

The Medieval Period, Day Twenty-Three

Arthur's Dead, Dead, Dead

The death of Arthur

- What happens?
- How does Malory's account differ from his sources? (compare the scene in the Queen's chamber, Malory 649, French source 750)

Siege of the Tower of London (679)

Address to Englishmen (680)



Why the ambiguities?

- Lancelot and Guenivere are guilty... or are they?
- Arthur's dead... or is he?

How inevitable are the happenings of the text?

Why insert so many warnings, advice, visions, etc.?

The Death of Arthur (again)

- 1485 is the highpoint in Arthurian interest: Caxton published his edition of Malory. Henry VII succeeded to the English throne (after the defeat and death of Richard III) and as the first of the Tudors (a family of Welsh origin), Henry claimed to be descended from Arthur. He repainted the 14th c. 'round table' and even named his first son Arthur, but... Arthur died.
- Even in the 15th c., as Caxton's preface shows, Arthurian legend was beginning to be criticized as unhistorical. After the Protestant Reformation, Arthurian narratives (just like the morality and mystery dramas) were also attacked as an agent of Catholic corruption.



Arthur's Elizabethan Fate: See page xxviii-xxix in your edition.

In our forefathers tyme, whan Papistrie, as a standyng poole, couered and ouerflowed all England, fewe booke were read in our tong, sauynge certayne booke of Cheualrie, as they sayd, for pastime and pleasure, which, as some say, were made in Monasteries, by idle Monkes, or wanton Chanons: as one for example, *Morte Arthure*: the whole pleasure of which booke standeth in two speciall poyntes, in open mans slaughter, and bold bawdrye: In which booke those be counted the noblest Knightes, that do kill most men without any quarell, and commit fowlest aduoulteries by sutlest shiftes: as Sir *Launcelote*, with the wife of king *Arthure* his master: Syr *Tristram* with the wife of king *Marke* his vncke: Syr *Lamerocke* with the wife of king *Lote* that was his own aunte. This is good stuffe, for wise men to laughe at, or honest men to take pleasure at. Yet I know, when Gods Bible was banished the Court, and *Morte Arthure* receiued into the Princes chamber. What toyes, the dayly readyng of such a booke, may worke in the will of a yong ientleman, or a yong mayde, that liueth welthelie and idellelie, wise men can iudge, and honest men do pitie.

Roger Ascham
The Schoolmaster, 1570

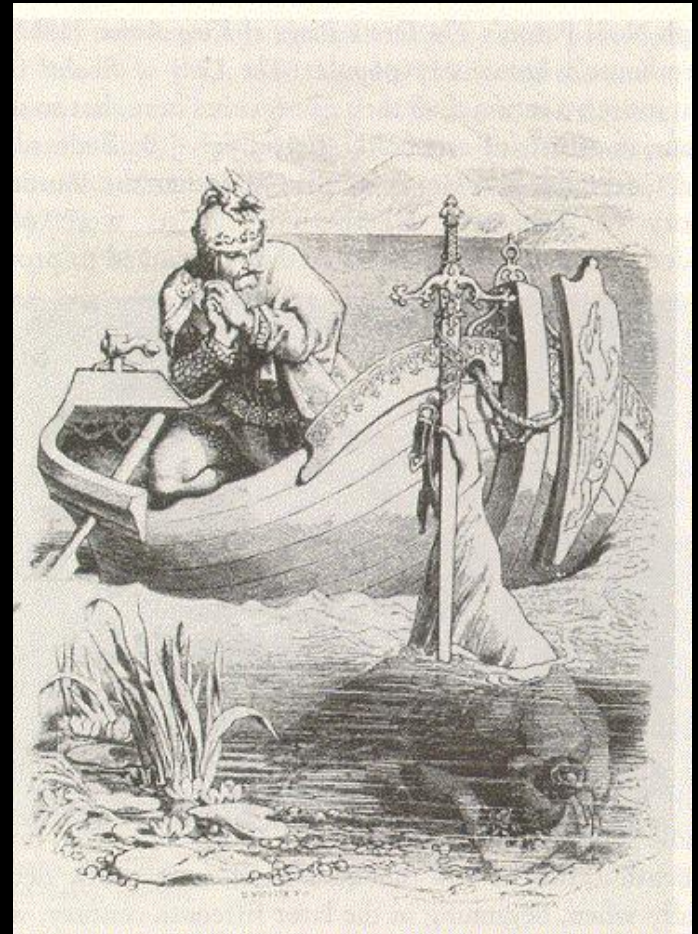
The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline: Which for that I conceived shoulde be most plausible and pleasing, being coloured with an historicall fiction...I chose the histoyre of kyng Arthure, as most fitte for the excellency of his person, being made famous by many mens former workes, and also furthest from the daunger of envy, and suspicion of present time...

