Here’s a sneak peek at the beginning of my new novel, Arthur’s Legacy, which retells the tale of Camelot from a perspective that alleges not only that Mordred was not a traitor, but that King Arthur’s descendants live among us today. Enjoy!

**PROLOGUE**

“For God’s sake let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings.”

— William Shakespeare, Richard II

Meleon had never thought it would come to this. He knew he and his brother, Prince Morgant, were far from the great knights that their grandfather, King Arthur, or even their father, Prince Mordred, had been, so if those two great men had not succeeded in defeating the usurper Constantine, how could he and Morgant? Yet, Meleon had hoped the good Lord above would aid them in their battle.

But it had been a slaughter, a hopeless slaughter. The brave and loyal men of Britain, those left who had not been slain at Camlann and many more—farmers, millers, merchants, all able bodied men who remained loyal to Arthur’s blood—had done their best. But what could they do against a tyrant who was aided by a witch?

The men had fought valiantly all that afternoon, but when the ravens began to flock above the battlefield with the decline of day and Meleon looked about him, having just run his blade through one of Constantine’s men, he saw that few of his own army remained on the field, and if they did not retreat now, those few would also fall by the sword.

“Meleon!” cried Morgant. ‘It's hopeless! Hurry! We must get away!”

Meleon hated to turn and run, but he knew his brother was right. His father and grandfather would not have thought it cowardly if he sought to save his own life. Then perhaps he could make it safely to Lesser Britain, to their distant cousins there, to raise a new army, to seek out Merlin, the great wizard who had disappeared from Britain years before, but who might be the only one alive now who could fight against the witch. Meleon, however, had never even met Merlin, only heard tales of him, so how could he know whether the wizard were still alive? But sightings of him had been rumored over the years, and what other hope was there?

No time to think of Merlin now. Meleon turned and rushed after his brother, joined by a couple of dozen fellow soldiers as the enemy’s army tried to pursue them. They ran over the nearby hill and into the forest, the enemy cutting down half of them along the way, the blood of his comrades spraying onto Meleon’s face as he fought to try to save them. But once his men reached the forest, the enemy failed to pursue them farther, and Meleon and Morgant led their
loyal handful of followers into the woods.

They were hardly worth pursuing now. Doubtless, Constantine and his men would find them if he wanted their lives, and they were bleeding so profusely from their many wounds that they could not run far.

Still, they managed to make their way through the forest as the sky darkened, and after a couple of miles, as night finally fell, they emerged into a clearing where stood a small monastery, one Meleon knew—it was where the great Sir Bedwyr had retreated after the fatal Battle of Camlann where Arthur and Mordred had been slain.

Just that morning, Meleon’s men had camped at the monastery before going to face Constantine, and Meleon had then begged Sir Bedwyr to join them in battle, even declaring that as Arthur’s heir, he, Meleon, was now Bedwyr’s king, so it was his duty to obey him.

But Bedwyr had calmly said, “No. All the trouble that has come upon Britain is my fault. It is God’s punishment for my and Queen Guinevere’s sins. I am not wise, nor good, but I can hold off causing more pain and bloodshed.”

Meleon could not believe the knight’s words. Never had there ever been a braver man in all the history of Britain than Sir Bedwyr, so how could he desert them now?

“It is desertion, you know,” Meleon had said, trying to incite the knight to anger so he would join them. “You are being disloyal to Arthur. If you wish to make penance for your sins, the best way is to take up arms against he who has usurped Arthur’s throne.”

But Bedwyr would have none of it. “My king is in heaven now,” he said. Meleon did not know whether by “my king” Bedwyr meant his deceased grandfather or God himself, but either way, it would not help Britain.

“God does not want an evil witch to sit on the throne of Britain,” Meleon had argued.

“God takes no interest in the wars of humans,” Bedwyr had replied. “He cares only for their salvation, and war, in any form and for any reason, works against that salvation.”

Now as Meleon struggled across the meadow to the monastery’s door, he wondered whether Bedwyr would even give him and his men sanctuary.

