The profoundest grief is voiced in the alliterative poem by King Arthur on the death of his knights:

"Kyng comly with crowne, in care am I leuyde!
 Alle my lordchipe lawe in lande es layde vndyre!
 That me has gyfene gwerdone, be grace of hym seluene,
 Mayntenye my manhede by myghte of theire handes.
 Made me manly one molde, and mayster in erthe;
 In a tenefulle tyme this forfere was rereryde,
 That for a traytoure has tynte alle my trewe lordys!
 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,

CHARACTER

87

Alls a wafulle wedowe that wanttes hir beryne!
 I may wery and wepe, and wrynge myne handys,
 ffor my wytt and my wyrchipe awaye es for euer!
 Off alle lordchips I take leue to mune ende!
 Here es the Bretones blode troughte owt of lyfe,
 And nowe in this journee alle my joy endys!"
 (ll. 4275-4290)

Once more the basic differences between the two poems are observable in these two passages. On one side is the love interest and conventional quality of the stanzaic, complete with sighs, moans and swoons; on the other side the national war interest and profound intensity of the alliterative.

Key differences in type of characterization of individual personages can be demonstrated in a comparison of the poems' two heroes, the stanzaic Lancelot and the alliterative Arthur. The stanzaic Lancelot is an idealized romantic hero, a two-dimensional character. He is certainly faced with very important problems and dilemmas all through the story, but even though he is moved to tears by these things and we feel his sadness, Lancelot is never portrayed as a deeply human character suffering internal anguish. We never feel that we have begun to get inside his mind to see and share what is going on there. Lancelot never makes a dramatic speech of self-revelation; he is the complete opposite of a Hamlet.

CHARACTER

88

Especially in the latter part of the story, when he returns to Britain to find everything gone to rack and ruin, Lancelot shows little evidence of profound thought or feeling. Surely he repents, but his decision to repent and retire from the world, though sincere, is not the outcome of any long period of soul-searching; it is a facile decision made at a moment's notice, when he learns that Guinevere has done so. To Guinevere's suggestion that he cease all communication with her and marry another, he replies:

"Now, swete madame, that wold I not doo,
 To haue all the world vnto my mede;
 So vntrew fynd ye me neuyr mo:
 It for to do cryste me for-bede!

For-bede it god that euyr I shold
 A-gaynste yow worche so grete vnryght,
 Syne we to-gedyr vpon thys mold
 haue let owre lyffe by day and nyght!
 Vnto god I yiffe a heste to hoode,
 The same desteny that yow is dyghte
 I will Resseyve in som house bolde,
 To plese here-After god All-myght;

To plese god All that I maye
 I shall here-After do myne entente,
 And euyr for yow specyally pray,
 While god wyll me lyffe lente."
 (ll. 3678-3693)

Lancelot does all the noblest things, and he remains always an inhabitant of the world of romance. He is a typed character.

CHARACTER

89

The alliterative Arthur is sharply distinguishable from the stanzaic Lancelot in type of characterization, for Arthur more clearly comes through as a completely human figure. We have witnessed earlier several examples of the intensity of Arthur's passionate outbursts. To these one might add his rage at news of the giant who destroys his people, his fear in his dream of the duchess and wheel, and his last desperate yearning to die for his knights. Any one of his speeches near the end, at one of the most dramatic points in the poem, will further illustrate that depth of feeling so typical of the alliterative Arthur. Take, for instance, his poignant speech on discovering Gawain lying dead on the battlefield:

Than gliftis the gud kynge, and glopyns in hert,
 Gronys fulle grisely with gretande teris,
 Knelis downe to the cors, and kaught it in armes,
 Kastys vpe his vmbrere, and kyssis hyme sone,
 Lokes on his eye-liddis, that lowkkide ware faire,
 His lippis like to the lede, and his lire falowede!
 Than the corownde kyng cryes fulle lowde, --
 "Dere kosyne o kynde, in kare am I leuede!
 ffor nowe my wirchipe es wente, and my were endide!
 Here is the hope of my hele, my happynge of armes!
 My herte and my hardynes hale one hym lengede!
 My concelle, my comforte, that kepide myne herte!
 Of alle knyghtes the kynge that vndir Criste lifede,
 Thou was worthy to be kynge, thofe I the corowne bare!
 My wele and my wirchipe of alle this werlde riche
 Was wonnene thourghe sir Gawayne, and thourghe his witt
 one!

Allas!" saide sir Arthure, "nowe ekys my sorowe!
 I am vtterly vndone in myne awene landes!
 A dowttouse derfe dede, thou duellis to longe!
 Why drawes thou so one dreghe? thow drownnes myne
 herte!"

Than sweltes the swete kynge and in swoune fallis,

CHARACTER

90

Swafres vp swiftly, and swetly hym kysses,
 Tille his burliche berde was bloody be-rowne,
 Alls he had bestes birtenede, and broghte owt of life;
 Ne had sir Ewayne comene, and othire grete lordys,
 His bolde herte had broustene for bale at that stownde!
 (ll. 3949-3974)

This is genuine drama; and the alliterative Arthur is a deeply living, feeling, suffering person, a genuinely tragic figure.

A further way of illustrating the different type of characterization of individual personages in our two poems is to compare their respective versions of Mordred. The stanzaic Mordred is an absolute villain. We first meet him near the middle of the poem as one of the twelve knights sent to gang up on Lancelot, and Mordred's behavior on this occasion is somewhat less than honorable: "Bot mordreit fled as he were wode,/To saue hys lyff full fayne he was" (ll. 1862-1863). When he is chosen steward to rule in the absence of Arthur we are given no hint of his feelings:

The knyghtis answeyrd, with-oute lese,
 And said, for sothe, that so them thought
 That syr mordred the sekereste was,
 Thoughe men the Reme throw-oute sought,
 To saue the Reme in trews and pees.
 Was A boke by-fore hym brought;
 Syr mordreit they to steward chese;
 That many A bolde sythen A-bought.
 (ll. 2516-2523)

Later, in forty lines or so, the story of Mordred's rebellion and harassment of the Queen is related directly

CHARACTER

91

by the narrator. It is only after more than three-fourths of the poem has passed that we hear Mordred speak for the first time, and his words are precisely what one would expect from a thoroughly evil man. His wrath is turned against the Archbishop of Canterbury who has just rebuked him for his evil deeds:

"A nyse clerke," than mordred sayd,
 "Trowiste thou to warne me of my wille?
 be hym that for vs suffred payne,
 These wordys shalt thou lyke full ylle!
 with wilde hors thou shalt be drayne
 And hangyd hye vpon An hylle."
 The bischoppe to fle than was fayne
 And suffred hym hys folyes to fulfyllen.
 (ll. 3010-3017)

Just before the final battle Mordred is still a thorough-going villain as he suspiciously rejects an offer of a truce and promises to destroy his king:

mordred, that was bothe kene And bolde,
 made hym breme As Any bore at bay,
 And sware by Iudas that Ihesus sold:
 "Suche sawes Ar not now to saye;
 That he hathe hyght he shall it hold;
 The tone of vs shall dye thys day;
 And telle hym trewly that I tolde,
 I schall hym marre, yife that I may."
 (ll. 3248-3255)

Mordred's character is manifest; not only is he a coward, but also traitor to his king, enemy of his Church, and ruthless abuser of ladies. In the end he shows not the slightest sign of remorse. He is as black a villain as any melodrama can offer, a two-dimensional figure.

The alliterative Mordred presents us with an interesting contrast. Here is a very sophisticated portrait, not of a melodramatic villain, but of an actual human being, one whom we loathe but also one whom we can pity. Our first acquaintance with Mordred is when King Arthur is ready to leave on his campaign and wishes to appoint a caretaker for the realm. Mordred does not want to accept the appointment:

Than sir Modrede fulle myldly meles hym seluene,
Knelyd to the conquerour, and carpes thise wordez, --
"I be-seke yow, sir, as my sybbe lorde,
That ye wille for charyté cheese yow a-nother;
ffor if ye putte me in this plytte, yowre pople es
dyssauyde;
To presente a prynce astate my powere es symple.
Whene other of werre wysse are wyrchypide here-aftyre.
Thane may I for-sothe be sette bott at lyttille.
To passe in your presance my purpos is takyne,
And alle my purueaunce apperte fore my pris knyghtez."
(11. 679-688)

On this occasion he displays the fatal ambition that is to lead to his downfall later, and it is even possible he knows himself well enough to wish to avoid the temptation of being left in sole dominion over the realm while Arthur is away.

No attempt is made to excuse Mordred's act of disloyalty in usurping the throne, of treachery in the slaying of Gawain, and of guile in fighting under false colors. But there is another dimension to the alliterative

CHARACTER

93

Mordred. Immediately after he has killed Gawain, Mordred answers King Frederick's question on Gawain's identity in the following words:

"He was makles one molde, mane, by my trowhe;
 This was sir Gawayne the gude, the gladdeste of othire,
 And the gracioseste gome that vndire God lyffede,
 Mane hardyeste of hande, happyeste in armes,
 And the hendeste in hawle vndire heuene riche;
 The lordelieste of ledynge qwhylles he lyffe myghte,
 ffore he was lyone allossede in londes i-newe;
 Had thow knawene hym, sir kynge, in kythe thare he
 lengede,
 His konyng, his knyghthede, his kyndly werkes,
 His doynge, his doughtynesse, his dedis of armes,
 Thow wolde hafe dole for his dede the dayes of thy
 lyfe!" (ll. 3875-3885)

This is nothing less than the generous tribute of one warrior for another. At this moment Mordred is moved to tears of remorse for his crime as he recalls the good times that are past:

Yit that traytour alls tite teris lete he falle,
 Turnes hym furthe tite, and talkes no more,
 Went wepand a-waye, and weries the stowndys,
 That euer his werdes ware wroghte sicke wandrethe to
 wyrke:
 Whene he thoghte on this thyng, it thirllde his herte;
 ffor sake of his sybb blode sygheande he rydys;
 When that renayede renke remembirde hym seluene,
 Of reuerence and ryotes of the Rownde Table,
 He remyd and repent hyme of alle his rewthe werkes,
 Rode awaye with his rowte, ristys he no lengere,
 ffor rade of oure riche kynge, ryve that he scholde.
 (ll. 3886-3896)

But in his genuine grief over the death of his kinsman he still finds time for an act of tenderness toward Guinevere:

CHARACTER

94

Than the traytoure treunted the Tyseday thar-aftyre,
Trynnys in with a trayne tresone to worke,
And by the Tambire that tide his tentis he reris,
And thane in a mette-while a messangere he sendes,
And wraite vn-to Waynor how the werlde chaungede,
And what comliche coste the kyng was aryuede,
One floode foughtene with his fleete, and fellyd theme
 o lyfe;
Bade hir ferkene oo ferre, and fflee with hir childire,
Whills he myghte wile hym awaye, and wyne to hir speche,
Ayere in-to Irelande, in-to thas owte-mowntes,
And wonne thare in wildernesse with-in tha wast landys.
 (11. 3900-3910)

A couple of hundred lines later Mordred slays and is slain by Arthur, and the reader is left with the memorable picture of a traitorous villain who nevertheless has a human heart, a fully-developed human character rather than a two-dimensional figure.

Finally, to round out the present discussion of character, whereas the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur presents us with normal-sized characters acting in an atmosphere of courtly intrigue, the alliterative Morte Arthure presents grand figures acting in an atmosphere of momentous international conflict. The Maid of Ascalot, that capricious young female, plays her part in the intrigue of the stanzaic poem. The stanzaic Gawain too does his share by carrying stories of Lancelot's alleged love back to the court; and the stanzaic Arthur is curious to learn what his knights are whispering about behind his back. In contrast to this the alliterative poem's characters are

CHARACTER

95

concerned with more crucial matters: the alliterative Gawain is more concerned with cracking enemy skulls than he is with conversation, and it is impossible to even picture the alliterative Arthur's being desperately curious about the whisperings of his knights; he is much too busy struggling against emperors, giants, and armies of Saracens to have time for such preoccupations. In general then, whereas the stanzaic poem gives a picture of conventional knights and ladies in a setting of courtly intrigue, the alliterative poem gives a picture of larger-than-life figures in exciting but deadly struggle against tremendous and even monstrous forces of evil.

The stanzaic version is characterized by a few simple feelings given conventional expression by relatively simple characters in the context of romance; the alliterative version is characterized by more complex emotions given intense expression by relatively complex characters in the context of a heroic and in many ways epic poem.¹¹ While the stanzaic characters' feelings are

¹¹ A note is in order here on the term "simple" as it is used to designate characters in the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur. In this context the term does not mean "low," "vulgar," or "rustic"; it merely indicates that the stanzaic characters represent basic types of human beings. Furthermore, the "simple" or two-dimensional characters of Le Morte Arthur, though different from, are not

evoked by the illicit love affair and its estrangement of old friends, the alliterative characters' deepest passions boil over and swirl around the shock of battle and bloody destruction of the Round Table.

necessarily inferior to those of the alliterative poem. The stanzaic characters are of the type spoken of by Baugh and Newstead (see footnotes # 2 and 3, p. 69 above); the alliterative characters, however, not only do not conform to type but are actually more akin to the epic characters spoken of by W. P. Ker: "Without dramatic representation of the characters, epic is mere history or romance; the variety and life of epic are to be found in the drama that springs up at every encounter of the personages.... The success of epic poetry depends on the author's power of imagining and representing characters." Epic and Romance (London: Macmillan and Co., 1922), p. 17.

CHAPTER IV

HERO

Most critics agree in designating as the hero the central character in a literary work, regardless of moral qualities.¹ Being the central character the hero will usually be concerned with the things that are of highest interest to the author. The kind of hero very strongly indicates the kind of literary work. The hero of the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur, as noted earlier, is Lancelot; that of the alliterative Morte Arthure is Arthur. A comparison of these two chief characters will, therefore, throw light on some of the more important differentiating aspects of the two poems.

Our comparison of Lancelot and Arthur will consist of two main parts: first, a general comparison, to

¹ The hero may be defined as "The most important character ... in a literary work. As technical terms in criticism, these words [hero and heroine] do not necessarily suggest that a character possesses either prowess or virtue. He may be a cowardly rogue, but because he is the central character, he is the 'hero.'" Beckson and Ganz, p. 72. Thrall, Hibbard and Holman, p. 219, similarly define hero as "The central character in a work of FICTION or a DRAMA. The terms [hero and heroine] are applied to the characters who are the focal points of the readers' or the spectators' interest, often without reference to the superiority of the moral qualities of one character over another." See also Liberman and Foster, pp. 58-59.

determine the key features of each character, and second, a moral comparison, to determine the virtues and vices of each character as well as to detect any evidence of didactic intent on the part of the respective poets. The general comparison will consist of an examination (1) of Lancelot as knight and courtly lover, and (2) of Arthur as king and conqueror. In our moral comparison we will examine the respective poetic treatments of two paradoxes: (1) that of Lancelot as Christian knight yet loyal courtly lover, and (2) that of Arthur as great and Christian king yet ambitious and vengeful conqueror.

The stanzaic Lancelot is a formidable champion. Early in the poem we get a glimpse of him as handsome and powerful, a man of imposing stature. Despite his disguise as an old man, his identity is instantly revealed by the manner in which he controls his horse after it has stumbled:

They by-held hym bothe Anone
 A stounde for the stedis sake;
 his hors stomelyd at a stone
 That alle his body there-with gan shake;
 The knight than braundisshid yche a bone,
 As he the bridelle vp gan take;
 There-by wiste they bothe Anone
 That it was launcelott du lake.
 (ll. 113-120)

It is King Arthur himself who recognizes Lancelot and pays tribute to him:

kynge Arthur than spekis he
 To sir evwayne there wordis Right:
 "Welle may launcelot holden be
 Off alle the world the beste knight
 Off biaute and of bounte,
 And sithe is none so moche of myght,
 At every dede beste is he,
 And sithe he nold it wist no wight.
 (ll. 121-128)

Besides this, Lancelot is almost invincible in combat, as he proves again and again in tournament, skirmish, and full scale battle, and Lancelot's fame is such that even in defeat Mador can rejoice that he could put up a fight against so excellent a champion. Even Arthur confesses his fear of Lancelot.

Besides being so formidable Lancelot is ever the loyal vassal to his lord the King; it is here that the process of idealization is carried to its fantastic extreme. Having been forced into battle Lancelot reins in his great strength so as to avoid slaying his former friends, and still he refuses to strike Arthur:

In All the felde that ilke tyde
 Myght no man stande launcelot a-geyne,
 And sythen as faste As he myght Ryde
 To saue that no man sholde be slayne.
 The kynge was euyr nere by-syde
 And hewe on hym with All hys mayne,
 And he so corteise was that tyde
 O dynte that he nolde smyte a-gayne.
 (ll. 2166-2173)

Bors is impatient with this policy and unhorses Arthur; Lancelot is doubly saddened:

HERO

100

"Allas!" quod launcelot, "wo is me,
 That euyr shulde I se with syghte
 By-fore me hym vnhorsyd bee,
 The noble kynge that made me knyght!"
 he was than so corteise and fre
 That downe of hys stede he lyghte;
 The kynge ther-on than horsys he
 And bade hym fle, yiffe that he myght.
 (ll. 2190-2197)

Later on, even after having endured the most furious attacks of Arthur and Gawain, Lancelot not only holds no grudge but even gathers his friends and readily leaves for England to assist Arthur in his struggle with Mordred.

Add to all this the popularity of Lancelot with the other members of the court. This is most evident in the first half of the poem. When Lancelot is away from court they long for his return, and when he returns they welcome him with a joyous enthusiasm that is moving in its simplicity:

The kinge stode in a toure on highe,
 Be-sydes hym standis syr Gawayne;
 launcelotte whan that they sighe,
 Were nevyr men on mold so fayne.
 They Ranne as swithe as euyr they might
 Oute at the gates hym Agayne;
 Was nevyr tidandis to them so light.
 The kinge hym kissyd and knight & swayne;

To a chamber the kynge hym lad;
 feyre in Arms they gon hym fold,
 And sette hym on A Riche bedde
 That sprad was with a clothe of gold;
 To serve hym was there no man sad
 Ne dight hym as hym-self wold
 To make hym bothe blithe and glad;
 And sithe Auntres he them told.
 (ll. 704-719)

And again:

The kynge and Alle hys knyghtis kene;
In hys armys he gon hym take,
The kynge hym kyste and courte by-dene.
(ll. 1628-1632)

Scenes like these effectively prepare us for the tragic events that will follow. They add to the pathos.