I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a braue knight, perfected in the twelve private moral vertues... To some I knowe this Methode will seeme displeasaut, which had rather have good discipline delivered plainly in way of precepts...then thus cloudily enwrapped in Allegoricall devises. But...much more profitable and gracious is doctrine by ensample, then by rule.

So have I laboured to doe in the person of Arthure: whome I conceive...to have seene in a dream or vision the Faery Queen, with whose excellent beauty ravished, he awaking resolved to seeke her out...In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and glorious person of our soveraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery land.

Edmund Spenser
The Faerie Queene, 1590s

A. Arthur and Excalibur



B. The Lady of the Lake

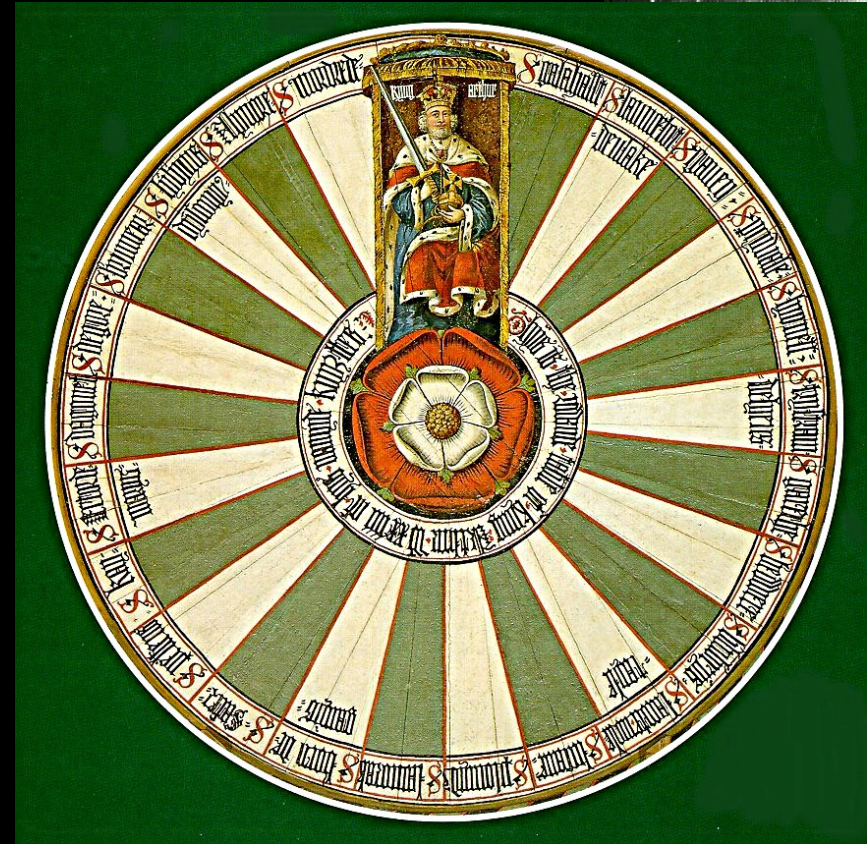


C. The Grail



D. More Grail





Next Class: Death of the Historian

- I will evaluate posts and comments on Wednesday (tomorrow).
- Remember: no class on Thursday! Enjoy the holiday.
- Pick up your first essay and be sure to set up appointments to discuss any feedback questions with me.
- Watch *Monty Python's Holy Grail*.
- TAKE NOTES WHILE WATCHING.

How does the 'Arthurian' legend invoked in this film compare to Malory's version? Is it seen as 'historical' or 'non-historical'?

How do the comic effects of this film compare to forms of medieval comedy seen across the semester?

Can we list some themes that we have encountered in this semester's reading that also appear in this film?

- You can also begin thinking about your second essay—the assignment will be posted under web resources tomorrow (be sure to note the new due date, later than it appears on original copies of our syllabus).