He need not have wondered, however, for the monks had been watching for their return, and without surprise at their greatly reduced numbers, the holy brothers quickly rushed outdoors to help them inside to treat their wounds.

Bedwyr greeted the princes, separating them from their men and telling them to come with him into the chapel.

“We will pray,” said Bedwyr, “for those whose lives were lost this day, both those of your own men and those of Constantine’s.”

“Pray for the souls of traitors!” spat out Morgant.

“Before your grandfather Arthur went to Avalon to be healed, he told me to pray for him and the souls of all men,” said Bedwyr calmly. And then he turned and walked to the chapel, and the princes, too exhausted to argue, decided it was best to follow and get the praying over with so Bedwyr might find them a meal and aid them in further escape.

“We cannot stay long,” said Meleon. “My wife Rachel will be grief-stricken with worry. We must find a boat and sail to Rheged so I can warn her of what has happened.”

“There is no need,” said Bedwyr, “this morning after your army left, a messenger arrived to bring news of your wife. He journeyed all night and was exhausted; he is resting inside the monastery, waiting to give you the news, but for now, it is enough to tell you that Princess Rachel gave birth two days ago to your son, whom she named Arthur after your grandfather, and this morning, she embarked with the child and several knights of her father, King Accolon, for Lesser Britain to find safety there, for Constantine has sent another army against Rheged. The messenger barely escaped them as they marched toward the castle just an hour after Princess Rachel and the child made their escape.”

“Thank God for her safety,” said Meleon as they entered the chapel. “I will pray then that God be with her, as well as with my father-in-law, King Accolon, and his people.”

Bedwyr bid the princes follow him to the altar in the small chapel, and there the three knelt and spoke silently to God of what troubled their hearts.

But their prayers were not to be finished. Not three minutes after they knelt, the chapel door was flung open and strode Constantine with half-a-dozen of his armed men and the Witch Queen following him.

Bedwyr jumped up, instinctively reaching for his sword, but there was none by his side.

Morgant only had time to half-draw his sword before Constantine’s own sword swung through the air, severing the prince’s head.

“No!” cried Meleon, his sword drawn to engage his enemy in combat.

Constantine’s men, however, quickly surrounded the prince. One of them, having not a shred of honor, struck Meleon a blow in the back, which did not pierce his armor but sent the prince to the floor. A second later, Constantine’s sword rested against Meleon’s throat.
“Sacrilege!” shouted Bedwyr, who had been grabbed by three burly knights, now struggling to hold him, his old fighting spirit having been raised by the attack. “Would you shed blood in the House of God?”

“Silence!” screamed the Witch Queen, she who was named Gwennhwyvach and who claimed to be sister to Guinevere and the true Queen of Britain. Stepping up to Bedwyr, she laughed in his face. “Fool knight, you who thought yourself invincible—look at you now, a beggar monk. To such humility I have driven the strongest man in Britain. You are just like every other man since the time of Adam himself. Weak, foolish, a coward, afraid of women, afraid of my power, afraid of your very self.”

“Mylady,” said Constantine, drawing her attention, “with this sword blow, I now do claim all Britain as wholly ours.”

And with those words and before Gwennhwyvach even could speak, he plunged his sword through Meleon’s throat.

Meleon could not believe the agonizing sting of the metal as it severed his flesh. He struggled for breath, his body going into panic mode.

“Fool!” screeched Gwennhwyvach at her consort. “Did I tell you to slay him? First I must know where the rings are!”

“What rings?” asked Constantine.

“Where are the rings?” Gwennhwyvach demanded, staring down at Meleon with piercing eyes.

But Meleon closed his eyes, for he had heard that the Witch Queen could read the very secrets of a man’s soul in his eyes. He knew which rings she meant—the royal rings of Avalon, the rings his grandfather and grandmother had always worn. Once, when he had been a small boy, he had sat on his grandfather’s lap and played with his ring and his grandfather had said, “This ring holds incredible power such that even I don’t know how fully to use it or all its secrets. But one day it shall be yours, and you shall pass it to all the Kings of Britain who shall come after you.” Meleon had always wondered what power it held, but he had never dared to ask his grandfather more. Neither his grandfather nor grandmother ever would have taken those rings from their fingers, so if…as Sir Bedwyr had told him…Morgana had…had taken…. Meleon could barely think…hated that he was dying….would never again….see Rachel or his son…. But if Morgana had taken…King Arthur to Avalon…the rings were there…and safe until his son….
Bedivere fears not having Arthur with him, so he cries: “I am going a long way/With these thou seest if indeed I go/(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt).”