For the sake of comparison it is notable that Lancelot's popularity is not seen as extending beyond his own courtly circle to the country at large. Lancelot is a private figure rather than a public one. All his most pressing affairs -- the affair with Guinevere, the feud with Gawain, and the final repentance -- are personal. He does possess lands, but as a knight he is consistently seen as leader of a small band rather than of a national army; and even as the leader of a small band he lacks any weighty sense of responsibility. In the early part of the story he seems, like many other romance heroes, to be riding here, there, and everywhere in search of "aunters"; in the latter part he brings his followers back to Britain to fight Mordred, leaves them, supposedly for fifteen days, and never returns to them at all. Such may be the behavior of an ideal hero of romance; but it is most assuredly not that of an able commander. Add the fact that there is no trace of ambition for power in Lancelot's character, and the conclusion is inevitable::

he is a great knight but not a great ruler.

Finally, Lancelot is a hero in the world of cortaysye. Early on he is described by the Earle of Ascalot as "Courteyse and hende" (l. 166). And when the Earle's daughter becomes infatuated with him, Lancelot knows her thoughts and is gentleman enough to comfort her:

Therle had a doughter that was hym dere,
Mykell launcelott she beheld;
hyr Rode was rede as blossom on brere
Or floure that springith in the feld;
Glad she was to sitte hym nere,
The noble knight vndir sheld;
Wepinge was hyr moste chere,
So mykell on hym hyr herte gan held.

Vp than Rose that mayden stille
And to hyr chamber wente she tho;
Downe vppon hir bedde she felle,
That nighe hyr herte brast in two.
launcelot wiste what was hyr wyll,
Welle he knew by other mo,
hyr brother klepitte he hym tulle
And to hyr chamber gonne they go;
he satte hym downe for the maydens sake
vpon hyr bedde there she lay,
Courtesely to hyr he spake,
For to comforte that fayre may.
(ll. 177-196)

A few moments later he is obliged to demonstrate his loyalty to Guinevere and the courtly love code, but, as mentioned earlier, he consents to wear the young Ascalot lady's sleeve and be her champion in the tournament, an honorable compromise. It is typical of Lancelot that he always seems to be involved with some woman, even other than Guinevere and the Lady of Ascalot. In the past, we

are given to understand, he has helped many ladies in distress, which has earned him their everlasting gratitude and guarantees him their aid whenever the need arises. When Lancelot is warred upon by Arthur, help comes not from kings and counts but from queens and countesses, who willingly send their fighting men:

launcelot gonne with hysse folke forthe wende,
 With sory hert and drery mode;
 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;
 So mykelle folke to hym gon fare,
 Hydous it was hys oste to see;
 To the Ioyus Gard wente he thare
 and helde hym in that stronge Cyte.
 (ll. 2030-2045)

When travelling, Lancelot always seems to stop at a lady's castle, and for negotiations, in contrast to Arthur and Mordred, he always sends damsels as messengers. Lancelot is truly a ladies' man, in some ways even a kind of medieval James Bond.

We must not forget his defence of Guinevere against Sir Mador in the trial by combat and his rescue of Guinevere from death at the stake. In all instances stress is put not on the actual fighting involved but on

ffor whyeseste, and worthyeste, and wyghteste of hanndez :
 Of alle the wyes thate I watte in this werlde ryche,
 The knyghtlyeste creatoure in Cristyndome haldene,
 Of kynges or of conquerour, crownde in erthe,
 Of countenaunce, of corage, of crewelle lates,
 The comlyeste of knyghtehode that vndyre Cryste lyffes!
 He maye be spokene in dyspens, despysere of syluere,
 That no more of golde gyffes thane of grette stones,
 No more of wyne thane of watyre, that of the welle
 rynnys,

Ne of welthe of this werlde bot wyrchipe allone.
 Syche contaunce was neuer knowene in no kythe ryche,
 As was with that conquerour in his court haldene;
 I countede at this Crystynmesse, of kynges enoyntede,
 Hole tene at his table, that tyme with hyme selfene.
 (ll. 530-545)

This picture is further enhanced by means of contrast when Gawain, Arthur's messenger, refers to the Emperor Lucius as "the vnlordlyeste lede that I on lukede euer!" (l. 1313). King Arthur is royal majesty itself, an august personage who participates only in the most crucial battles -- for example, with the giant of St. Michael's Mount, with the Emperor Lucius, and with Mordred -- and Arthur's fierce courage is taken for granted, "ffore he was demyde the doughtyeste that duellyde in erthe" (l. 219).

In the alliterative poem Arthur takes on some of the attributes of an ideal king. He is, first of all, a capable and just ruler. When the Roman senator begs safe conduct through the realm, Arthur does not hesitate to reassure him:

"Care noghte," quod the kynges, "thy coundyte es knawene
 ffro Carlelele to the coste, there thy cogge lengges;

Thoghe thy cofers ware fulle, cramede with syluer,
 Thow myghte be sekyre of my sele sixty myle forthire."
 (ll. 475-478)

The King is also a responsible personage, fully conscious of his duties as a national sovereign. War with the Romans is a full serious matter he informs the impetuous Sir Cador, and all must be decided on with the help of a council of advisors, and with deliberation and care. When war is decided upon and the military campaign in full swing, Arthur still carries his sense of responsibility, not only for the safety of his knights but, after the capture of an enemy city, for the orderly behavior of all under his command. His instructions are explicit and strict:

In iche leuere on lowde the kynge did crye,
 Of payne of lyf and lym and lesynge of londes
 That no lele ligemane, that to hym lonngede,
 Sulde bye be no ladysse, ne be no lele maydyns,
 Ne be no burgesse wyffe, better ne werse;
 Ne no biernez myse-bide, that to the burghe longede.
 (ll. 3078-3083)

Arthur's most important function as a national leader is to act as defender of his people, and it is here that he becomes something of a messianic figure. Three enemies threaten at different stages: 1) an external human enemy, the tyrant Lucius; 2) an internal human enemy, the traitor Mordred; and 3) an outrageous monster, the giant of St. Michael's Mount. Of the three it is the

giant who has committed most crimes against the people, who is generally the most frightening, and against whom Arthur fights his first and most furious battle unattended. This encounter has special interest for the alliterative poet, for he gives it much more attention than do the chronicle writers.²

The King first hears of the giant in a general way from his philosophers who interpret his dream of a bear and a dragon as a forecast of his victory over the tormentors of his people. Following fast upon this is the Templer's news of the giant's evil deeds and the consequent fear and misery of the people, at which Arthur is enraged: "Than romyez the ryche kynge for rewthe of the pople" (l. 888). He secretly determines to fight the giant alone and quickly prepares himself for the ordeal.

He finds the giant at supper, and the giant grows as an enemy not only of Arthur's people but of all mankind and of Christianity:

How vn-semly that sott satt sowpande hym one;
He lay lenand one lange, lugande vn-faire,
The thee of a manns lymme lyfte vp by the haunche;
His bakke, and his bewschers, and his brode lende;
He bekez by the bale-fyre, and breklesse hym semede;
Thare ware rostez fulle ruyde, and rewfulle bredez,

² See Matthews, The Tragedy of Arthur, p. 25.

Beerynes and bestaile brochede to-geders;
 Cowlefulle cramede of crysmede childyre,
 Sum as brede brochede, and bierdez theme tournede.
 (11. 1044-1052)

Not only is the monster, like Grendel, a cannibal, but he eats "crysmede childyre" and so becomes an even blacker villain. After the King's haughty speech of salutation we get a full and horrifying picture of the enemy:

Thane glopuede the glotone and glorede vn-faire;
 He grenuede as grewhounde, with grysly tuskes;
 He gapuede, he groned faste, with grucchande latez,
 ffor grefe of the gude kynge, that hyme with grame
 gretez!
 His fax and his foretoppe was filterede to-geders,
 And owte of his face fome ane halfe gote large;
 His frount and his forheuede, alle was it ouer,
 As the felle of a froske, and frakuede it semede,
 Huke-nebbyde as a hawke, and a gore berde,
 And herede to the hole eyghne with gyngande browes;
 Harske as hunde-fisch, hardly who so lukez,
 So was the hyde of that hulke hally al ouer!
 Erne had he fulle huge, and vgly to schewe,
 With eghne fulle horrible, and ardauunt for sothe;
 fflatt-mowthede as a fluke, with fleryande lypys,
 And the flesche in his fortethe fowly as a bere.
 His berde was brothy and blake, that tille his brest
 rechede,
 Grassede as a mereswyne with corks fulle huge,
 And alle falterde the flesche in his foule lippys,
 Ilke wrethe as a wolfe-heuede, it wraythe owtt at ones!
 Bullenekkyde was that bierne, and brade in the scholders,
 Brok-brestede as a brawne, with brustils fulle large,
 Ruyd armes as an ake with rusclede sydes,
 Lyme and leskes fulle lothyne, leue ye for sothe:
 Schouelle-fotede was that schalke, and schaylande hyme
 semyde,
 With schankez vn-schaply, schowande to-gedyrs;
 Thykke theese as a thursse, and thikkere in the hanche,
 Greese growene as a galte, fulle grylyche he lukez!
 Who the lenghe of the lede lelly accountes,
 ffro the face to the fote, was fyfe fadome lange!
 (11. 1074-1103)

After a description like this it becomes clear that

Arthur's struggle against the giant is not only to avenge the ravished lady and defend his people, but also to defend goodness and Christianity itself against the threat of evil and the fiend. This is so because the giant "engenderde of fendez" is as much of a "helle gast" as Grendel, a potent symbol of evil, the unnatural and death.³ When the people hear the news of Arthur's victory they praise him as their deliverer:

"Welcome, oure liege lord, to lang has thow duellyde!
 Gouvernour vndyr Gode, graytheste and noble,
 To whame grace es graunted, and gyffene at his wille!
 Now thy comly come has comforthede vs alle!
 Thow has in thy realtee reuengyde thy pople!
 Thurghe helpe of thy hande, thyne enmyse are struyede,
 That has thy renkes ouer-ronne, and refte theme their
 childyre!
 Whas neuer rewme owte of araye as redyly releuede!"
 (ll. 1200-1207)

Besides being an ideal king, Arthur is a great warrior-leader, reminding one of old Germanic chieftains like Beowulf. In chapter III, above, the fighting man's personal code in the alliterative Morte Arthure was called the warrior mystique. The warrior mystique finds its foremost embodiment in the person of King Arthur. Not only is he powerful and fearless, but as lord is generous to his people when he gives them the treasure of the

³ See Finlayson, "Arthur and the Giant of St. Michael's Mount," 113.

Bot euer ffresche for to fyghte, in felde whene hym
 lykes.
 I acounte no kynge that vndyr Criste lyffes,
 Whilles I see yowe alle sounde, I sette be no more."
 (ll. 397-406)

Arthur consistently refuses to accept without complaint the death of even one of his knights, for even one of them is worth an unlimited number of other men. Sir Cadur is at first severely criticized for the loss of a mere fourteen men in obtaining an astounding victory which cost the enemy fifty thousand dead. The King's extreme love reaches a climax in the final battle when he yearns to give his life for his men:

Than remys the riche kynge with rewthe at his herte,
 Hewys hys handys one heghte, and to the heuene lokes,--
 "Qwythene hade Dryghttyne destaynede at his dere wille,
 That he hade demyde me to-daye to dy for yow alle!
 That had I leuer than be lorde alle my lyfe tyme,
 Off alle that Alexandere aught qwhilles he in erthe
 lengede." (ll. 4155-4160)

And when this battle is over and all is gone, he swoons for sorrow, weeping for his knights, "Alls a wafulle wedowe that wanttes hir beryne!" (l. 4285)

In battle too the fundamental difference between the stanzaic Lancelot and the alliterative Arthur becomes apparent. If Lancelot is at his most typical effecting a daring personal escape, duelling with Mador or Gawain, or rescuing Guinevere, Arthur is at his most typical gathering a national army, taking it on a long military

campaign complete with forced marches and carefully worked out strategy. The most crucial battle of the war, the one in which Lucius is slain, is actually a triumph of strategy and tactics as much as of physical power. Lucius is not ready for battle, so he decides to lead his army into Saxony and wait there for reinforcements. Arthur hears of this and responds:

Bot owre wyese kyng es warre to wayttene his renkes,
 And wyesly by the woddez voydez his oste;
 Gerte felschene his fyrez, flawmande fulle heghe,
 Trussene fulle traystely, and treunt there-aftyre.
 Sethene in-to Sessoyne, he soughte at the gayneste,
 And at the surs of the sonne disseuerez his knyghttez:
 fforesette theme the cité appone sere halfez,
 So-daynly on iche halfe, with seuene grett stales.
 Anely in the vale and vawewarde enbusches;
 Sir Valyant of Vyleris, with valyant knyghttez,
 Be-fore the kyngez visage made siche 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;
 Demenys the medylwarde menskfully hyme selfene,
 ffittes his fote-mene, alls hym faire thynkkes;
 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;
 He arrayed in the rereward fulle rialle knyghtez,
 With renkkes renownnd of the Round Table,
 Sir Raynalde, sir Richere, that rade was neuer,
 The riche duke of Rowne wyth ryders ynewe;
 Sir Cayous, sir Clegis, and clene mene of armes,
 The kyng castes to kepe be thaa clere strandes.
 Sir Lott and sir Launcelotte, thise lordly knyghttez,
 Salle lenge on his lefte hande, wyth legyones ynewe,
 To meue in the morne-while, yif the myste happyne;
 Sir Cador of Cornewaile, and his kene knyghtez,
 To kepe at the karfuke, to close in ther othere:
 He plantez in siche placez prynce and erlez,
 That no powere sulde passe be no preué wayes.

(11. 1973-2005)

aspect of Arthur; emphasis is placed elsewhere. If the stanzaic Lancelot is especially characterized by his cortaysye, the alliterative Arthur is especially characterized by his fighting excellence and his love of all phases of the warrior's craft. Lancelot's attitude toward armor and weapons is purely utilitarian. They can save his life, so he obtains them before he ventures into a serious fight; but he seems quite unconcerned about armor and weapons for their own sake, and he dons them quite unceremoniously. Arthur, however, is far different. His arming is an almost ritualistic event followed with great interest by the narrator:

Aftyre euesange, sir Arthure hyme selfene
 Wente to hys wardrope, and warpe of hys wedez,
 Armede hym in a actone with orfraeez fulle ryche,
 Abouen one that a jeryne of Acres owte euer,
 Abouen that a jesseraunt of jentylle maylez,
 A jupone of Ierodyne jaggede in schredez;
 He brayedez one a bacenett burneschte of syluer,
 The beste that was in Basille, wyth bordurs ryche;
 The creste and the coronalle, enclosed so faire
 Wyth clasppis of clere golde, couched wyth stones;
 The vesare, the aventaille, enarmede so faire,
 Voyde with-owttyne vice, with wyndowes of syluer;
 His gloues haylyche hilte, and grauene at the hemmez,
 With graynez and gobelets, glorious of hewe;
 He bracez a brade schelde, and his brande aschez,
 Bounede hyme a broune stede, and one the bente houys;
 He sterte tille his sterepe and stridez one lofte,
 Streynnez hyme stowttly, and sterys hyme faire,
 Brochez the baye stede, and to the buske rydez,
 And there hys knyghtes hyme kepede fulle clenlyche
 arayed. (ll. 900-919)

As the greatest of the warriors Arthur is frequently referred to as Conqueror and even compared to other great

conquerors in history and legend, notably Alexander, Hector, Joshua and David. Arthur lives for fighting, and few have such overwhelming success in that craft as he.

The most important difference between the two heroes, then, is that whereas Lancelot is a fairly conventional hero of courtly romance, a valiant individual faced with personal challenges and combats, a chivalrous knight and courtly lover, Arthur is a king and conqueror and in some ways even an epic hero, a great national figure whose personal interests are identified with the national interests and whose name and exploits have become part of the national mythology. The Arthur of the alliterative poem is the figure that had already been glorified by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, and Layamon, a figure whom even Milton, centuries later, was to seriously consider making the hero of a new British epic.

Let us turn now to an important aspect of both heroes that has not yet been examined, namely the moral. It will be necessary to touch upon a statement such as the following: "In the major Northern English romances of the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Arthurian court and its code are invariably subjected to moral criticism: the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur is a tragedy caused by courtly love and broken allegiance; the

alliterative Morte Arthure is a tragedy of Arthur's ambition, his 'surquidré.'⁴ Our task is to determine whether or not the respective heroes are "subjected to moral criticism."

The stanzaic Lancelot is a loyal son of the Church standing head and shoulders over every other knight in that poem. In contrast to Mordred who threatens the Archbishop of Canterbury with torture and death, Lancelot heeds a bishop's demand and makes peace; and, on the other hand, in contrast to Arthur who quickly breaks his promise of peace, Lancelot keeps his promise of peace for a long time, even under pressure from his own knights and intolerable provocation from his enemies. After withdrawing to a castle in his own country to escape the vengeful onslaught of his enemies, he demonstrates a pacifism that is truly Christ-like:

Than spake the lorde that was so hende,
 Hym-self, syr launcelot de lake:
 "Lordyngis, A whyle I rede we lende
 And oure worthy wallys wake;
 A message wille I to them sende,
 A trews by-twene vs for to take;
 my lord is so corteise and hende
 That yit I hope A pees to make;

Thoughe we myght the worshyppe wyne,
 Off A thyng myn hert is sore:

⁴ Benson, Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain, p. 246.

Thys land is of folke full thynne,
 Bataylles has it made full bare;
 Wete ye welle it were grete synne
 Crysten folke to sle thus more-
 Withe myldenesse we shall be-gynne
 And god shall wische vs wele to fare."
 (ll. 2588-2603)

His messenger is sent to plead for peace and to promise that Lancelot would retire to the Holy Land for the rest of his life:

"And sythen, yiffe ye make an heste,
 he wille it holde with hys honde,
 By-twene you for to make pees
 Stabully euer for to stonde;
 He wolde Rape hym on A Resse
 Myldely to the holy londe,
 There to lyue, with-uten lese,
 Whyle he is man lyvande."
 (ll. 2660-2667)

And this is more than an empty boast, for later, after both Arthur and Mordred are destroyed, Lancelot does retire to a life of prayer and penance, not in the Holy Land but in a hermitage.