Then in lines 424-6, he remarks, “I am going a long way/With these thou seest if indeed I go/(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt).”

Arthur seems similarly confused the night before his death. He has a difficult time trying to sleep because he knows what the next day will hold, just as Christ was in anguish about his approaching death. After Arthur has been wounded, he again becomes confused. Like Christ, Arthur knows the future. He knows he will live beyond death and that his death is necessary for God’s plan to work, Christ is also human; he has the same frailties and fears as a human being. Later when Christ is dying on the cross, the crowd assumes he has become confused, particularly when he calls out to God, and they make the mistake of thinking he is calling out to Elijah.

Arthur then requests of Bedivere, “Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer/than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice/Rise like a fountain for me night and day” (415-7).

Arthur’s request of Bedivere, “Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer/than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice/Rise like a fountain for me night and day” (415-7).

Bedivere again disobeys, now because he believes that if the sword were lost, there would be no proof that Arthur ever existed; Bedivere fears that future generations will not believe in the great king who will come again. Bedivere is now playing the role of Saint Thomas the Doubter.

Bedivere faithfully returns Excalibur into the lake.

Tennyson’s efforts to link Arthur to Christ are best supported by his expansion of the character of Bedivere as Arthur’s companion when Arthur is dying. Bedivere is given a role similar to that of an apostle. He has been Arthur’s companion since the beginning of Arthur’s kingship. Now Bedivere is the only knight who remains with Arthur at his end; therefore, one would expect Bedivere to be ever faithful to Arthur. However, even Saint Peter denied Christ when Christ was arrested (Matt 26:69-75), and Bedivere treats Arthur in a similar manner.

Peter’s denial of Christ is essentially a lie. Likewise, Bedivere lies to Arthur when Arthur asks him whether he threw Excalibur into the lake. Rather than toss away Excalibur, Bedivere decides to keep the sword because of its material value. In the gospels, Judas is willing to betray Christ for thirty pieces of silver. Bedivere is also willing to disobey his friend and king for a material possession. When Arthur realizes that Bedivere has lied about throwing the sword back into the lake, he asks Bedivere to return and this time, faithfully, to carry out his orders.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ wishes the cup of death could pass from his lips. Even though he knows he will live beyond death and that his death is necessary for God’s plan to work, Christ is also human; he has the same frailties and fears as a human being. Later when Christ is dying on the cross, the crowd assumes he has become confused, particularly when he calls out to God, and they make the mistake of thinking he is calling out to Elijah.

Arthur appears similarly confused the night before his death. He has a difficult time trying to sleep because he knows what the next day will hold, just as Christ was in anguish about his approaching death. After Arthur has been wounded, he again becomes confused. Like Christ, Arthur knows the future. He knows he is the king who will come again, but his human frailties and fears still make him doubtful. In line 348, Arthur says, “I fear it is too late, and I shall die.”

Then in lines 424-6, he remarks, “I am going a long way/With these thou seest if indeed I go/(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt).”

Before Christ leaves his apostles, he tells them, “And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!” (Matthew 28: 20). These are words of comfort from Christ to his apostles, yet because the apostles are only human, they will forever be doubtful while trying to believe.

Christ tells his apostles that he will always be with them, and similarly, Arthur tries to comfort Bedivere by saying he will return to him. Arthur says this even though he claims he has no comfort to give because he is so confused he does not know whether his belief in his returning again is only part of his imagination.

Bedivere fears not having Arthur with him, so he cries:
'Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?

And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,

Among new men, strange faces, other minds.' (l. 395-6, 404-6).

Because Bedivere is only human, he cannot fully grasp that Arthur will come again. At the end of the poem he remains doubtful, as shown through his thought, “He comes again; but—if he come no more—” (l. 451). Then as the barge that carries Arthur to Avalon drifts farther away, Bedivere “saw,/Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,/Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King” (l.463-5). Bedivere can no longer be sure he sees Arthur. Arthur is gone, and with him goes any proof that he ever existed. Bedivere is all that is left to carry on Arthur’s story, and even he remains doubtful concerning the truth of Arthur’s return.

Tennyson had been attracted to the Arthurian legend since he was a boy; however, it was not until the death of his closest friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, that Tennyson decided to write a poem on the death of King Arthur. Hallam’s death in 1833 inspired Tennyson to write “Morte d’Arthur” which appeared in 1842. Later Tennyson renamed the poem “The Passing of Arthur” so it could be incorporated into Idylls of the King.

“The Passing of Arthur” is essentially about upheaval and catastrophe. For Tennyson, the greatest upheaval he ever experienced was Hallam’s death. Tennyson’s experience of such a passing allowed him to understand the Arthurian legend of the doomed king. Through writing “Morte d’Arthur,” Tennyson was creating his own reaction to the death of King Arthur. This reaction was as personal as that he had made to the death of Arthur Henry Hallam because for Tennyson, these two Arthurs were in many ways the same person (Rosenberg 168-9).

As Tennyson depicts King Arthur as a Christ figure, similarly he uses wording in In Memoriam to show that Hallam was also a type of Christ figure. In Stanza CXXIX, Tennyson refers to Hallam as “Known and unknown, human, divine” (l. 5). King Arthur is similarly human, yet he is also divine because he will come again. Tennyson, like Bedivere, also expresses his doubts about his friend’s immortality. Again, this doubt is similar to that of St. Thomas’s doubt about Christ’s resurrection. Just as there are no physical remains to show that Arthur or Christ ever existed or will come again, Tennyson knows there is no assurance that Hallam will have life after death. In In Memoriam, Tennyson, like Bedivere and the apostles, realizes, “We have but faith: we cannot know,/For knowledge is of things we see” (l.21-2). This is one of the major themes of In Memoriam, so important that Tennyson also used the same idea in the opening lines:

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove; (l. 1-4).

Tennyson felt he could still be the “follower” of Hallam by believing in him even after he had died. Similarly, Bedivere was follower and believer in King Arthur, and the apostles followed and believed in Christ.

Hallam is also cast into a role similar to that of Christ and King Arthur because he is personified as having an all-knowing role in the universe. Rosenberg points out that this theme is especially clear in Stanza CXXVII, where Tennyson compares the world in utter chaos and turmoil to Hallam’s state of being: “thou, dear spirit, happy star,/O’erlook’st the tumult from afar,/And smilest, knowing all is well” (l.18-20). Because Hallam is no longer a man, but now immortal, he understands God’s plan for the universe while mankind remains unable to comprehend it. Similarly, while the apostles watched Christ be crucified and could not understand what it meant, Christ knew his death was part of a larger plan. In “The Passing of Arthur,” Arthur knows he will die at Modred’s hand, but he also knows that he is the king who will come again.

Bedivere, however, cannot help being doubtful about Arthur’s return because he has the frailties and fears of a human being.

Another similarity between “The Passing of Arthur” and In Memoriam is the feeling of abandonment. As we have already seen, Bedivere despairs at being left alone in the world. Tennyson has a similar feeling when lamenting that he is no longer with Hallam. In Stanza
XXIII, Tennyson writes:

Now, sometimes in my sorrow shut,
Or breaking into song by fits,

Alone, alone, to where he sits,

The Shadow cloak’d from head to foot (l.1-4)

Tennyson’s breaking into song by fits also recalls the wailing sound made by the Three Queens as they come to carry King Arthur away (l.367-72); it could also be linked up with the sound of the barge as it moved out across the water “like some full-breasted swan/That, fluting a wild carol ere her death, Ruffles her pure cold plume…” (l.434-6).