But along with his loyalty to the Church and to his earthly sovereign Lancelot has a loyalty to the courtly love code in his affair with Guinevere. As mentioned earlier, Lancelot is caught on the horns of a dilemma, for no matter how hard he tries to be good the Church will always see his love affair as adultery, and his King will always see it as a breach of loyalty. It cannot be denied that the whole train of unhappy events in the stanzaic

poem, from the death of the Maid of Ascalot to the rebellion of Mordred and death of Arthur, can be traced directly or indirectly to the Lancelot-Guinevere affair; therefore, no one can deny that the poem is concerned with a moral issue, but is the hero subjected to moral censure of any kind?

The answer is that there is absolutely no explicit moral censure of the hero. There seems to be a tone of pity for Lancelot and regret at the predicament of so great a champion. Only near the end of the poem, after the death of Arthur and destruction of the Round Table, do we find implicit approval of Guinevere and Lancelot's repentance and implied approval of their renunciation of the world, including courtly love. That is all.

The alliterative Arthur is a figure whose moral ideals are seen as matching his imposing physical stature. He is the Christian King who fights under the banner of the Virgin Mother and Child, who orders a church and convent built on St. Michael's Mount after it has been cleared of the evil giant, and who criticizes the practice of ransoming war captives as a mercenary and demeaning practice: "'ffor it commes to no kynge that conquerour es holdene,/To comone with his captifis fore couatys of siluer'" (ll. 1579-1580). Arthur's further

clearly stated policy is to respect and defend the Pope's lands out of respect for the Holy See:

"I gyffe my protteccione to alle the pope landez,
My ryche penselle of pes my pople to schewe.
It es a foly to offende oure fadyr vndire Gode,
Owther Peter or Paule, tha postles of Rome.
Yif we spare the spirituelle, we spede bot the bettire;
Whills we haue for to speke, spille salle it neuer!"
(ll. 2410-2415)

And even as he nears the zenith of his earthly power and glory, the King's cherished ideal is a crusade to the Holy Land: "'Syne graythe ouer the grette see with gud mene of armes,/To reuenge the renke that one the rode dyede!'" (ll. 3216-3217)

Arthur's inflexible principles lead him to perform acts which many readers might consider to be immoral. His personal sense of justice, for example, tells him he has a right to rule Rome; therefore he will wage bloody war to destroy Lucius. Anyone who opposes his will is, in his eyes, opposing justice and is to be ruthlessly destroyed. In retaliation for the killing of his knights in battle he willingly sanctions the slaughter of enemies in the aftermath of victory:

Thane the kyde conquerour cryes fulle lowde,--
"Cosyne of Cornewaile, take kepe to thi selfene,
That no captayne be kepyde for none siluer,
Or sir Kayous dede be cruelly vengede!"
(ll. 2262-2264)

And Arthur's last order as a dying man is for the execution of Mordred's children.

Regardless of the opinions of readers on the alleged immorality of the alliterative Arthur, however, our task is to determine whether or not he is censured within the context of the poem. That there is absolutely no explicit condemnation all will agree; nevertheless, some see at least an implicit condemnation of the King. The leading exponent of this view is William Matthews. Matthews would agree with Finlayson, who sees the fall of Arthur in the alliterative poem as the "fall of a great and Christian conqueror due to his desertion of that championship of justice and right which originally made him great."⁵ Matthews' opinions on the poet's attitude toward the moral aspect of Arthur's character are important enough to warrant careful consideration.

Matthews presents a thorough argument in support of his beliefs. This is not the place for a step-by-step analysis and evaluation of his views; but it is worthwhile to at least know

⁵ Finlayson, "Arthur and the Giant of St. Michael's Mount," 119.

Matthews' thesis and some of his main supporting arguments. First of all, he believes Arthur is associated in the poet's mind with Alexander: "The author of Morte Arthure... is to be numbered amongst Alexander's strongest critics, and his association of Alexander with Arthur is one of the principal leads to the uncustomary meaning he discovers in the traditional story of Arthur's imperial war and the rebellion in which the Arthurian world is brought to ruin."⁶ After this early statement Matthews produces the following argument: The fact that a cardinal rather than a senator is sent to beg peace of Arthur indicates that Arthur has been fighting against the Church all along. After the cardinal has departed Arthur sees himself as the new Alexander, the overling of everything on earth. It is immediately after this speech that Arthur dreams of the duchess-of-the-wheel and of Alexander and the fallen conquerors. The dream and the interpretation given to it by Arthur's philosopher are logical artistic sequels to the ruthless imperialistic warfare that the poet has depicted and to his characterization of Arthur as a latterday Alexander, admirable in many ways but tarnished by a conqueror's sin of ~~van~~glory. The

⁶ Matthews, The Tragedy of Arthur, p. 93.

philosopher interprets Arthur's dream in three steps: 1) he points out the King's crime of shedding innocent blood; 2) he predicts the King's downfall; and 3) he urges him to confession, contrition and acts of satisfaction. Arthur does go to confession eventually, but he does not fully repent. His dressing in magnificent robes immediately after being urged to penitence indicates the King's inability to truly renounce the vanities of this world. Further, in the final battle Mordred is struck down by the sword Caliburn, symbolic of temporal power; Arthur, however, is struck down by the sword of peace, touched with the supernatural and associated with Frodo, chief among Arthur's victims. Clarent, like Mordred, is the instrument of God, working through Fortune in the prosecution of divine justice and the maintenance of the spiritual arm over the temporal. Finally, admiration and even pity temper the poet's moral irony. Battered by divine justice Arthur fights out his last days in a mood of despair only partly alleviated by his Christlike aspirations. --Such is the view of Matthews.⁷

Matthews' idea is an interesting and in some ways plausible one, but, as he himself feels obliged to admit,

⁷ See The Tragedy of Arthur, pp. 134 ff.

it remains in the last analysis a theory rather than a proven fact. And it has been challenged. Loomis, for example, completely disagrees with Matthews: "Arthur is not a pagan Alexander, dominated by pride and a lust for power, but a Christian like Charlemagne, fighting for his rights and for the faith. The tragic ending is due to no fault of his, no hamartia. Realistically considered, it is the result of Mordred's unforeseeable treason; in terms of symbolism, it is the result of Lady Fortune's treachery."⁸ These words of Loomis seem sensible enough to one who has got into the spirit of the poem. A twentieth-century Christian might strongly wish to morally censure the alliterative Arthur, but there is no conclusive internal evidence to prove that the fourteenth-century poet also wished to do so.

We are left then, first, with a general picture of the two heroes: on one hand is the stanzaic Lancelot, a formidable, loyal, popular and chivalrous knight, courteous ladies' champion, and courtly lover; on the other hand is the alliterative Arthur, an august, responsible and devoted king, courageous and generous warrior-leader, and

⁸ Roger Sherman Loomis, The Development of Arthurian Romance (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1963), p. 151.

invincible conqueror. In the moral sphere, secondly, Lancelot, the successful lover, suffers no explicit and only the gentlest of implicit censures for his liaison with Guinevere; Arthur, the successful warrior, is not subjected to explicit moral censure, and, notwithstanding Matthews, there is no conclusive evidence indicating implicit moral censure either.

CHAPTER V

FORM

Form designates the organization of the elements of a work of art in relation to its total effect. Critics often distinguish between form and content, form being the pattern or structure or organization which is employed to give expression to the content.¹ Form is important because it helps clearly indicate the meaning and general import of a poem and is one of the most important elements determining the kind of poem.²

We will compare the stanzaic Le Morte Arthure and the alliterative Morte Arthure, first, on overall organization and unity, second, on general breadth,

¹ See Beckson and Ganz, p. 64; Thrall, Hibbard and Holman, p. 206; Liberman and Foster, p. 55; and Barnet, Berman and Burto, pp. 45-47.

² For more on the general importance of form in literature, see Theodore Maynard, Preface to Poetry (New York: The Century Co., 1933), pp. 67 ff. and Perrine, Sound and Sense, pp. 197 ff. For a discussion on the importance of control enabling the author to maintain a well-organized structure in a longer work, see E.M.W. Tillyard, The English Epic and its Background (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 8 ff. Matthews attaches much importance to structure in the alliterative Morte Arthure, suggesting that the poem's structure is typical of the medieval tragedy of fortune. See The Tragedy of Arthur, pp. 94 ff.

amplitude or expansiveness, and third, on medium for narrative and dialogue.

The first 1671 lines of the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur consist of three major episodes: 1) the tournament, 2) the Lady of Ascalot, and 3) the poisoning of the Scottish knight. Each of these episodes has its own interest, certainly, but the three have only the loosest relationship with one another: they all deal with Lancelot and help us get a clearer picture of him in action. First of all, the tournament, besides helping get the narrative moving, gives us an opportunity of witnessing Lancelot's great prowess as a knight. Second, the Lady of Ascalot's infatuation helps indicate Lancelot's attractiveness as a man, while his reaction, as pointed out earlier, demonstrates his cortaysye and loyalty to the courtly love code. Third, the poisoning of the Scottish knight with the consequent predicament of the Queen helps demonstrate not only Lancelot's prowess and loyalty in defending her but also his popularity with his comrades, since they show much more concern about his absence than about danger to the Queen. It is at line 1671, immediately after Lancelot's defeat of Sir Mador, brother of the Scottish knight, that Agravayne announces his intention of telling Arthur of the Lancelot-Guinevere

affair. A major break in the narrative occurs here.

Lines 1672 to 3969 of the stanzaic poem consist of a chain of events which begins with the treachery of Agravayne and ends with the deaths of Lancelot and Guinevere. Starting at the end and working backward to the beginning we can trace a general cause-and-effect relationship linking all these episodes together. Lancelot and Guinevere die in separate and penitential retirement from the world in sorrow at the terribly destructive war, a war which reaches its climax in the destruction of the Round Table in the final battle between Arthur and the traitor Mordred. Causes of the rebellion of Mordred and destruction of Arthur and the Round Table can be traced back thus: Mordred rebels because Arthur and his knights are away fighting Lancelot; they are fighting Lancelot primarily because Gawain wants revenge for the killing of his three brothers; and the three brothers were killed either deliberately or accidentally in fights caused ultimately by the courtly love affair of Lancelot and the Queen.

In the overall organization of the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur we may conclude that line 1671 is an important point. Up to this point the poem has a rather loose structure, with the different episodes held

together by a slim narrative thread and by a common interest in Lancelot. After line 1671, however, there is a stronger and more obvious unity in the cause-and-effect relationship linking the major episodes. There is no discernable rising action, turning point, and falling action in the poem, but this is not to deny that it has a certain unity. The stanzaic Le Morte Arthur, despite the weakness of part one, does have a certain overall unity in that every scene can be said to relate to Lancelot alone or to Lancelot in his relations with the Queen on one hand and the King and courtly circle on the other.

Turning to the alliterative Morte Arthure we find a structure quite different from that of the stanzaic poem. Instead of a chain of episodes the alliterative version presents us with a carefully organized framework consisting of a rising action, a turning point, and a falling action leading to a catastrophe. Early in the poem we receive a forecast of the rising action. We will learn of King Arthur and his knights and their success in war:

How they whanne wyth were wyrchippis many,
 Sloughe Lucyus the lythyre, that lord was of Rome,
 And conqueryd that kyngryke thorowe craftys of armes.
 (11. 22-24)

Our expectations are fulfilled, for the first part of the alliterative poem is a joyful story for Arthur and his knights, as they meet the Romans and win one battle after

Throly belles thay rynge, and Requiem syngys,
 Dosse messes and matyns with mournande notes:
 Relygeous reueste in theire riche copes,
 Pontyficalles and prelattes 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! (ll. 4332-4341)

It is especially interesting from the point of view of structure to observe that the atmosphere of joy and triumph in the entertainment of the Roman messengers at the outset is balanced by a corresponding atmosphere of grief and defeat in the funeral scene at the close.³

We must be careful not to play *down* the importance of Arthur's dream of the Wheel of Fortune in our study of structure. In the stanzaic poem a similar dream occupies only 24 short lines and has no functional importance in the narrative, because the stanzaic poet is not primarily interested in the rise and fall of kings. In the alliterative poem, however, it is another matter. Standing as it does right at the turning point of the narrative and occupying fully 234 lines of the Morte Arthure, the dream and its interpretation symbolically and discursively demonstrate the key motif of the entire poem: that

³ See Matthews, The Tragedy of Arthur, pp. 110 ff.

Thane weendes owtt the wardayne, sir Gawayne hymne
selfene,
Alls he that weysse was and wyghte, wondyrs to seke;
Thane was he warre of a wye, wondyre wele armyde,
Baytand one a wattire banke by the wodde eynis,
Buskede in brenyes bryghte to be-halde,
Enbrassed a brode schelde on a blonke ryche,
With birene ony borne, bot a boye one,
Houes by hym on a blonke, and his spere holdes.
He bare gessenande in golde, thre grayhondes of sable,
With chapes a cheynes of chalke whytte syluer,
A charebocle in the cheefe, chawngawnde of hewes,
And a cheefe anterous, chalange who lykes.
(ll. 2513-2524)

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

affect a work of over four thousand lines; in spite of this blemish the Morte Arthure maintains its clear, well-organized framework and structural unity.

A second aspect of form that should be examined after structural organization and unity is breadth, amplitude or expansiveness. Le Morte Arthur is much more limited in this respect than is its alliterative counterpart. Not only has the stanzaic poem some 375 fewer lines, but it even has shorter lines, so that in total number of words it is truly a good deal shorter. Besides this, Le Morte Arthur has relatively few characters: only five major ones -- Lancelot, Guinevere, Gawain, Arthur, and the Lady of Ascalot -- and very few minor ones. The scenes are also relatively few, and they simply present us with events without the embellishment of long descriptive passages or speeches. Here once more the ballad simplicity is observable in the narrative; the stanzaic poet is a straightforward storyteller.

The stanzaic poem's setting too is limited. Le Morte Arthur does not make us aware of vast distances. Arthur and Gawain pursue Lancelot across the water to his own lands, but there are very few place names, and so the story seems almost to exist free of space. It is the same for time. Only once or twice is mention of time made,

and it is only to indicate the passage of the six months it takes Arthur to besiege Lancelot's castle, and the respective three-week and two-month periods it takes Gawain to recover from wounds suffered in his duels with Lancelot. Add these facts together, and it is clear that the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur is generally characterized by a limited rather than an expansive narrative framework.

Not only is the alliterative Morte Arthure longer, but, as befits its broader national preoccupations, it has a much more extensive gallery of characters. Besides major figures such as Arthur, Gawain, Lucius, Cador, Mordred and the giant of St. Michael's Mount, we are presented with the host of characters who play relatively minor roles, namely, Guinevere, Priamus, Lancelot, Clegis, Lott, Evayne, Cradok, assorted philosophers, senators, cardinals and kings and many others.

These characters play their parts in a great number and variety of scenes. While the stanzaic poet confines himself to essential points of narrative, the alliterative poet generally expands his major scenes and freely creates new ones. The two different narrative techniques can readily be illustrated by a comparison of the stanzaic and alliterative versions of Arthur's return to Britain on hearing of Mordred's rebellion. The stanzaic poet gives

it all in a mere sixteen lines:

Arthur, that was mykelle of myght,
 With hys folke come over the flode,
 An C galeyse that were welle dyght
 With barons bold And hys of blode;
 he wende to haue landyd, as it was Ryght,
 At Dower, ther hym thoght full gode,
 And ther he fand many An hardy knyght
 That styffe in stoure A-gaynste hym stode.

Arthur sone hathe take the land
 That hym was leveste in to lende;
 hys fele fomen that he ther found,
 he wende by-fore had bene hys frend.
 The kynge was wrothe And weliney wode,
 And with hys men he gan vp wend;
 So strong A stoure was vpon that stronde
 That many A man ther had hys end.
 (ll. 3050-3065)

The alliterative poet takes seven or eight times as many lines to cover this part of his narrative (ll. 3591-3711). He must tell what countries the knights have to march through from Italy to the Channel; how long it takes to assemble a fleet of ships; how Arthur organizes his fleet for a battle with Mordred's naval forces; what Arthur says to his men to encourage them; what Arthur's banner looks like; how the battle looked and sounded, including an account of boarding parties, archers and others; and finally, how Arthur's men laugh to see their foes defeated. Only after all this are the knights able to land on British soil; and the long land battles initiated by Gawain's rash charge remain to be fought.

The alliterative poet's tendency toward amplification is further seen not only in long descriptive passages, especially in battle scenes, but in long heroic speeches as well. As in other heroic poems, such as Beowulf, for example, the warriors break out into long and eloquent expressions of their ideals and their resolve even in the thick of battle. The narrative of heroic words and actions stretches on and on, like the Bayeux Tapestry, until we get a panoramic view of every scene.

There is in the alliterative poem a characteristic awareness of vastness in space and time. Arthur's empire stretches from Britain across France deep into Central Europe; and Lucius gathers his huge army from three continents: "Asye, and Affreke, and Ewrope the large" (l. 574). Both the Roman and British armies march over huge distances to challenge each other, and after the death of Lucius Arthur consolidates his power from Britain in the north to Rome in the south, and from Spain in the west to Prussia in the east, while, as the poet tells us, "ffro Spayne into Spruyslande the worde of hyme sprynges" (l. 3162). These military operations are months apart, and all of them together cover a period of several years. This vastness of space and time adds to the impression of dignity and importance we get in a

reading of Morte Arthure. It helps give the poem something of the amplitude of epic in its patriotic treatment of the rise and fall of a great British empire.⁴

We might round out this part of our study by comparing the medium for narrative and dialogue in the two poems. The narrative is conditioned by the form of verse used in each work. The eight, short, alternate-rhyming lines of each stanza in Le Morte Arthur constitute a medium which differs sharply from the long, unrhymed, alliterative lines of Morte Arthure. The suitability or unsuitability of each of these verse forms for narrative can readily be demonstrated by choosing at random a passage from each poem and comparing them. Here from Le Morte Arthur is a typical portion of its narrative:

Launcelot sore woundyd lay;
 knightis sought hym full wyde.
 Therle sonne night and day
 Was alle-way hym be-syde;
 Therle hym-self whan he ryde may
 Brought hym home with mykell pride
 And made hym bothe game & play
 Tille ne might bothe go and Ryde.

Boerte and lyonelle than sware,
 and at the kinge there leve toke there,
 Ageyne they wold come nevir mare
 Till they wiste where launcelot were.
 Ector went with them thare
 To seche his brodyr that hym was dere.

⁴ For a discussion of the amplitude of epic see Tillyard, The English Epic, pp. 6 ff.

many a land they ganne through fare
 And sought hym bothe ferre and nere.
 (ll. 424-439)

One finds here a smoothness and simplicity which are in themselves praiseworthy; but in a long poem such as Le Morte Arthur this kind of stanza, with its short lines, incessantly recurring rhymes, and dog-trot rhythm, becomes flat and monotonous. Here, on the other hand, from Morte Arthure is a typical portion of that poem's narrative:

Qwen Sir Arthur the kynge had kyllled the gyaunt,
 Than blythely fro Bareflete he buskes one the morne,
 With his batelle one brede, by tha blythe stremes;
 To-warde Castelle Blanke he chesez hym the waye,
 Thurghe a faire champayne, vndyr schalke hyllis;
 The kyng fraystez a furth ouer the fresche strandez,
 ffoundez with his faire folke ouer an hym lykez:
 ffurthe stepes that steryne, and strekez his tentis
 One a strenghe by a streme, in thas straytt landez.

Onone aftyre myddaye, in the mene while,
 Thare comez two messangers of tha fere marchez,
 ffra the marschalle of Fraunce, and menskfully hym
 gretes,

Be-soghte hyme of sucour, and saide hym thise wordez,--
 "Sir, thi marschalle, thi mynistr, thy mercy be-sekez,
 Of thy medille magestee, fore mendement of thi pople,
 Of thise marchez-mene, that thus are myskaryede...."
 (ll. 1222-1237)

These long, rough, alliterating lines constitute a far more flexible and therefore less monotonous medium for a long work.

The great difference in verse forms also determines to a large extent the kind of dialogue we find in each poem. The stanzaic poem gives us, for example, this

typical scene involving Lancelot and Guinevere:

launcelott forth wendys he,
 Unto the chambyr to the quene,
 And sette hym downe vpon his kne
 And salues there that lady shene.
 "launcelott, what dostow here with me?
 The kinge is went and the courte by-dene;
 I drede we shall discouerid be,
 Off the loue is vs by-twene;

Sir agravayne at home is he,
 nyght & day he waytes vs two."
 "Nay," he sayd, "my lady fre,
 I ne thinke not it shall be so;
 I come to take my leve of the,
 Oute of courte or that I go."
 "ya swithe that thou Armyd be,
 For thy dwellynge me is full woo."
 (ll. 65-80)

Notice here the simplicity not only of rhyme but of diction as well. Out of the 102 words in these two stanzas no less than 87 are of one syllable. Along with this simplicity of diction is a strikingly economical use of words: four short lines introduce the scene, and the actual dialogue flows smoothly and directly in a manner reminiscent of the ballad. The rigidity of the short-lined, alternate-rhyming stanza is suitable in ballad dialogue, which is brief and designed to be sung to the accompaniment of instrumental music; however, in a long poem like Le Morte Arthur this stanzaic rigidity has a constricting influence on the dialogue, making the speeches sound mechanical, and finally, monotonous. The stanzaic poet is evidently not at his best in this area.

The alliterating lines of Morte Arthure are more suitable for long passages of dialogue and especially for the long decorous speeches which so interest the alliterative poet. The particular dramatic possibilities of this alliterative verse are especially apparent in that series of dramatic speeches which constitutes Arthur's war council in the Giant's Tower (ll. 243-406). This passage is far too long to quote, but the shorter one depicting the arrival and greeting of the Roman senator at Arthur's court will at least give us a glimpse of the alliterative poet's handling of dramatic action and speech:

Bot on the newyere daye, at the none euyne,
 As the bolde at the borde was of brede seruyde,
 So come in sodanly a senatour of Rome,
 Wyth sextene knyghtes in a soyte, sewande hym one.
 He salued the souerayne and the sale aftyr,
 Ilke a kynge aftyre kynge, and mad his enclines;
 Gaynour in hir degré he grette as hym lykyde,
 And syne agayne to the gome he gaffe vp his nedys:
 "Sir Lucius Iberius, the Emperour of Rome,
 Saluz the as sugett, vndyre his sele ryche;
 It es credens, sir kynge, with cruelle wordez,
 Trow it for no trufles, his targe es to schewe!
 Now in this newyers daye with notaries sygne,
 I make the somouns in sale to sue for thi landys,
 That on Lammesse daye thare be no lette ffoundene,
 That thow bee redy at Rome with alle thi Rounde
 Table.... (ll. 78-93)

The speech continues for 24 more lines. It is typical of the alliterative poet not only to have his characters present such long speeches but also to introduce this scene with 73 words while the stanzaic poet uses 23 words

to introduce the Lancelot-Guinevere scene discussed earlier. Also, the long flexible alliterative lines each with its slight internal pause or caesura make for human speech that is rhythmic, yet freer and far more stately than anything we find in the stanzaic poem.

Briefly then, while the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur is structurally unified in a chain of events, especially after line 1671, the alliterative Morte Arthure is structurally unified in a framework of rising and falling action symbolized by Fortune's Wheel; while the stanzaic poem is limited in number of lines, scenes, characters and speeches, as well as in space and time, the alliterative poem has a general epic breadth or expansiveness; and while the eight-line stanzas of Le Morte Arthur are generally smooth, simple, relatively rigid, and even monotonous, the long alliterating lines of Morte Arthure are generally rough, stately, and flexible.

CONCLUSION

Examination and comparison of the works under consideration has thrown their key distinguishing features into relief so that we may now look back with an estimating view of the result of our endeavors, taking a final look at Le Morte Arthur and Morte Arthure in that order.

Careful analysis of the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur and the alliterative Morte Arthure reveals two widely divergent poetic approaches to the Death-of-Arthur story to come out of fourteenth-century England. Le Morte Arthur, composed in alternate-rhyming stanzas, deals with courtly love intrigues and personal conflicts in a world where cortaysye is a most important virtue and where the hero is an idealized knightly champion. Two-dimensional characters express basic human feelings as they play out their parts in a limited and partially episodic narrative set in a wondrous world of romance and marked by clear descriptions of knights and ladies, all conveyed with a relatively subdued tone. The stanzaic Le Morte Arthur, obviously, is a courtly romance treatment of Arthurian materials in the manner of Chrétien de Troies, but coupled with something of a ballad tone which sets the poem apart from its elaborate and ornate French sources.

CONCLUSION

142

The alliterative Morte Arthure, on the other hand, written in long four-stress alliterative lines, deals with the religio-nationalistic wars of kings and nations, and reflects contemporary English pride of nationality.

In this poem the qualities of a fighting man in the comitatus relationship are stressed to the complete neglect of cortaysye, and, logically enough, the hero is a warrior-king. Relatively complex, living characters express complex and intense feelings. Fate and Fortune, ruled by Divine Providence and symbolized by Fortune's Wheel, brood over the characters and events of the story and are inextricably bound up with the overall rising and falling movement of the well-unified and expansive narrative. Far from the wondrous world of romance the alliterative Morte Arthure is set in the more realistic world of economic necessity in which we find the rich, colorful descriptions of elaborate feasts and the boisterous tumult, sharp onomatopoeic sounds, and grisly sights of wholesale slaughter on the battlefield. One finds in the alliterative Morte Arthure the national and national-mythological concerns, the grand tragic theme, and general dignity and expansiveness of epic along with a pervasive heroic quality. Morte Arthure is written in the chronicle tradition represented by Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon, but we can look back even beyond these writers to

CONCLUSION

143

find a similar heroic spirit in works like the Old English Battle of Maldon and the continental Chanson de Roland.

It has been argued that Morte Arthure is part of an unbroken tradition of oral heroic verse that reaches back beyond Layamon and the Conquest.¹ On the other hand, because of the scarcity of written texts it might be claimed that the work is an isolated revival rather than the continuation of an unbroken tradition. We need not concern ourselves in any detail with this argument beyond recalling Muscatine's opinion: "The recurrence of a style after a long period of disuse is never fully explained as a result of nostalgia for a particular period of the past. It heralds also the discovery that a convention formed in the past provides a set of tools ready-made for some specific use of the present."² Fourteenth-century England must have offered some opportunity to any poet capable of embodying his vision in the old heroic style; and Morte Arthure is the remarkable result.

From this point we can move on to a careful reading of the two shorter works, the Awntyrs of Arthure and

¹ See especially Loomis, The Development of Arthurian Romance, p. 147, and R.A. Wilson, "Oral-Formulaic Technique and Alliterative Poetry," Speculum, XXXII (1957), 793-804.

² Muscatine, Chaucer, p. 2.

CONCLUSION

144

Golagros and Gawane, with a view to determining the extent to which each of them (1) resembles one or other of the two longer works just considered, (2) blends the important characteristics of both longer works, or (3) represents an altogether fresh approach to Arthurian materials. PART II, therefore, will consist of one chapter on the Awntyrs and another on Golagros.

PART TWO

THE APPLICATION

CHAPTER VI

AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE

The Awntyrs of Arthure has come down to us in four copies, one of which is in the Thornton Manuscript of Lincoln, mentioned earlier as containing the alliterative Morte Arthure.¹ The Awntyrs consists of 715 lines composed somewhere in the north of England after 1370 by an unknown author. The poem is written in a peculiar thirteen-line stanza which consists of nine consecutive four-stress alliterative lines followed by four two-stress alliterative lines

and which has the rhyme scheme
ababababcbddc. No source has been discovered for the poem. An interesting item in this work is the particular refrain

¹ The Thornton Manuscript, presently resting in the Library of Lincoln Cathedral, was written around 1440 by Robert Thornton; the Douce Manuscript, presently resting in the Bodleian Library, was written in the late 1400's; the Ireland Manuscript, at Hale in Lancashire, was written around 1450; and finally, the Lambeth Palace text was written sometime before 1450. The present study of the Awntyrs of Arthure is based upon the Thornton Manuscript as reproduced in Scottish Alliterative Poems, ed. F. J. Amours, Scottish Text Society (New York: Johnson Reprint Company, 1966 [for 1897]). The Douce Manuscript is reproduced on facing pages in the same text.

in the linking of stanzas which results when the last line of each stanza is repeated in the first line of the stanza following.²

We will commence our analysis by studying the especially close relationship which exists between structure and theme in the Awntyrs of Arthure. Following this we will carefully examine texture and, after moving through a brief review of characterization, concentrate attention on the hero. Having completed our analysis with a final note on form, we will attempt to draw some conclusions on the nature of this work and on its relation to the two types of romance studied in PART ONE.

The Awntyrs of Arthure consists of two episodes which at first sight seem to have little connection with each other but which in reality are parts of one whole. The first 342 lines consist of the hunting scene, the

² Much literary scholarship has not been devoted to either the Awntyrs of Arthure or Golagros and Gawane. Sir William Craigie, "The Scottish Alliterative Poems," Proceedings of the British Academy, XXVIII (1942), 217-236, and Matthews, The Tragedy of Arthur, pp. 152 ff., devote attention to these poems beyond the passing mention accorded them in general histories and handbooks. Craigie's general study helps set the works into historical perspective. Matthews' few pages are centered, not unexpectedly, on the moral character of the King in the two poems and on the degree to which this Arthur resembles the Arthur of the alliterative Morte Arthure.

appearance of the Ghost, and the return to supper at Randolph's Hall. Lines 343 to 715 consist of the arrival of Galeron and his lady, Galeron's challenge and fight with Gawain, and the final resolution of these events. Of vital importance to the poem's structure is the Ghost. The Ghost's counsel to the chief actors is the focal point of episode one, and its influence, seen in the chief actors' obedience to its counsel, dominates episode two. The Ghost, therefore, is a central figure having an indispensable pervasive and unifying effect on the poem; the remarks of the Ghost are normative and constitute the very core of meaning in the poem.

The tremendous importance of the Ghost is indicated by the profound impression it makes when it first appears. Nothing else in the Awntyrs of Arthure moves one so much as that moment when the gay hunting scene is abruptly interrupted by the unnatural convulsions attending this unearthly visitant. The darkness and storm accompanied by the grim appearance and hellish yells of the Ghost are enough to frighten every living creature:

The hundes are to hillys, and thaire hedes hydes,
 For that grysely gaste made so gryme bere.
 The grete grewhundes were agayste for that grym bere;
 The birdis one the bewes,
 That one that gaste gewes,
 Thay clyme in the clewes,
 That hedows whene thay here. (ll. 124-130)

The total picture is enough to jolt the reader to attention and arouse a mood of expectation. Thus, with his sure sense of the dramatic the poet makes certain the reader will carefully note the Ghost's counsel and assign to it the highest importance.

We shall study the Awntyrs of Arthure to determine precisely what the Ghost's counsel is in episode one and precisely how this counsel is put into practice in episode two. This counsel can conveniently be divided into two parts: 1) to Guinevere, and 2) to Gawain.

Seeing things from the perspective of eternity the Ghost expresses a general contempt for the pleasures of this world and warns of the necessity of remembering death. Looking at Guinevere in her royal earthly state it prefaces its advice to her with a grim reminder:

"For alle youre fresche favoure,
Nowe moyse one this mirroure,
For bothe Kynge and Emperoure
Thus salle ye bee." (ll. 166-169)

The stage is now set, and the Ghost's advice is communicated primarily in the form of answers to the Queen's anxious questions. The advice to Guinevere may be summarized in four main points: 1) avoid illicit love affairs, 2) avoid the sin of pride, 3) practice charity to the poor, and 4) offer prayers for the dead.

Citing its own bitter experience as an example, the Ghost warns the Queen to avoid sins of the flesh:

"I bare the of my body; what bote es to lye?
Be that to takenynge thou trowe,
I brake a solempne a-vowe,
That none wyste, bot I and thowe,
And therefore dole I drye." (ll. 204-208)

.....

"This es it to luffe paramoures and lustis and litys,
That gerse me lyghte and lenge so lawe in this lake."
(ll. 213-214)

Despite the Ghost's general exhortation, "Now fande to mende of thi mys" (l. 193), there is no evidence in this poem that the Queen is carrying on any kind of illicit love affair before the Ghost's appearance. In episode two, once more, the Queen's behaviour in this respect is beyond reproach: there is absolutely no mention of courtly love or other illicit involvement either with Lancelot or with any other of Arthur's knights.

The second and third points of the Ghost's advice to Guinevere come in the form of answers to the two key questions posed by the Queen: 1) Which is the greatest of sins? and 2) Which is the greatest of virtues? To the first the Ghost replies that pride with all its trappings is worst and leads to the bitterest of sufferings:

"Pride, with apparementis, als prophetis haue talde,
By-fore the pople appertly in thaire prechyng.
The bale is fulle bittire, thare-of be thou balde;
It makis beryns fulle balde to breke his byddyng.
Who so his byddyng brekis, bare he es of blysse;
Bot thay be salued of that sare,

Certis, or thay hethyne fare,
Thay mone wiete of calde care,
Waynoure, I wys." (ll. 239-247)

To the second question the Ghost, echoing St. Paul, declares, in so many words, that charity is the greatest of virtues:³

"Mekenesse and mercy," scho saide, "tho are the moste;
Hafe pete one the pore, thane plesys thou awre Kynge;
Sythene after that, do almous dedis of alle other
thynges;
Thies arene the gud gyftis of the holy goste,
That enspyres alle sperites, with owttyne spillynge,
For to come to that blysse, that euer more salle laste."
(11. 250-255)

In episode two the Queen puts these two pieces of advice into practice in one noble act which is at once humble and charitable. Having compassion for the two knights, Gawain and Galeron, as well as for Galeron's lady who has interceded with her, Guinevere meekly begs Arthur to stop the combat:

Than wilfully dame Waynour vn-to the kynge went,
Scho caughte of hir coronalle, and knelyd hym tille:
"Als thou erte roye ryalle, and recheste of rent,
And I thyne wyfe, weddid at myne awene wille,
Yone beryns in yone batelle, that bledis one yone bent,
Thay are wery, I wysse, and wondide fulle ille,
Thurghe schene schildis thaire schuldirs are schent;
.....

The granes of Sir Gawayne greuys me fulle sare.
Wolde thou, lufly lorde,
Gare the knyghtis accorde,
It ware grete comforde
Tille alle that here ware." (ll. 625-637)

³ See 1 Corinthians, 13: 1-13. On the evil of pride, see Luke, 18:9-14.

Finally, in its suffering the Ghost, as a fourth point, repeatedly importunes Guinevere to offer prayer for the souls of the dead. It especially dwells on the benefits that accrue to it as a suffering soul when masses are offered up by the faithful on earth:

"Were thritty trentalles done,
By-twixene vndrone and none,
My saule were saluede fulle sone,
And broghte in to blysse." (ll. 218-221)
.....

"To mene me with messes, grete menske nowe it were."
(l. 230)
.....

"And mene me with messes, and matyns in melle."
(l. 320)
.....

"Vs thynke a messe als swete
Als any spyce that euer thou ete." (ll. 322-323)

Guinevere's initial reaction is effusive:

"To blysse brynge the that barne, that dere hase the
boghte,
That was crucyfiede one croyse, and crownede with
thorne;
Crystynned and krysommede with candilles and coude,
Fullede in funestane, fulle frely by-forne;
Mary, that es myghty, and myldeste of mode,
That bare that blyssched, in bedleme was borne,
Gyffe me grace for to grete thy saule with some gude,
And mene the with messes and matynnes one morne."
(ll. 222-229)

More important is the Queen's promise: "'Now here hertly
one hande I hete the to halde,/With a melyone of messes
to make thy menynges'" (ll. 235-236). In the last stanza
of the poem this thread of the narrative is picked up
when Guinevere scrupulously keeps her promise to the

AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE

152

Ghost:

Dame Gaynour garte besyly wryte in to the weste,
 To alle manere of relygeous, to rede and to synge;
 Prides withe processyones to pray were prest,
 With a mylione of messis to make hir menynges.
 Dukes, erles, barouns, and bechoppes of the beste,
 Thurghe alle Ynglande scho garte make menynges.
 (ll. 703-708)

The second part of the Ghost's counsel, that given to Gawain, is quite clearly a condemnation of imperial ambition or covetousness which will eventually lead to destruction:

"Youre kynge es to couetous, I telle the, sir knyghte;
 Maye no mane stere hym of strenghe, whilles the whele
 standis;
 Whene he es in his mageste hegheste, and maste es of
 myghte,
 He salle lighte fulle lawe, appone the see sandis.
 Thus your cheualrous kynge chefe schalle a chaunce;
 False fortune in fyghte,
 That wondirfulle whele wryghte,
 Mase lordis lawe for to lyghte;
 Takes witnes by Fraunce. (ll. 265-273)

The Ghost continues with a long prophetic speech outlining the misfortunes that await the Round Table.⁴ The

⁴ The Ghost's prophetic speech is based on the chronicle tradition and sounds like an actual summary of the alliterative Morte Arthure:

"Fraunce hafe ye frely with your fyghte wonnene;
 The Frolo and the Farnaghe es frely by-leuede;
 Bretayne and Burgoyne es bothe to yow bowndene,
 And alle the dугepers of Fraunce with the dyne dreuede.
 Gyane may gretyne that the werre was by-gounnene;
 Es noghte a lorde in that lande appone lyfe leuede.
 Yete salle the riche Romaynes with yow bene ouer-
 ronnene,

AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE

153

Ghost's charges against Arthur as an imperial conqueror are echoed by Galeron in episode two when he complains bitterly of the loss of his lands: "'Thou hase wonnen thaym one werre, with owtrageouse wille,/And gyffene thame sir Gawayne'" (ll. 421-422). The poem's overall pattern of unity is once more maintained in the second

And alle the rownde tabille thaire rentis be reuede.
 Thay salle yitt be tybire tymbire yow tene.
 Gete the, sir Gawayne,
 Turne thou to tuskayne,
 For [lese] thou salle Bretayne
 With a knyghte kene.