Another similarity between In Memoriam and “The Passing of Arthur” is that Arthur is carried off on a barge. Hallam died in Switzerland, so in order to have his funeral in England, his body had to be transported over the English Channel. Tennyson, familiar with Arthur’s being carried over the water to Avalon, the holy or magical isle and a type of heavenly home, probably saw a parallel here to Hallam’s being carried over the water to his homeland of England. Tennyson does not often refer to Hallam by his first name in In Memoriam; however, when Hallam’s body is being transported in Stanza IX, Tennyson does call Hallam by his first name of Arthur, probably to bring up the image of King Arthur.

Fair ship, that from the Italian shore
Sailest the placid ocean-plains
With my lost Arthur’s loved remains,

Spread thy full wings, and waft him o’er (IX. 1-4).

Furthermore, the barge that takes Arthur away is personified as a swan. Here, the “Fair ship” spreads its wings, again evoking a swan image.

Throughout In Memoriam, Tennyson also refers to Hallam as a king. Similarly, Christ is often referred to as a king in Christian tradition. In his largely autobiographical work “Merlin and the Gleam” (1889), Tennyson writes of “The King who loved me,/and cannot die….” Rosenberg points out that in this poem, although the king referred to is King Arthur, because the poem is so autobiographical, the line could mean that Hallam was the king who loved Tennyson (168).

As In Memoriam comes to its close, Tennyson believes that Hallam lives on. Before Christ’s ascension into heaven, Christ told his disciples, “And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!” (Matthew 28:20). Similarly at the end of In Memoriam, Tennyson has faith that Hallam is still with him in spirit. Tennyson eloquently expresses this feeling in stanza CXXX:

Thy voice is on the rolling air;
I hear thee where the waters run;
Thou standest in the rising sun,
And in the setting thou art fair.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Far off thou art, but ever nigh;
I have thee still, and I rejoice; (l. 1-4, 13-14).

Tennyson still has Hallam with him, just as Christ remains with the apostles. As “The Passing of Arthur” concludes, Bedivere is left with Arthur’s memory; he must now go out and tell his tale of Arthur to the world, just as the apostles went forth to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. Tennyson realized that Hallam’s death had an emotional effect upon him similar to Bedivere’s loss of Arthur and the apostles’ loss of Christ. Perhaps Tennyson felt that if he wanted to find comfort, he needed to follow their examples. By writing In Memoriam, Tennyson was telling his audience about Hallam, thus keeping Hallam’s memory alive just as Christ and King Arthur have been able to live on through the stories told of them.

The Arthurian legends have continued to endure because they are about real people in situations that everyone can relate to. Tennyson was fully aware of this when he wrote “The Passing of Arthur” and In Memoriam. Like Bedivere, Tennyson had lost the one who was his king, the one who was a Christ figure to him. By realizing that Bedivere and Christ’s apostles were able to go on with life, even using their loss as an advantage to spread their belief systems, Tennyson found the strength to continue with his life. “The Passing of Arthur,” therefore, is a testament to the continual value and relevancy that a centuries old legend can have to modern life. This is why the Arthurian legend endured until Tennyson’s time, and it is why it still endures and enriches our lives today. In all times and in all places, the Arthurian legend has fulfilled the basic need of comforting people by reflecting scenes from real life and granting hope to those who hear it. This same need is what has brought so many people to Christianity. Therefore, it is easy to parallel Christ to Arthur, and to relate these characters to our own personal heroes just as Tennyson did with Hallam.

Works Cited

The Arthurian tradition in the Middle Ages provides two separate versions of Guinevere and Mordred's relationship. Depending upon the text, Guinevere may willingly marry Mordred and act as his accomplice in treason against Arthur, or she may flee from Mordred and lock herself in the Tower of London. Such a vast difference between various tellings of the legend seems extreme; however, these differences represent a division between two separate Arthurian traditions in the Middle Ages.

Maureen Fries states that Arthurian literature is conveniently divided into two mainstreams: the chronicle and romance traditions (“Poem” 30). This division can also be divided on national lines, with the chronicles written by English authors while the romances were primarily of French origin. The English used the Arthurian legend to glorify England's past while the French were interested in the legend as a source for romances.