A knyghte salle kenly closene the crowne,
 And at carelyone be crownede for kynge;
 That sege salle be sesede at a sesone,
 That mekille bale and barete tille ynglande sall brynge.
 Ther salle in tuskayne be talde of that tresone,
 Ane torne home a-gayne for that tydyng;
 And ther salle the Rownde Tabille losse the renowne,
 Besyde ramessye fulle ryghte at a rydyng;
 And at Dorsett salle dy the doghetyeste of alle.
 Gette the, sir Gawayne,
 The baldeste of Bretayne;
 For in a slake thou salle be slayne,
 Swylke ferly salle falle!

Siche ferly salle falle, with owttene any fabille,
 Appone Cornewayle coste, with a knyghte kene;
 Arthure the auenante, that honeste es and abille,
 Salle be wondede, I wysse, fulle wathely, I wene;
 [And al the rial rowte of the rounde table,
 Thei shullene dye one a day, the doughety by-dene,]
 Supprysede with a sugette, that beris of sabelle,
 A sawtire engrelede of siluer fulle schene.
 He beris of sabelle, sothely to saye;
 In Kyng Arthures haulle
 The childe playes hym at the balle,
 That salle owtttraye yow alle,
 Fulle derfely a daye." (ll. 274-312)
 (Words in brackets are from the Douce Manuscript.)

AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE

154

episode when Gawain obeys the Ghost by rejecting covetousness and voluntarily relinquishing his claim on the lands of Sir Galeron.

The Awntyrs of Arthure through its peculiar overall structure carries a serious message. In the first episode, primarily through dialogue, the abstract principles are enunciated; in the second episode we have a story in which these principles are put into practice. The second episode, therefore, is a test story: not only is it a test of Gawain's courage, but more importantly it is a test to determine whether both Guinevere and Gawain have learned the lessons imparted to them by the Ghost. The principles voiced by the Ghost, therefore, inform the whole poem and constitute its theme.

This brings us to texture, which we will consider in five parts: 1) tone, 2) situation, 3) imagery, 4) sound and movement, and 5) contrast.

The Awntyrs of Arthure has a thoroughly didactic tone. One must always be very careful about equating a literary character with its creator, but in this instance, in view of what has been discovered so far, it should be obvious that the Ghost is a spokesman for the poet himself. From its dominant position in the poem the Ghost preaches

AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE

155

the medieval Christian principles of its creator, and while the Ghost instructs Guinevere and Gawain and they obey its directives, the poet is busily at work indirectly instructing the reader.

A second element of texture is situation. The Awntyrs of Arthure is set in the world of romance, as we learn from the very first line. Immediately we expect this to be a far-off world complete with wonderful happenings. To a certain extent this is so, for surely the appearance of the Ghost is a wonderful happening. But there is nothing otherworldly about the Tarn Wadling near which the Ghost appears and the Randolph Hall to which Arthur and his knights retire for their supper after a hard day's hunting. There is something down-to-earth which finds expression in this poem in a love of place names. Sir Galeron defiantly names the lands which have been taken from him by unrighteous conquest: "'Of Konyngge, of Carryke, of Conyngame, of Kylle,/Of Lomonde, of Lenay, of Lowthyane hillis'" (ll. 419-420).

Hand in hand with this love of place names is a feel for tangible objects which leads the poet to a piling up of details of every thing from a cushion to a salt shaker in the pavilion hospitably prepared for Sir Galeron:

AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE

156

Pighte was it prowdely, withe purpure and paulle,
With dossours and qweschyns, and bankowres fulle
 bryghte;
With inne was a chapelle, a chambir and ane haulle,
A chymney with charecole, to chawffene that knyghte.
His stede was sone stabilled, and lede to the stalle,
And haye hendly heuyde in hekkes one hyghte.
Sythene he braydes vp a burde, and clathes gunne calle,
Sanapes and salers, fulle semly to syghte,
Preketes and broketes, and standertis by-twene.
Than thay seruede that knyghte,
And his worthy wyghte,
With fulle riche daynteths dyghte,
In siluere fulle schene. (ll. 442-455)

In a mere thirteen lines the rich purple cloth, the bright tapestries, the cushions, the chapel, the hall, the chimney, the stable, the hay, the candlesticks, and other objects are all worked into an extraordinarily brilliant word picture. Clarity of depiction, word economy, and feel for material objects come together to make this passage unforgettable.

The third element of texture, imagery, is quite rich at several points in the Awntyrs of Arthure. Even though the feasts, for example, are treated briefly, the descriptive touches are very colorful and suggestive:

The kyng was sett to the supere, and seruede in sale,
Vndir a seloure of sylke, fulle daynetyuously dighte,
With alle the wirchipe to welde, and wyne for to wale,
Birdis in brede, of brynt golde bryghte. (ll. 339-342)

In siluer sa semly thai serue thame of the beste,
With vernage, in verrays, and cowppys sa clene;
And thus thase gleterande gomme gladdis thaire gestis
Withe riche daynteths, endorrede in dysches by-dene.
(ll. 456-459)

The Awntyrs of Arthure, in which both cortaysye and fighting are about equally prized, furnishes us with both the feminine and the masculine types of imagery. These two types are best represented respectively in the portraits of Sir Galeron's lady and of Sir Galeron himself. Like Guinevere the lady brings to the poem a picture of delicate feminine finery:

Scho was the worthilieste wythte, that any wy myghte
welde;
Hir gyde was gloryous and gaye, alle of gyrse grene;
Hir belle was of plonkete, withe birdis fulle baulde,
Botonede with besantes, and bokellede fulle bene;
Hir fase in fyne perrye frette was in fowlde,
Conterfelette in a kelle, colouredede fulle clene;
Withe a crowne of crystalle and of clere golde;
Hir courchefes were coryouse, with many prowde pyne.
(ll. 365-372)

That knyghte in his coloures was armede fulle clene,
Withe his comly creste, fulle clene to by-holde;
His brenyes and his bacenett, burneschet fulle bene.

With a bourdoure a-bowte, alle of brynte golde;
His mayles was mylk-whytte, enclosede so clene;
His horse trappede withe the same, als it was me taulde;
The schelde one his schuldir, of syluere fulle schene,
Withe bare heuedis of blake, burely and baulde.
His horse withe sendale was teldede, and trappede to the
 hele;
And his cheuarone by forne
Stode als ane vnycorne,
Als so scharpe als any thorne,
And mayles of stele.

In stele was he stuffede, that steryne was one stede,
Alle of sternys of golde, that stekillede was one straye;
He and his gambesouns glomede als gledys,
Withe graynes of rubyes, that graythede were gaye;
And his schene schynbawdes, scharpe for to schrede.
(11. 378-395)

This kind of imagery helps give the poem an aristocratic martial quality besides arousing a mood of expectation which is satisfied in the fighting scene which is to come.

Our fourth element of texture is exemplified in the chivalrous Gawain-Galeron duel with its violent energy, rapid movement and onomatopoeic sound.⁵ Here is part of

5 Another excellent example of violent energy and rapid movement is the hunting scene early in the Awntyrs:
Vndir those bewes thay bade, those beryns so bolde,
To bekire at those barrayne, in bankis so bare.
Thay keste of thaire coppilles, in clyffes so calde;
Thay recomforthed thaire kenettis, to kele thame of care;
Thare myghte hirdmene, hendely forsothe, herdis by-halde,
Herkyn huntynge with hornnes, in holtis so hare.
Thay questede and quellys,
By frythis and fellis,
That the dere dwellys,
And darkys and darys.

Alle darkis the dere, and to downe schowys,
And, for the dowte of the dede, drowpys the daa,

AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE

159

that clash as the Awntyrs poet sees it:

He keruet of the cantel that couurt the knyghte,
Thro his shild and his shildur a schaft-mun he share;
Then the latelest lord loghe opon heghte,
And Gauan grechut ther-with, and greut wundur sore;
Sayd, "he shuld rewarde the this route, and I con rede
o-ryghte."

He foundes into the freke with a fresche fare;
Throght basynet and breny, that burnyschet was bryghte,
With a bytand brand euyng throgget he him bare;
He bare thrughe his brenys, that burneyst were bryghte.
Then gloppunt that gaye,
Hit was no ferly, in faye,
His stedes startun on straye,
With steroppus fulle stryghte. (ll. 521-533)
.....

And thus the hardy on heyte on helmis thai heuen,
Betun downe berels, in bordurs so bryghte,
That with stones iraille were strenult and strauen,
Frettut with fyne gold, that failis in the fighte.
With schildus on ther schildurs schomely thay shewen,
Stythe stapuls of stele thay striken doune streghte.
(ll. 586-591)

The language of the Awntyrs of Arthure can give us
strikingly onomatopoeic sounds. Take, for example, the
sound of Sir Galeron's sword slipping on Gawain's coat of
mail: "He etyllede withe a slyng hafe slayne hym with
sleghte;/The swerde sleppis on slante, and one the mayle

And by the stremys so strange, that swyftly swoghes,
Thay wery the wilde swyne, and wyrkkis thame waa.
Thay hunte and halowes, in holttis and hillys,
And tille thaire riste raches relyes one thaire raye;
Thay gafe no gamene, no graythe, that one grownde growes,
Grete hundis fulle gladly gane gaa.
Thus thies gomes thay ga, in grevys so grene,
And boldly blowes rechayse,
And folowes faste one the trase,
With many sergyaunte of mace,
Swylk solauce to sene. (ll. 40-65)

slydys" (ll. 616-617). Apart from movement and sound a most notable item in this fighting scene is the complete absence of any crude and barbarous account of wounding or slaying. This is a chivalrous encounter between two Christian gentlemen; it is not a ferocious life-or-death struggle against the villainous enemies of Britain or of Christianity.

A final element of texture to be considered in the Awntyrs of Arthure is the use of contrast, especially in the first episode. The picture we get of Guinevere very early in the poem is calculated to impress us with her richness and beauty:

And thus sir Gawane the gay dame Gayenour he ledis,
 In a gleterande gyde, that glemet fulle gaye,
 Withe riche rebanes reuerssede, who that righte redys,
 Raylede with rubes one royalle arraye;
 Hir hude was of hawe hewe, that hir hede hydys,
 Wroghte with peloure and palle, and perrye to paye;
 Schruedede in a schorte cloke, that the rayne schrydes,
 Sett ouer with safyrs, fulle sothely to saye.
 And thus wondirfully was alle the wyghtis wedys;
 Hir sadille semyde of that ilke,
 Semlely sewede with sylke;
 One a muyle als the milke
 Gayely scho glydis. (ll. 14-25)

This is sharply contrasted, a few moments later, with the bareness and blackness of the Ghost:

Bare was hir body, and blake to the bone,
 Alle by-claggede in claye, vn-comlyly clede;
 It weryit, it wayemettede lyke a womane,
 That nowther one hede, ne one hare, hillynge it hade.
 It stottyde, it stounnede, it stode als a stane,

AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE

161

It marrede, it mournede, it moyssede for made.
 Vn-to that grysely gaste Sir Gawayne es gane;
 He raykede to it one a rase, for he was neuer rade;
 For rade was he neuer, nowe who that ryghte redis.
 One the chefe of the cholle,
 A tade pykit one hir polle,
 Hir eghne ware holkede fulle holle,
 Glowand als gledis. (ll. 105-117)

Again and again the Ghost contrasts its present ugliness
 with either its own past glories or with Guinevere's
 present glories:

"Qwene was I whilome, wele bryghtere of browes
 Than Beryke or Brangwayne, the byrdis so balde;
 Of any gamnes or gudis, that one the grownde growes,
 Wele grettere than gaynour, of garsomes and of golde....
 And now am I cachede owte of kythe in carys so colde;
 In care am I cachede, and cowchede in claye."
 (ll. 144-147 & 151-152)

.....
 "I was reddere in rode than rose in the rayne...
 And now I am a grisely gaste and grymly grane."
 (ll. 161 & 163)

.....
 "Withe daynteths one desse thi dyetes are dyghte,
 And thus in dawngere and dole I downe and I dwelle."
 (ll. 183-184)

The extremely revolting ugliness of the Ghost is an
 especially appropriate punishment for sins of lechery,
 pride and selfishness, besides serving as a reminder of
 death and as a warning to repentance. The technique of
 contrast in the Awntyrs of Arthure, then, is functional:
 the beauties and glories of this world are presented side
 by side with the ugliness and sufferings of a soul in
 eternity so as to overpoweringly demonstrate the vital
 relevance of the Ghost's austere philosophy.

Before moving on from texture to a discussion of the hero in the Awntyrs of Arthure, a few words on characterization are in order. Depiction of the hero as well as of other persons in the poem is quite simple. there is no great complexity or dramatic evolution of personality in any of the characters. From two-dimensional characters one expects basic feelings, and the expression of basic feelings is precisely what one finds in the Awntyrs. In the Gawain-Galeron duel, for example, Gawain's momentary success brings loud shrieks of dismay from Galerons lady and equally loud laughs of joy from members of the Round Table:

Thenne his lemmon on lofte scrilles and scrykes,
 Quenne the balefulle birde blenked on his blode.
 Other lordus and lades thayre laykes welle likes,
 Thonked God of his grace, for Gawan the gode.
 (ll. 536-539)

In only one instance is there any outburst of truly moving emotion. Gawain makes this outburst immediately after his horse, Greselle, has been slain:

"Greselle," quod Gauan, "gone is, Gode ote!
 He was the burlokkest blonke, ther euyr bote brede!
 By him that inne Bedelem wasse borne for oure bote,
 I schalle reuenge the to day, and I con ryght rede."
 "Foche the my fresun," quod the freke, "is feyrest on
 fote,
 He wulle stond the in stoure, in-toe so mycul styd."
 "No more for thi fresun, then for a rysche rote,
 Butte for dylle of a dowmbe best, that thus schuld be
 ded;
 I mowrne for no matytory, for I may gete more."
 And as he stode bi his stede,
 That was gud in iche nede,

Negtehonde Syr Wauan wold wede,
So wepputte he fulle sore. (ll. 546-559)

It is remarkable that the one thing important enough to call forth such emotion from the knight is his horse. There is something here of the warrior's attachment to the objects of his craft, horses, swords, armor and so on. However, both in depth and intensity of feeling and in the object to which that feeling is directed this speech of Gawain is unique in the Awntyrs of Arthure.

The hero of the Awntyrs of Arthure is Gawain. Indeed, he plays such a prominent role that the poem's title might more naturally have been the Awntyrs of Gawain. Gawain is, so far as we can observe him, a typical romance hero complete with goodness, strength, courage, loyalty and a sense of honor. But Gawain has a few distinctive traits that help us perceive something of the Awntyrs poet's interests.

First of all, the Awntyrs of Arthure is characterized by the presence of women, specifically Guivevere and Sir Galeron's lady; therefore Gawain is a courteous knight always ready to serve one of them, especially Guinevere. To be sure, he is not called upon for courtly conversation and dalliance, but he certainly is called upon and is willing to protect and comfort Guinevere in her fear of

darkness and the Ghost, as the poem tells us: "Nane bot hym selfe one a blonke by that birde bydis" (l. 29), and later, "Nane bot sir gawane, the gayeste of alle,/Be-leuys with dame gaynour in those greues grene" (ll. 68-69).

Gawain stands out in simple contrast to the thoughtless and selfish knights who go off hunting, leaving her alone, as Guinevere complains:

"Sir Cadore, Sir Caduke, Sir Costarde, Sir Kaye,
Thir knyghtis are vn-curtayse, by crose and by crede,
That thus me has lefte in this Erthe at my dede daye,
With the gryselyeste gaste that euer herde I grete."
(ll. 96-99)

Before his combat with Galeron Gawain courteously commends himself to the Queen: "And sythene vn-to dame Waynour fulle wyesely he wente,/And lefte withe hir in warde his worthily wyghte" (ll. 486-487). When the fighting becomes furious Guinevere is the lady who weeps for Gawain's safety: "Thenne Dame Gaynor grette for his sake,/For Gawan the gode" (ll. 596-597). Finally, as we saw earlier, Guinevere explicitly mentions Gawain's sufferings in her plea to Arthur to stop the fight.

In spite of Gawain's cortaysye and particularly close relationship with Guinevere, there is no hint of a courtly love affair between the two. Gawain is, therefore, not involved in any of the adulterous liasons, furtive secret meetings, betrayals by spies and informers, and

AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE

165

besmirched reputations that often accompany the courtly love affairs of romance. Like his namesake in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, he has all the most cherished virtues of the courtly world without having any of its unchristian aspects.

Gawain has the key quality of moral awareness, which makes possible a genuine remorse of conscience. This quality comes out in his earnest questioning of the Ghost early in the poem:

"How salle we fare," said the freke, "that fowndis to
fyghte,
That ofte foundis the folkes, in fele knygis landis,
That riche rewmes ouer rynnes agaynes the ryghte,
And wynnes wirchippis and welthis, by wyghtenes of
handis?" (ll. 261-264)

Here we can detect a doubt about the goodness of past actions and an accompanying sorrow which is truly penitential. This quality in the hero, of course, does its part to characterize the Awntyrs of Arthure as the work of a poet primarily interested in morality.

Other qualities of the hero are manifested in his response to the two major challenges he is faced with. His first challenge, the Ghost, represents not only the unknown but perhaps even moral evil in all its horror: "In the lyknes of Lucyfere, layetheste in helle" (l. 84). But Gawain faces it down with all the courage and

AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE

166

steadfastness of a good Christian facing down the
machinations of Lucifer:

"At this gaste," quod Sir Gaweayne, "greue yowe no more;
I salle speke with yone spyrete,
In yone wayes so were,
If I maye the Bales bete
Of yone body bare." (ll. 100-104)

Finally, the Ghost is reduced to asking Gawain's permission to address the Queen:

"Loo! curtayse knyghte,
How that dede hase my dyghte!
Nowe guffe me anes a syghte
Of Gayenour the gaye." (ll. 153-156)

Gawain's second challenge comes in the person of Sir Galeron, who presents him with two tests: first, of his physical courage and strength, and second, of his moral integrity. At the meeting called by the King to decide on a response to Galeron's spoken challenge, Gawain promptly demonstrates his knightly honor and physical courage by volunteering to fight:

Whene the ryalle renke was gone to his ryste,
The kynge in to concelle hase callede his knyghtis so
 kene;
Sayse: "Lukes nowe, ye lordyngs, oure lose be noghte lost;
Who salle enconter withe yone knyghte, nowe lukes vs
 bytvene."
Thane saide sir Gawayne: "He salle vs noghte greue;
Here my trouthe I yow plyghte,
I salle feghte withe yone knyghte,
In the defence of my ryghte,
My lorde, withe yowre lefe." (ll. 460-468)

Almost one-fifth of the Awntyrs of Arthure is taken up by the fighting between the two knights, and on this occasion

AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE

167

Gawain proves his prowess by overcoming his opponent. More important, although a brave and capable fighting man he exhibits no trace of braggadocio or bloodthirsty cruelty. He meets the test of his moral integrity on this occasion by obeying his King's request and generously returning all the lands of his vanquished opponent:

"Now, and here I gyffe hym," quod Gawayne, "with owttyne
any gyle,
Alle the landes and the lythes, fra Lowyke to Layre,
Commoke and Carrike, Conyghame and Kille,
Als the cheualrous knyghte hase chalandchede als ayere;
The lebynge, the lowpynge, the leveastre Ile,
Bathe frythes and forestes, frely and faire.
(ll. 677-682)

As mentioned earlier, Gawain does not betray a trace of the imperial ambition or covetousness so vigorously condemned by the Ghost.

In our discussion of theme we have seen the manner in which the Ghost as a central figure gives an important overall unity of structure to the Awntyrs of Arthure. It is necessary, however, at this point to remark on one other element of form before attempting to draw any conclusions. There is a high degree of sophistication in the outward form of the poem. For instance, the poem begins and ends with almost the same lines: "In Kyng Arthure tyme ane awntir by-tyde,/By the Terne Wahethelyne, als the buke tellis;" (ll. 1-2), and

AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE
CONCLUSION

168

And in the tyme of Arthure
 This awntyr by-tyd...
 In Yggillwode Foreste, at the Ternwathelayne.
 (ll. 714-715)

The Awntyrs presents us with an interesting series of twos: the work consists of two main episodes; there are two knights and two ladies in the spotlight; the hero meets two major challenges; and the Ghost dispenses two different bits of counsel to two different people. The recurrence of twos in the Awntyrs of Arthure reflects the poem's dual theme as voiced in this two-part counsel of the Ghost, 1) to Guinevere and 2) to Gawain.

Keeping in mind on one hand the courtly romance as exemplified in the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur, and on the other hand the epic-heroic romance as exemplified in the alliterative Morte Arthure, we can draw some conclusions, first, on the manner and extent to which the Awntyrs of Arthure has traits common in each of these two major types, and second, on the essential nature of the Awntyrs of Arthure considered in its own right.

A few items in the Awntyrs are common to the courtly romance. Composed of two episodes in which two-dimensional characters express basic feelings, the poem is characterized by the presence of lovely ladies in

AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE
CONCLUSION

169

their feminine finery, ladies to whom service and protection is proffered by their courteous knights. Indeed, one of the hero's most notable qualities is his cortaysye in the service of his Queen, a quality which explicitly distinguishes him from his more loutish fellows.

On the other hand, a few items in the Awntyrs are reminiscent of the epic-heroic ~~romance~~. Set in the terrestrial world of Medieval England, the poem, with its rich and hospitable feasts, gives us at least a glimpse of the solempne and stately aristocratic life. More importantly, in its hero's sense of honor, his enormous physical courage and strength, and his intense love for the objects of the warrior craft, we see something of the heroic warrior's code, although it is divorced in this instance from the comitatus relationship. Finally, in the great excitement, vigorous movement, and vivid sights and sounds of fighting, as well as in the relatively large number of lines allotted to the combat scene, we detect something, though in this instance more humane and chivalrous, of that overwhelming preoccupation with fighting, which is a mark of the heroic poem.

More important than either its courtly or its heroic characteristics, however, is the essentially didactic nature of the Awntyrs of Arthure. The careful

AWNTYRS OF ARTHURE
CONCLUSION

170

use of contrast, the stress on moral excellence in the hero, and the skilful management of form are all consistent with the poem's heavily moralistic dual theme and its didactic tone. One can therefore best describe the Awntyrs of Arthure as a short, non-allegorical, didactic romance in which are blended elements of both the courtly and the heroic.

CHAPTER VII

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

Of Golagros and Gawane no manuscript copies have survived, but there is in the National Library of Scotland a unique copy printed in Edinburgh by Walter Chepman and Andrew Myllar in 1508. The poem, in Middle Scots, was composed between 1450 and 1500 by an unknown author. It consists of 1362 lines measured out into the thirteen-line alliterative stanzas we have already seen in the Awntyrs of Arthure. Two separate episodes in Chrétien's Perceval or Conte du Graal, in a very free adaptation, provide the substance of the story.¹

Our analysis of Golagros will follow a pattern similar to that used in our analysis of the Awntyrs of Arthure. Having considered theme, texture, character, hero, and form in that order, we will attempt to draw some conclusions on the nature of this work and on its relation to the two types of romance studied in PART ONE.

¹ See Newstead, "Arthurian Legends" in Severs' Manual, p. 62. The present study of Golagros and Gawane is based upon the text as reproduced in Scottish Alliterative Poems, ed. F. J. Amours. For a cursory review of scholarship on the poem, see above, footnote #2, chapter VI.

To arrive at some comprehension of theme in Golagros and Gawane we must examine the two basic ideals that are inherent in the poem. The first of these ideals, feudal independence, finds its embodiment in the person of Golagros and its articulation in his speeches. Golagros' answer to the King's invitation to subjection is a courteous and truly noble declaration of principle:

"Bot sauand my senyeoury fra subiECTION,
 And my lordscip vn-lamyt, withoutin legiance,
 All that I can to yone king, cumly with croun,
 I sall preif all my pane to do hym plesance;
 Baith with body and beild, bowsum and boun,
 Hym to mensk on mold, withoutin manance.
 Bot nowthir for his senyeoury, nor for his summoun,
 Na for dreid of na dede, na for na distance,
 I will noght bow me ane bak for berne that is borne."
 (ll. 441-449)

At no point in the poem is it either openly declared or subtly implied that this desire for independence is outrageous or that its expositor is an impudent rebel against established order. On the contrary, Golagros is neither an anarchist nor a radical social reformer: he is a genuine conservative.

This is so because Golagros opposes the King chiefly out of loyalty to his family tradition, since not one of his noble ancestors has set a precedent by paying homage to a king. Spynagros tells Arthur this at the outset:

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

173

"Yone lord haldis of nane leid, that yone land aw,
 Bot euer-lesting but legiance, to his leving,
 As his eldaris has done, enduring his daw."
 (ll. 262-264)

And Golagros clearly states his motivation to the King's
 messengers:

"I thank your gracious grete lord and his gude wil;
 Had euer leid of this land, that had bene leuand,
 Maid ony feute before, freik to fulfil,
 I suld sickirly myself be consentand,
 And seik to your souerane, seymly on syll.
 Sen hail our doughty elderis has bene endurand,
 Thriuandly in this thede, vnchargit as thril,
 If I, for obeisance or boist, to bondage me bynde,
 I war wourthy to be
 Hingit heigh on ane tre,
 That ilk creature might se,
 To waif with the wynd." (ll. 429-440)

.....

"Quhill I may my wit wald,
 I think my fredome to hald,
 As my eldaris of ald
 Has done me beforne." (ll. 450-453)

This staunch respect for tradition and pride of ancestry
 is a prominent feature of the poem which is again seen as
 Golagros' men prepare for battle:

Ilk knyght his cunysance kithit full cleir;
 Thair names writtin all thare,
 Quhat berne that it bare,
 That ilk freke quhare he fare
 Might wit quhat he weir. (ll. 488-492)

Golagros' ideal of feudal independence, therefore, has
 little in common with the modern democratic ideal of
 liberty and equality. Golagros would never even think of
 attempting to "liberate" those who pay feudal homage, for
 he is himself a feudal lord to whose rule a number of

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

174

people are subject.

The second ideal inherent in Golagros and Gawane is that of feudal allegiance. Early in the poem the nameless Lord of the Castle offers all his possessions to the King in a speech that contrasts neatly with that of Golagros in a parallel situation:

"Ye ar welcum cumly king," said the kene knyght,
 "Ay, quhil you likis and list, to luge in this leid.
 Heir I mak yow of myne maister of myght,
 Of all the wyis and welth I weild in this steid.
 Thair is na ridand roy, be resoun and right,
 Sa deir welcum this day, doutles but dreid.
 I am your cousing of kyn, I mak to yow knawin;
 This kyth and this castell,
 Firth, forest and fell,
 Ay, quhill yow likis to duell,
 Ressaue as your awin. (ll. 185-195)

The ideal of allegiance is even more dramatically voiced by the followers of Golagros following his defeat in combat:

"We wil na fauour here fenye to frende nor to fa;
 We like yow ay as our lord to were and to weild;
 Your lordschip we may noght forga, else lang as we leif;
 Ye sal be our gouernour,
 Quhil your dais may endure,
 In eise and honour,
 For chance that may cheif." (ll. 1187-1193)

The perfect embodiment of the ideal of allegiance is, of course, Gawain who readily volunteers to fight for Arthur. When Arthur resolves to subdue Golagros the two contrasting ideals, of feudal independence on one hand and of feudal allegiance on the other, are brought into a direct

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

175

conflict around which all the major action of the poem evolves.²

One might naturally ask which side the poet favors in this basic conflict; and in attempting to answer this question one must examine the part played by King Arthur. The Arthur of this poem is an enigmatic character, as a look at his actions will demonstrate. When he first learns of Golagros' independence he resolves in no uncertain terms to demand homage:

"Hevinly god!" said the heynd, "how happynis this thing?
Herd thair euer ony sage sa selcouth ane saw!
Sal neuer myne hart be in saill na in liking,
Bot gif I loissing my life, or be laid law,
Be the pilgramage compleit I pas for saull prow,
Bot dede be my destenyng,
He sall at my agane cumyng
Mak homage and oblissing,
I mak myne avow!" (ll. 265-273)

Spynagros' exhortations toward moderation only serve to incense the King so much that he trembles with rage, swearing to ruthlessly assert his will:

"In faith," said the cumly king, "trou ye full traist,
My hecht sall haldin be, for baill or for blis.

² The poem is concerned with one of the most pressing political problems of its time and place: "For more than a century the Leitmotiv in Scottish history, as in the history of all west European countries at this time [1371-1488], was the struggle between the Crown and the Baronage which the Monarchy, as it developed, had endowed with much of its own power." J. D. Mackie, A History of Scotland (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 94.

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

176

Sall neuer my likame be laid vnlaissit to sleip,
 Quhill I haue gart yone berne bow,
 As I haue maid myne auow,
 Or ellis mony wedou
 Ful wraithly sal weip." (ll. 293-298)

This picture of Arthur as a stern and dictatorial conqueror begins to undergo a process of modification later, however, when we find the King moved with pity for his knights: "The roy ramyt for reuth, richest of rent,/ For cair of his knights cruel and kene" (ll. 693-694). Later, Arthur prays for Gawain who is in danger of being slain by the fierce onslaught of Golagros:

Than the king vnto Criste kest vp ane cry,
 Said: "Lord, as thow life lent to levand in leid,
 As thou formit all frute to foster our fude,
 Grant me confort this day,
 As thow art God verray!"
 Thus prais the king in affray,
 For Gawyne the gude. (ll. 953-959)

In his second prayer Arthur's compassion extends even to Golagros:

King Arthur Ihesu besoght, seymly with sight:
 "As thow art souerane God, sickerly, and syre,
 As thow wald warys fra wo Wauane the wight,
 And grant the frekis on fold farar to fall,
 Baith thair honouris to saif." (ll. 1004-1008)

At last, in the closing lines of the poem Arthur voluntarily releases Golagros from the duty of allegiance:

Quhen the ryal roy, maist of renoune,
 With al his reuerend rout wes reddy to ryde,
 The king, cumly with kith, wes crochit with croune,
 To schir Golagras the gay said gudly that tyde:
 "Heir mak I the reward, as I haue resoune,
 Before thir senyeouris in sight, semely beside,
 As tuiching the temporalite, in toure and in toune,

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

177

In firth, forest and fell, and woddis so wide;
 I mak releisching of thin allegiance;
 But dreid I sall the warand,
 Baith be sey and be land,
 Fre as I the first fand,
 With outin distance." (ll. 1350-1362)

This later generosity, strictly speaking, is inconsistent with the King's earlier ruthless imperialism, and so the overall picture is ambiguous.

Matthews puts strong emphasis on the characterization of Arthur, dwelling upon his dictatorial qualities and accusing him, among other things, of hypocrisy and cowardice.³ Speaking of Arthur's indisputable magnanimity in the final stanza, Matthews is clearly at a loss to explain the apparent inconsistency of characterization. He finally ends by declaring that the poet is strongly critical of Arthur but that "after his vaunting of the theme of freedom the poet [has] no wish to end on the vassalage of his hero."⁴

By emphasizing the importance of Arthur in this poem, by unduly stressing and amplifying Arthur's faults, and, at the same time, by complaining of the inconsistency of the characterization, Matthews is hardly being fair to

³ See Matthews, The Tragedy of Arthur, pp. 163 ff.

⁴ Ibid., p. 166.

either Arthur or the poet. For even if we admit that Arthur has great faults and that his actions are inconsistent, we are left with the basic fact that Arthur actually plays a very minor role in this poem. Golagros and Gawane, as its title implies, is not primarily concerned with the exercise of kingship. Arthur's intransigent ultimatum is simply a necessary starting point and background, and his magnanimous behavior in the closing lines simply gives the poem a smooth and happy ending for all concerned.

In the poem's central conflict between the ideals of feudal independence and of feudal allegiance, dramatized by the series of physical combats and the climactic personal clash of Golagros and Gawain, it is very difficult to discern any trace of condemnation of one side or the other. Golagros is presented as a noble and worthy knight, but so also is Gawain, who wins the encounter and who is, after all, the King's man. With apparent impartiality, then, the poem is obsessed with a problem which was probably of great interest to its military-aristocratic audience: How can the conflict of two chivalrous knights representing apparently irreconcilable ideals be resolved honorably but without the death of either man? The search for an answer to this question brings out in most

of the knights and especially in the two champions the greatest of fighting ability and the noblest of chivalrous conduct.

Texture, the second element in Golagros and Gawane, may be analyzed in three parts: first, situation; second, imagery; and third, sound and movement.

The poem is set in a clear and vivid world of tangible objects rather than in a completely unrealistic world. The castle of Golagros as first observed by Arthur and his men, for instance, is not a romantic faerie palace but a huge, impregnable fortress set near a river and in a landscape filled with bustle and activity:

Thai passit in thare pilgramage, the proudest in pall,
The prince provit in prese, that prise wes and deir;
Syne war thai war of ane wane, wrocht with ane wal,
Reirdit on ane riche roche, beside ane riveir,
With doubill dykis be-dene drawin our all;
Micht nane thame note with invy, nor nygh thame to neir.
The land wes likand in large and lufsum to call;
Propir schene schane the son, seymly and seir.
The king stude vesiaand the wall, maist vailyeand to se:
On that river he saw
Cumly towris to knaw;
The roy rekinnit on raw
Thretty and thre.

Apone that riche river, randonit full evin,
The side-wallis war set, sad to the see;
Scippis saland thame by, sexty and sevyn,
To send, quhen thame self list, in seir cuntre,
That al thai that ar wrocht vndir the hie hevin
Micht nocht warne thame at wil to esche nor entre.
(ll. 235-253)

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

180

This kind of clarity of depiction of a real world is accompanied by a nice attention to details. We get an example of this in Kay's errand to buy provisions: When Kay rides up he finds the gates of the castle unlocked. He dismounts his horse and ties it to a tree, after which he enters a richly decorated hall which is completely deserted. Finally, the knight sees through an opening a bright coal fire in a fireplace over which a dwarf is roasting small fowls on a slowly turning spit.... This attention to details pervades Golagros and Gawane from beginning to end.

The countryside through which Arthur and his men ride is shown to be very lovely, but it has a harshness which reminds us of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. The harsher aspects of this environment are carefully depicted:

The king faris with his folk, our firthis and fellis,
 Feill dais or he fand of flynd or of fyre;
 Bot deip dalis bedene, downis and dellis,
 Montains and marresse, with mony rank myre;
 Birkin bewis about, boggis and wellis,
 With outin beilding of blis, of bern or of byre;
 Bot torris and tene wais, teirfull quha tellis.
 Tuglit and travalit thus trew men can tyre,
 Sa wundir wait wes the way, wit ye but wene.
 (ll. 27-35)

Surroundings like these present the knights with the problem of food and shelter:

And all thair vittalis war gone,
 That thay weildit in wone;

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

181

Resset couth thai find none
That suld thair bute bene. (ll. 36-39)

A consequent search for provisions is actually the occasion for the first short episode. This attention to economic necessity in Golagros and Gawane is continued later when we find the knights hunting deer for food rather than for sport.

The imagery in Golagros and Gawane has a special richness conveying something of the wealth and pleasure of the contemporary aristocracy. Scenes of hospitable entertainment are striking:

Thair myght service be sene, with segis in saill,
Thocht all selcought war soght fra the son to the see;
Wynis went within that wane, maist wourthy to vaill,
In coupis of cleir gold, brichtest of blee.
It war full teir for to tell treuly in taill
The seir courssis that war set in that semblee.
The meriest war menskit on mete, at the maill,
With menstralis myrthfully makand thame glee.
(ll. 209-216)

A further example of rich imagery is the brilliant gems and colors in the dazzling spectacle of the pitching of the tents:

Thai plantit doun ane pailyeoun, vpone ane plane lee.
Of pall and of pillour that proudly wes picht,
With rapis of rede gold, riale to see,
And grete ensenyes of the samyne, semly by sicht;
Bordouris about, that bricht war of ble,
Betin with brint gold, burely and bricht;
Frenyeis of fyne silk, fretit ful fre
With deir dyamonthis bedene, that dayntely wes dicht.
(ll. 312-319)

In scenes like these we catch something of the tenor of

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

182

the aristocratic life, its love of wealth and beauty, its ease and repose, and, especially in the banquet scenes, its superb sense of decorum.

This richness of imagery is matched by a masculine and especially martial type of imagery in Golagros and Gawane. Instead of lovely ladies in their shimmering finery we get the flash of armor and weapons as the glittering knights jangle by on their powerful steeds:

Thus the royale can remove, with his Round Tabill,
Of all riches maist rike, in riall array.
Wes neuer fundun on fold, but fenyeing or fabill,
Ane farayr floure on ane feild of fresch men, in fay;
Farand on thair stedis, stout men and stabill,
Mony sterne our the streit stertis on stray.
Thair baneris schane with the sone, of siluer and sabill,
And vthir glemyt as gold and gowlis so gay;
Of siluer and saphir schirly thai schane;
Ane fair battell on breid,
Merkit our ane fair meid;
With spurris spedely thai speid
Our fellis, in fane. (ll. 14-26)

Be it wes mydmorne and mare, merkit on the day,
Schir Golagros mery men, menskful of myght,
In greis and garatouris, grathit full gay,
Seuyne score of scheildis thai schew at ane sicht;
And helme set to ilk scheild, siker of assay,
With fel lans on loft, lemand ful light.
Thus flourit thai the fore front, thair fays to fray,
The frekis, that war fundin ferse and forssy in fight.
(ll. 480-487)

There is a special interest in weaponry, the whole poem being sprinkled with terms like "schene scheild," "lufly lancis," "birny and basnet," and "glisnand armour" (ll. 532, 553, 601, & 652).

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

183

These weapons are put to use against the armor of an opponent. There is a fascination with the cutting of expensive armor to ribbons, with the rich gold links of chain mail hopping off at the slice of a sharp sword and the sight of rich red blood flowing over the armor from a fresh wound:

With ane bitand brand, burly and braid,
 Quhilk oft in battale had bene his bute and his belde,
 He leit gird to the grome, with greif that he had,
 And claif throw the cantell of the clene schelde.
 Throw birny and breist-plait and bordour it baid;
 The fulye of the fyne gold fell in the feild.
 The rede blude with the rout folowit the blaid,
 For all the wedis, I wise, that the wy weild.
 Throw claspis of clene gold, and clowis sa cleir.
 Thair with schir Golagras the syre,
 In mekill angir and ire,
 Alse ferse as the fyre,
 Leit fle to his feir. (ll. 934-946)

In this chivalrous fight among Christian knights there is no distasteful and frightful battle descriptions. The combat of Golagros and Gawain is bitter, but it is not marked by the ruthless desperation one might find in a fight against the enemies of Christianity.

Fully thirty percent of Golagros and Gawane is occupied by elaborate depictions of the sights and sounds of physical combat. On and on goes the fighting in stanza after stanza of which the following is a brief example:

The wyis wroght vthir grete wandreth and weuch,
 Wirkand woundis full wyde with wapnis of were;
 Helmys of hard steill thai hatterit and heuch,
 In that hailsing thai hynt grete harmys and here;

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

184

All to-turnit thair entyre, traistly and twech,
 Burnist bladis of steill throw birneis thay bere;
 Schort suerdis of scheith smertly thay dreuch,
 Athir breik to his fallow, with fellonne affere;
 Throw platis of polist steill thair poyntis can pase.
 All thus thai threw in that thrang
 Stalwart strakis and strang;
 With daggaris derfly thay dang,
 Thai doughtyis on dase. (ll. 700-712)

The tempo of the fighting increases toward the end, and so the clash of Golagros and Gawain is especially frightful:

Thir lufly ledis on the land left be thame allane,
 Tuke nowthir fremmyt nor freyndis, bot found thame fra;
 Twa rynnyng renkis raith the riolyse has tane,
 Ilk freik to his feir, to frestin his fa.
 Thai gird one tva grete horse, on grund quhil thai grane;
 The trew helmys and traist in tathis thai ta;
 The rochis reirdit with the rasch, quhen thai samyne rane;
 Thair speris in the feild in flendris gart ga.
 The stedis stakerit in the stour, for streking on stray;
 The bernys bowit abak,
 Sa woundir rude wes the rak;
 Quhilk that happynnit the lak,
 Couth na leid say! (ll. 908-920)

In its preoccupation with fierce personal combats of this type Golagros and Gawane has a certain heroic quality.

Possibly the best example of onomatopoeic sound is in the description of siege machinery. The energetic bustle and sounds of preparation are conveyed especially in the rolling "r's," the sharp "p's," and the dull, pounding "b's" and "g's":

Than thai schupe for to assege segis vnsaught,
 Ay the manlyest on mold, that maist of myght moght.
 Thair wes restling and reling, but rest that raught,
 Mony sege our the sey to the cite socht;
 Schipmen our the streme thai stithil full straught
 With alkin wappyns, I wys, that wes for were wroght.

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

185

Thai bend bowis of bras braithly within;
 Pellokis paisand to pase,
 Gapand gunnys of brase,
 Grundin ganyeis thair wase,
 That maid ful gret dyn.

Thair wes blauing of bemys, braging and beir;
 Bretynit doune braid wod, maid bewis full fair;
 Wrightis welterand doune treis, wit ye but weir,
 Ordanit hurdys ful hie in holtis sa haire,
 For to greif thair gomys, gramest that wer,
 To gar the gayest on grund grayne vndir geir.
 Thus thai schupe for ane salt, ilk sege seir;
 Ilka souerane his ensenye shewin has thair;
 Ferly fayr wes the feild, flekerit and faw
 With gold and goulis in greyne,
 Schynand scheirly and scheyne;
 The sone, as cristall sa cleyne,
 In scheildis thai schaw. (ll. 456-479)

We find here a genuine vividness, a feeling verve for lively scenes and action which typifies the whole poem. It may be noted in passing, however, that even though the siege machinery is made ready it is never actually used, all of the fighting consisting of individual personal encounters. The poem is concerned with the ideals, courage and fighting ability of men rather than with the long range, impersonal encounters of mechanized warfare.

Having considered theme and texture we are brought now to a third element in Golagros and Gawane, character, under which heading we will discuss first, the mode of characterization, and second, the code of personal behavior accepted by the poem's chief characters.

Characterization in Golagros and Gawane is two-dimensional. Only the two main figures are developed to any extent, and they are idealized. Generally speaking, the feelings we find being expressed do not impress us by their depth and intensity. When Gawain is in danger, as mentioned earlier, the King weeps for his safety, as do the other knights: "Knichtis ramyt for reuth, schir Gawyne thai rew" (l. 966). The followers of Golagros exhibit similar feelings when their lord is in danger:

Lordingis and ladyis in the castell on loft,
 Quhen thai saw thair liege lord laid on the landis,
 Mony sweit thing of sware swownit full oft,
 Wyis wourthit for wo to wringin thair handis.
 Wes nowthir solace nor sang thair sorow to soft,
 Ane sair stonay and stour at thair hartis standis.
 (ll. 1051-1056)

As the fight rages and fortune seems to smile first on one combatant and then on the other, the reader finally becomes able to predict what the spectator's reactions will be, for the same pattern is repeated again and again thus: "Thus the ledis on loft in langour war lent;/The lordis on the tothir side for liking thay leugh" (ll. 1064-1065).

The knights of Golagros and Gawane follow a code of honor which includes devotion to Christ, pride of ancestry, courage, physical strength, loyalty, a legitimate love of independence, fidelity to one's word, and

courtesy. Two qualities especially prized and worthy of special mention at this point are courage and physical strength, or fighting ability, and courtesy, or the will and ability to behave decorously. The first of these, fighting ability, is exemplified by the best knights at several points in the poem, in the no less than twelve individual combats which take place within the poem's 1362 lines. Great fighting ability is most emphatically a mark of status in the society portrayed, and the amount of space devoted to fighting is indicative of the audience's thirst for heroic literature.

It is necessary to enter here a caveat on the term "heroic." In Golagros and Gawane there is no trace of the comitatus relationship among warriors. Although a total of as many as eight or ten men are engaged at any one time, emphasis is put on isolated individual matches rather than on a band of comrades holding together to cooperate for mutual support and protection. One looks in vain for long, boastful and exhortatory speeches in the thick of combat. The new mode of fighting calls for two knights to tilt at each other and shatter their lances, then dismount to fight with swords until one or the other collapses from sheer exhaustion. Under this system, in a fight involving eight knights paired off, it is

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

188

possible to observe two of Arthur's knights being led off as prisoners while their two more fortunate comrades who have been victorious do not feel obliged to come to the rescue of their fellows. Golagros and Gawane, therefore, is heroic in that fighting is valued for its own sake, almost as an end in itself; but the work is not heroic in the fullest possible sense of the word.

The second knightly quality worthy of special mention in this poem is the ability to behave according to all the rules of decorum. This quality is observable on several different occasions, from that scene early in the poem when Arthur is ceremoniously welcomed by the Lord of the Castle until those final scenes when Golagros hospitably entertains the King and his followers and a general reconciliation is forged. The most notable single instance of decorous conduct is in the visit of Arthur's three messengers to demand allegiance of Golagros. Before their departure from Arthur's camp they are solemnly lectured by Spynagros, who insists that they treat Golagros with the utmost courtesy and respect, since "It hynderis neuer for to be heyndly of speche" (l. 358). On their arrival in the presence of Golagros they remember this wise counsel:

Thai war courtes and couth thair knyghthed to kyth,
Athir vthir wele gret in gretly degre;

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

189

Thai bowit to the bernys, that bright war and blith,
 Fair in armys to fang, of figure sa fre.
 Syne thay sought to the chalmer, swiftly and swith,
 The gait to the grete lord semely to se,
 And salust the souerane sone, in ane sith,
 Courtesly inclinand, and kneland on kne.
 Ane blithar wes neuer borne of bane nor of blude;
 All thre in certane
 Salust the souerane,
 And he inclynand agane,
 Hatles, but hude. (ll. 376-388)

As spokesman for the three, Gawain begins with a brief
 introduction and a long speech in praise of the King:

... "our souerane Arthour
 Gretis the with honour,
 Has maid ws thre as mediatour,
 His message to schaw.

"He is the riallest roy, reuerend and rike,
 Of all the rentaris to ryme or rekin on raw.
 Thare is na leid on life of lordschip hym like,
 Na nane sa doughty of deid, induring his daw.
 Mony burgh, mony bour, mony big bike,
 Mony kynrik to his clame, cumly to knaw,
 Maneris full menskfull, with mony deip dike;
 Selcouth war the sevint part to say at saw.
 Thare anerdis to our nobill, to note quhen hym nedis,
 Tuelf crovnit kingis in feir,
 With all thair strang poweir,
 And mony wight weryer,
 Worthy in wedis.

"It has bene tauld hym with tong, trow ye full traist,
 Your dedis, your dignite and your doughtynes,
 Brevit throu bounte for ane of the best
 That now is namyt neir of all nobilnes,
 Sa wyde quhare wourscip walkis be west,
 Our seymly souerane hym self, forsuth, will noght cese,
 Quhill be haue frely fangit your frendschip to fest;
 Gif pament or praiser mught mak that purchase,
 For na largese my lord noght wil he neuer let,
 Na for na riches to rigne." (ll. 398-424)

It is only after all this that the speaker actually gets to
 the point and states in a mere three short lines the

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

190

reason for this visit from the King:

"I mak you na lesing,
It war his maist yarynyng
Your grant for to get." (ll. 425-427)

Now it is safe to assume that Golagros and his people know very well how great Arthur is, how many lands are his, and how many crowned kings are subject to him. Also, the very graceful compliment which the messenger brings from the King is no doubt pleasing to Golagros, but his happiness would be somewhat mixed were he an impatient man. This whole speech is to be valued almost solely for its ceremonial quality. It is a fine manifestation of the right way for courtly gentlemen to act in this society.

When speaking of the high premium put on knightly courtesy, we must take note of the treatment given to courtly ladies in this poem. In a few single lines sprinkled throughout the narrative only brief mention is made of the courtly relationship with ladies. Speaking of the first knight sent out by Golagros, for example, Spynagros, in the course of a long speech to the King, mentions that this fellow "thinkis provese to preve, for his paramour" (l. 538). In a similar manner Sir Edmond is later referred to as "that provit paramour" (l. 654). In the feasting near the close it is briefly mentioned

that each knight has a friend: "Ilk knyght ane cumly lady, that cleir wes of kyn" (l. 1157). On the other hand, there is absolutely no courtly conversation or dalliance among knights and ladies, and not a single one of Arthur's knights is inspired to fight for a lady. Most significant is the fact that the love interest which is prominent in the French source is absent to a large extent from Golagros and Gawane. In Chrétien's work Golagros' counterpart, the Riche Soudoier, is motivated to fight for his amie, and Gawain pretends to be defeated in order to satisfy her.⁵ By dropping the love interest of his original the Scottish author manages to give his poem a completely different emphasis by stressing Golagros' love of independence and Gawain's magnanimity.

Our fourth consideration, that of hero, must take into account both of these worthies, Golagros and Gawain, who exemplify between them the highest standards of chivalrous conduct. Even though Gawain has a slightly larger part to play and does actually defeat Golagros in battle, it must be remembered that Golagros is built up in other ways until he is almost the equal of Gawain. As we saw in discussing theme, each of these men represents an

⁵ See Newstead, "Arthurian Legends," in Severs' Manual, p. 63.

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

192

ideal: for Golagros, independence, and for Gawain, allegiance. As champions of these two contrasting principles they face each other on an almost equal footing, as two heroes in some ways reminiscent of Chaucer's Palamon and Arcite.

Golagros is leader of a certain company or meynee of knights who defend themselves against attack. He is the best of the group of fighting men described by Spynagros:

For thair is segis in yone saill wil set vpone sevin,
 Or thay be wrangit, I wis, I warne you ilk wy.
 Nane hardiar of hertis vndir the hevin,
 Or thay be dantit with dreid, erar will thai de;
 And thai with men vpone mold be machit full evin,
 Thai salbe fundin right ferse, and full of cheualrie.
 (ll. 508-513)

Golagros does not lead his men into battle as a united force. Instead, he maps out war strategy, sends out his knights for preliminary jousts, and finally goes out himself as champion. Naturally, on his fate hangs the fate of all those subject to him.

Golagros is an impressive figure possessing on one hand enormous fighting ability and on the other hand comliness and gentleness. Spynagros warns Arthur's knights of the formidable nature of this man they are about to face:

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

193

... "lordingis in le,
 I rede ye tent treuly to me teching;
 For I knaw yone bauld berne better than ye,
 His land, and his lordschip, and his leuing,
 And ye ar thre in this thede, thriuand oft in thrang;
 War al your strenthis in ane,
 In his grippis and ye gane,
 He wald overcum yow ilkane;
 Yone sterne is sa strang." (ll. 341-349)

But that there is more to Golagros than extraordinary strength is also pointed out:

"And he is maid on mold meik as ane child,
 Blith and bousum that berne as byrd in hir bour,
 Fayr of fell and of face as flour vnfiled."
 (ll. 350-352)

This dual estimate of Golagros is amply justified, first, by the fierce fighting ability he displays in the clash with Gawain, and second, by the way in which he is genuinely loved and esteemed by his people.

The same code of honor that gives Golagros his strong respect for tradition and consequent devotion to independence also demands from him an absolutely uncompromising courage which leads him to choose death rather than submission. To Gawain's request that he surrender his sword he answers:

"Me think farar to dee,
 Than schamyt be, verralie,
 Ane sclander to byde.

"Wes I neuer yit defoullit, nor fylit in fame,
 Nor nane of my eldaris, that euer I hard nevin;
 Bot ilk berne has bene vnbundin with blame,
 Ringand in rialte, and reullit thame self evin.

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

194

Sall neuer sege vndir son se me with schame,
 Na luke on my lekame with light nor with levin,
 Na nane of the nynt degre haue noy of my name,
 I swere by suthfast God, that settis all on sevin!
 Bot gif that wourschip of were win me away,
 I trete for na favour;
 Do furth thi devoir;
 Of me gettis thou na more,
 Doutles this day." (ll. 1035-1050)

Gawain's second request, that he come over to the King's camp, receives a like reply. In the end, only the spoken assurance of loyalty from his people will induce Golagros to submit. Fear of death has nothing to do with his capitulation.

Finally, two other virtues of Golagros stand out enough to warrant special mention: fidelity to his word of honor, and humility. When Gawain consents to enter the castle as a prisoner, his life and fortune are guaranteed only by the promise of Golagros, but that promise is kept, even though in keeping it Golagros is obliged to humbly confess defeat before all his followers. The King later praises Golagros for his genuine nobility in this instance:

"This is ane soueranefull thing, be Ihesu! think I,
 To leif in sic perell, and in sa grete plight;
 Had ony preiudice apperit in the partyce,
 It had bene grete perell;
 Bot sen the lawte is lell,
 That thow my kyndnes wil heill,
 The mare is thi price." (ll. 1304-1310)

The high quality of character manifested by Golagros on

this and other occasions is, of course, equalled only by Gawain.⁶

Gawain is depicted in the language of hyperbole as the ideal of ideal knights. He is the most suitable man for the King to send on a delicate diplomatic mission, on the one hand, or, on the other hand, to send forth to champion the Round Table in armed combat:

... schir Gawyne the gay, gude and gracios,
That euer wes beildit in blis, and bounte embrasit,
Joly and gentill, and full cheuailrus,
That neuer poynt of his prise wes fundin defasit,
Egir and ertand, and ryght anterus,
Illuminat vith lawte, and with lufe lasit. (ll. 389-394)

Such a man for all seasons would be outstanding in any situation and in any company, but in this poem his greatest virtues are doubly emphasized by the manner in which he is contrasted with other knights.

Gawain's courtesy or plain good manners is illustrated not only in his performance, already mentioned as messenger to Golagros, but on other occasions, notably in the incident involving Sir Kay and the dwarf. Having volunteered to go to a castle to arrange for provisions,

⁶ It is tempting to conjecture that the poet was actually employed by some lord who was fighting for his freedom, an individual from whom the character of Golagros could have been patterned. For more elaborate conjectures see Matthews, The Tragedy of Arthur, pp. 179 ff.

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

196

Kay boorishly insults a dwarf and in a haughty manner answers the knight who comes to the dwarf's rescue:

"Schort amendis wil I mak;
Thi schore compt I noght ane caik,
Traist wele thair till." (ll. 102-104)

The result is that Kay, the "crabbit of kynde" (l. 119), receives a stunning blow and flees back to the King untruthfully exclaiming that it is futile to hope for anything at this castle:

... "lord, wendis on your way,
Yone berne nykis yow with nay;
To prise hym forthir to pray,
It helpis na thing." (ll. 114-117)

Kay's loutish conduct and consequent failure is immediately contrasted with Gawain's courteous conduct and consequent success. Gawain, who immediately volunteers to try and improve on Kay's performance, greets the Lord of the Castle thus:

"I am send to your self, ane charge for to say,
Fra cumly Arthur, the king, cortesse and fre;
Quhilk prays for his saik and your gentrice,
That he might cum this toun till,
To by vittale at will,
Alse deir as segis will sell,
Payand the price." (ll. 137-143)

The Lord's answer tests Gawain's respect for ownership:

Than said the syre of the saill and the souerane:
"I will na vittale be sauld your senyeour vntill."
"That is at your avne will," said wourthy Gawane;
"To mak you lord of your avne, me think it grete
skill." (ll. 144-147)

At this gracious reply the Lord of the Castle joyfully

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

197

proclaims that everything he has is at the disposal of his visitors, at the same time expressing his contempt for the "laithless leid" who came "air to this place" (l. 157).

On his return to the King Gawain speaks, in four lines, his news of success which contrasts with Kay's earlier news of failure, also spoken in four lines:

"Weill gretis yow, lord, yone lusty in leid,
And says hym likis in land your langour to lis;
All the wyis and welth he weildis in theid
Sall halely be at your will, all that is his."
(ll. 172-175)

On this occasion Gawain by his courtesy has not only obtained the necessary provisions, but he has also, and more importantly, redeemed the reputation of the Round Table, just as he is later to defend its honor on the battlefield.

Gawain exhibits the most endearing qualities of a chivalrous fighting man, courage and physical strength combined with a high degree of humility and magnanimity. Having offered to personally accept Golagros' challenge he replies to the warnings of Spynagros with fearless words of determination:

"Gif I de doughtely, the les is my dere,
Thocht he war Sampsons himself, sa me Criste reid!
I forsaik noght to feght, for al his grete feir,
I do the weill for to wit, doutlese but dreid."
(ll. 808-811)

It is needless to comment upon Gawain's great fighting

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

198

ability; the fact that he overcomes a warrior of Golagros' reputation is enough. Most remarkable is the humility and magnanimity displayed by the victor on this occasion. In obvious contrast to Kay, who a few minutes earlier had run bragging to the King after stumbling upon someone weaker than himself, Gawain after winning a magnificent victory, can, by an almost superhuman exercise of the will, suppress a surge of triumphal emotion and further hazard his life in a self-effacing and generous attempt to save his noble opponent from shameful dishonor. Such is Gawain.

The fifth and final element to be considered in Golagros and Gawane is form. The poem has a somewhat peculiar but effective structure: the initial 236 lines, or roughly seventeen percent of the narrative, are devoted to Arthur's journeys and the incident of Sir Kay, the dwarf, and the Lord of the Castle; the remaining 1126 lines, or roughly eighty-three percent of the narrative, are concerned with the events surrounding the conflict with Golagros. The short first episode, which at first sight might seem superfluous, is consistent with the second episode because, as mentioned earlier, it introduces the general situation of Arthur's pilgrimage; furnishes an excellent example of the efficacy of

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE

199

courteous conduct in Gawain and Kay's action; and dramatizes the nobility of feudal allegiance in the Lord of the Castle's welcome of Arthur. Though composed of two separate episodes, therefore, the poem still has a genuine overall unity.

The main point of interest in Golagros and Gawane is made obvious by a severe telescoping and expansion of the narrative to achieve emphasis. It takes exactly eleven lines, for example, to tell of the King's journey of pilgrimage from Europe to the Middle East and back again:

The roy rial raid withoutin resting,
 And socht to the ciete of Criste, our the salt flude.
 With mekil honour in erd he maid his offering,
 Syne buskit hame the samyne way that he before yude.
 Thayr wes na spurris to spair, spedely thai spring;
 Thai brochit blonkis to thair sidis brist of rede blude.
 Thus the roy and his rout restles thai raid
 Ithandly ilk day,
 Our the montains gay,
 To Rome tuke the reddy way,
 Withoutin mare abaid. (ll. 301-311)

Yet it takes hundreds of lines to convey a few minutes of fighting. When the fighting is over and the problem of independence versus allegiance is settled, only 33 lines are devoted to after events; and the King's journey back home is not described at all.

The fighting sequence is carefully managed. Between the start of fighting at line 523 and its ending at line 1123, five days pass during which there are several trials

of strength arranged so as to create maximum interest. The first day's action involves two knights, the second day's two, the third day's eight, and the fourth day's ten. After all of this, when Golagros' challenge is taken up by Gawain, over a hundred lines are devoted to preliminary events which include Kay's brief and semi-farcical sortie, an event which in itself is a kind of comic relief before the great final encounter of the two heroes.

It is impossible to ignore the important functions of Spynagros in the poem. From the moment he abruptly comes into the narrative at line 261, he interprets for Arthur the history, motives, and conduct of Golagros. This function of Spynagros "tightens the narrative."⁷ By his praise of Golagros Spynagros serves to dramatically emphasize the ideal of independence; and by his repeated warnings to Arthur and his knights Spynagros contributes his share to that chain of suspenseful interest, which binds the narrative from the moment the King first hears of Golagros until the surrender of that worthy.

Before closing our discussion of form a note is in order on the part played by Fate in Golagros and Gawane.

⁷ Newstead, "Arthurian Legends," in Severs' Manual, p. 63.

Two stanzas are devoted to a discussion of this concept and its influence on the events of the narrative. After his defeat Golagros somewhat awkwardly philosophizes, pointing out the potency of Fate but also noting its subjection to Divine Providence:

"Sen fortune cachi\$ the cours, throu hir quentys,
I did it noght for nane dreid that I had to de,
Na for na fauting of hart, na for na fantise;
Quhare Criste cachis the cours, it rynnys quently;
May nowthir power nor pith put him to prise.
Quhan on-fortone quhelmys the quheil, thair gais grace by;
Quha may his danger endure or destanye dispise,
That led men in langour ay lestand inly,
The date na langar may endure na Drightin deuinis.
Ilk man may kyth be his cure,
Baith knyght, king and empriour,
And muse in his myrrour,
And mater maist mine is." (ll. 1220-1232)

He goes on to mention eight worthies associated with Fortune's Wheel:

"Hectour and Alexander, and Julius Cesar,
Dauid and Josue, and Judas the gent,
Sampson and Salamon, that wise and wourthy war."⁸
(ll. 1233-1235)

⁸ Six of these eight famous figures are also named by the King's philosopher in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*:
The eldeste was alexandere, that alle the erthe lowttede;
The tother Ector of Troye, the cheualrous gume;
The thirde Iulyus Cesare, that geant was holdene,
In iche jorne jentille, a-juggede with lordes;
The ferthe was sir Iudas, a justere fulle nobille,
The maysterfulle Makabee, the myghttyeste of strengthes;
The fyfte was Iosue, that joly mane of armes,
That in Ierusalem oste fulle myche joye lymppede;
The sexte was Dauid the dere, demyd with kynges
One of the doughtyeste that dubbede was euer.
(ll. 3408-3417)

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE
CONCLUSION

202

Despite the opinion of Golagros, however, one does not get the impression in reading this poem that relentless Fate is brooding over characters and events. This is the only major reference to Fate, and it comes not at any crucial or pivotal point in the narrative but only when the important action has been completed, as a kind of moralizing afterthought. It is as if a bit of extraneous material borrowed from a predecessor is simply put into the mouth of one of the major characters whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Harking back to our findings on the courtly type of romance, as represented by the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur, and the epic-heroic, as represented by the alliterative Morte Arthure, we may draw some conclusions on the nature of Golagros and Gawane. On one hand, apart from its two-dimensional mode of characterization, Golagros has little in common with the courtly romance. Containing, as it does, only vestigial references to ladies, the poem offers no examples of cortaysye, either in the form of courtly dalliance or of knightly combat in the service of a lady. And there is only a slight hint of courtly love. On the other hand, there are several important epic-heroic characteristics which are not to be

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE
CONCLUSION

203

found in Golagros and Gawane. Not concerned with any kind of great epic theme involving the fate of religion or nation, Golagros lacks the epic expansiveness, the great action, and the overall weightiness of tragedy. The excellence of this short poem lies, instead, in its new approach to a new focal point of interest.

Concerned with the basic conflict of two abstract ideals or principles which is symbolized in the physical conflict of opposing knights, especially of the two opposing champions, Golagros and Gawane is a heroic poem, but with modifications. Set in a rough world of economic necessity the narrative centres on the relatively long, climactic combat sequence involving individual matches and marked by vivid yet tactful depictions of martial sights and sounds. The work is of special interest, however, in that it sees the great knightly qualities of courage and strength existing side by side with other equally worthy qualities of the more civilized man; courtesy is especially held up as a model in the actions of Gawain, and fidelity, loyalty, and especially humility and magnanimity combine near the end to satisfactorily resolve the central conflict of the poem. Golagros and Gawane, consequently, is heroic but insistently emphasizes an ideal of fighting chivalry which is honorable in the

GOLAGROS AND GAWANE
CONCLUSION

204

broadest sense of that word.

CONCLUSION

Having completed our analysis and comparison we can conclude that, though Middle English romances are considered inferior in general to their continental counterparts, yet each of the four English specimens we have studied has its own distinctive and genuine literary value. We have witnessed in Le Morte Arthur how, through an economy of word and incident and a quiet, subdued tone, are conveyed the simple yet powerfully moving pathos of disrupted friendships and the perennially interesting nostalgia for a past state of human joy and harmony which can never again be. In Morte Arthure, by contrast, we saw how, through the general expansive framework and pervasive dignity of tone, are conveyed the deeply moving tragic impact of the martial rise to glory and catastrophic fall of a great empire. Morte Arthure allowed us to see an old legend through the eyes of the contemporary English aristocratic fighting class; we experienced both the nationalistic pride of this class and its fatalism in the face of the eternal transience of earthly glory. On a far more modest scale the Awntyrs of Arthure impressed us especially by its sure sense of drama in the Ghost scene and by the ingenuity with which it fuses its two episodes

CONCLUSION

206

to bring a religious and moral dimension to its courtly and martial worlds. In Golagros and Gawane, finally, we experienced the dramatic working out of a conflict between two ideals of the noble life, a conflict through which is projected a vision of a code of honorable conduct which is remarkable for its human sensitivity and compassion. We have learned from our study, therefore, that these four poems are, in fact, worthwhile artistic reflections of human thought and feeling, for their own medieval world and for all time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. PRIMARY SOURCES

- Amours, F. J., ed., Scottish Alliterative Poems. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1966. Reprinted from the 1897 text with the permission of the Scottish Text Society.
- Brock, Edmund, ed., Morte Arthure. London: Oxford University Press, 1961. Reprinted from the 1871 text for the Early English Text Society.
- Bruce, J. Douglas, ed., Le Morte Arthur. London: Kegan Paul, 1903. Published for the Early English Text Society.

II. SECONDARY SOURCES

- Baldwin, Charles S., Three Medieval Centuries of Literature in England, 1100-1400. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1932.
- Barber, R. W., Arthur of Albion. London: Pall Mall Press, 1961.
- Barnet, Sylvan, Berman, Merton and Burto, William, : A Dictionary of Literary Terms. Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1960.
- Baugh, Albert C., A History of the English Language. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957.
- , A Literary History of England. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948.
- , "The Middle English Romance: Some Questions of Creation, Presentation, and Preservation," Speculum, XLII (1967), 1-31.
- Beckson, Karl and Ganz, Arthur, A Reader's Guide to Literary Terms. New York: The Noonday Press, 1960.
- Bennett, H. S., Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century. London: Oxford university Press, 1965.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

208

- Benson, Larry D., Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1965.
- Billings, Anna Hunt, A Guide to the Middle English Metrical Romances. New York: Haskell House, 1965.
- Bruce, J. Douglas, The Evolution of Arthurian Romance. 2 vols. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1958.
Reprinted from 1922 text.
- Bush, Douglas, ed., The Portable Milton. New York: The Viking Press, 1966.
- Chambers, E. K., Arthur of Britain. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1927.
- Coulton, G. G., Medieval Panorama. 2 vols. London: Fontana Library, 1961.
- Craigie, Sir William, "The Scottish Alliterative Poems," Proceedings of the British Academy, XXVIII (1942), 217-236.
- Curry, Walter C., Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960.
- Dawson, Christopher, Medieval Essays. New York: Doubleday and Co., 1959.
- Denomy, A. J., The Heresy of Courtly Love. New York: Declan X. McMullen, 1947.
- Donaldson, Talbot, "Malory and the Stanzaic Le Morte Arthur," SP, XLVII, 460-472.
- Everett, Dorothy, Essays on Middle English Literature. London: Oxford University Press, 1955.
- Finlayson, John, "Arthur and the Giant of St. Michael's Mount," MAE, XXXIII (1964), 112-120.
- , "Formulaic Technique in 'Morte Arthure,'" Anglia, LXXXI (1963), 372-393.
- , "Rhetorical 'Descriptio' of Place in the Alliterative 'Morte Arthure,'" MP, LXI (1963), 1-11.
- Fletcher, Robert H., The Arthurian Material in the Chronicles. New York: Burt Franklin, 1958.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

209

- Ford, Boris, ed., The Age of Chaucer. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961.
- Gordon, E. V. and Vinaver, E., "New Light on the Text of the Alliterative Morte Arthure," MAE, VI (1937), 81-98.
- Gibbs, A. C., ed., Middle English Romances. London: Edward Arnold, 1966.
- Griffin, N. E., "The Definition of Romance," PMLA, XXXVIII (1923), 50-70.
- Gurteen, Humphreys, The Arthurian Epic. New York: Haskell House, 1965.
- Heer Friedrich, The Medieval World. Trans., Janet Sondheimer. Toronto: New American Library, 1961.
- Jackson, William Thomas H., The Literature of the Middle Ages. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.
- Kane, George, Middle English Literature. London: Methuen and Co., 1951.
- Ker, W. P., Epic and Romance. London: Macmillan and Co., 1922.
- Klenke, Sister M. A., "The 'Christus Domini' Concept in Medieval Art and Literature," SP, LVI (1959), 14-25.
- Legge, Dominica, Anglo-Norman Literature. London: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Lewis, Clive S., A Preface to Paradise Lost. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- _____, The Allegory of Love. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.
- Liberman, M. M. and Foster, Edward E., A Modern Lexicon of Literary Terms. Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1968.
- Loomis, Roger Sherman, ed., Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- _____, Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance. New York: Columbia University Press, 1927.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

210

- _____, The Development of Arthurian Romance. London: Hutchinson and Co., 1963.
- Mackie, J. D., A History of Scotland. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964.
- Mandel, Oscar, A Definition of Tragedy. New York: New York University Press, 1961.
- Mann, Horace, ed., Heroic Ballads. Boston: Ginn and Co., 1890.
- Matthews, William, The Tragedy of Arthur. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960.
- Maynard, Theodore, Preface to Poetry. New York: The Century Co., 1933.
- McKisack, May, The Fourteenth Century, 1307-1399. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Muscatine, Charles, Chaucer and the French Tradition. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960.
- Oakden, J. P., Alliterative Poetry in Middle English. 2 vols. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1930.
- O'Laughlin, John, "The Middle English Alliterative Morte Arthure," MAE, IV (1935), 153-168.
- Oldenbourg, Zoé, The Crusades. Trans., Anne Carter. New York: Random House, 1966.
- Owings, M. A., The Arts in the Middle English Romances. New York: Bookman Associates, 1952.
- Owst, G. R., Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England. Second Edition. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961.
- Perrine, Laurence, Sound and Sense. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963.
- Robinson, Fred N., ed., The Complete Works of Chaucer. Second Edition. Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1957.
- Sands, Donald B., ed., Middle English Verse Romances. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

211

- Schaar, Claes, The Golden Mirror. Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1955.
- Severs, J. Burke, ed., A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500. Fascicule I. New Haven, Conn.: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967.
- Shoeck, Richard J. and Taylor, Jerome, edd., Chaucer Criticism. 2 vols. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961.
- Spearing, A. C., Criticism and Medieval Poetry. London: Edward Arnold, 1964.
- Speirs, John, Medieval English Poetry: The Non-Chaucerian Tradition. London: Faber and Faber, 1957.
- Taylor, A. B., An Introduction to Medieval Romance. London: Heath Cranton, 1930.
- Thrall, W. F., and Hibbard, Addison, A Handbook to Literature. Revised and enlarged by C. H. Holman. New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960.
- Tillyard, E. M. W., The English Epic and its Background. New York: Oxford University Press, 1954.
- Waldron, R. A., "Oral-Formulaic Technique and Alliterative Poetry." Speculum, XXXII (1957), 792-804.
- Wells, John Edwin, A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1400. London: Oxford University Press, 1916.
- Williams, Charles, and Lewis, Clive S., Arthurian Torso. London: Oxford University Press, 1948.
- Wilson, R. H., "Malory, the Stanzaic Morte Arthur and the Mort Artu," MP, XXXVII (1939), 125-138.
- , "Some Minor Characters in the Morte Arthure," MLN, LXXI (1956), 475-480.
- Wilson, R. M., Early Middle English Literature. Second Edition. London: Methuen and Co., 1951.