Corresponding with this division are the separate traditions of whether Guinevere is Mordred's willing accomplice as she is in the chronicles, or if she rejects his proposals of marriage as she does in the romances. My argument is that the romancers could not allow Guinevere to wed Mordred because they had made two important additions to the legend: the introduction of Lancelot and the incestuous birth of Mordred. If Guinevere loved Lancelot, she could not be unfaithful to him by loving Mordred, and if Mordred is Arthur's son, a marriage between Guinevere and Mordred would be incestuous, and therefore, avoided by the romancers. To understand how these differences led to two separate traditions in Arthurian literature, we must begin with Geoffrey of Monmouth's original treatment of Guinevere and Mordred's relationship.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae was completed about 1136. In this work, Arthur goes overseas to fight the Roman emperor, while leaving Mordred as Britain's regent. Mordred is Arthur's nephew, the son of Arthur's sister, and no hint of incest exists to suggest that Mordred is Arthur's son. Only later would the incest motif be added to the legend. While Arthur is away, Mordred attempts to seize the kingdom and to marry Guinevere. Guinevere's contradictory appearances in later texts all stem from this ambiguous scene in Geoffrey. Geoffrey gives no insight into Guinevere's emotions regarding the marriage to Mordred. Therefore, it is unclear whether Guinevere is forced into marriage or willingly weds her husband's nephew.
The differences between French romances and English chronicles becomes significant when

“What is more, this treacherous tyrant was living adulterously and out of wedlock with Queen Guinevere, who had broken the vows of her earlier marriage. About this matter, most noble Duke, Geoffreoy of Monmouth prefers to say nothing (257).”

If Geoffrey had preferred to say more, later Arthurian texts would have been less contradictory, but also perhaps, less rich. Geoffrey then has Arthur return to England to fight Mordred, while Guinevere is in York. When Guinevere learns Mordred is marching into Winchester, “she gave way to despair. She fled from York to the City of the Legions and there, in the church of Julius the Martyr, she took her vows among the nuns, promising to lead a chaste life” (259).

These two passages make it difficult to determine the extent of Guinevere’s guilt. Geoffrey suggests she is guilty by stating that she broke her marriage vows, but Mordred may have forced her into marriage. More complicated is why Guinevere flees and from whom? She cannot be fleeing from Mordred because by going to the City of the Legions (Caerleon), she is moving closer to him. Mordred enters Winchester after Arthur has landed and defeated him at Richborough. Perhaps learning of Arthur’s success is what makes Guinevere fearful. In this case, she may flee to a nunnery as a place of clemency from fear of Arthur’s wrath. Certainly, her going to a nunnery rather than joining Mordred suggests she is more concerned about her own fate than Mordred’s. She might also hope that if Arthur finds her in a nunnery rather than with Mordred, he might believe her innocent. While Geoffrey seems to suggest Guinevere’s guilt, the passages are vague enough to make her motives doubtful. Geoffrey’s successors would seek to clarify this problem.

In 1155, Wace, of Normandy, France, translated Geoffrey’s Latin text into French verse, entitling it Roman de Brut. The name reflects his intent to present the Arthurian stories as romance rather than history. Wace’s translation was not closely tied to the Historia Regum Britanniae, but rather it was a free rendering of the work. Then around 1190, the English writer Layamon decided to render Wace’s book into vernacular English verse under the title Brut. In writing of Arthur in English, Layamon was reclaiming Arthur from the somewhat romantic embellishments Wace had added. Furthermore, because Layamon was English, he sought to glorify English history by molding the British Arthur into a model of the brave and heroic Englishman (Jones xi).

Wace and Layamon both clarified Geoffrey’s ambiguities regarding Guinevere although Wace’s style is more romantic than Layamon’s. Wace predates Chretien’s romances with their notion of courtly love, yet Fries points out that Wace credits Mordred with a type of courtly passion for Guinevere (“Poem” 33).

He had set his heart on Guenevere, his kinswoman, but such a love brought little honour to the queen. Mordred had kept this love close, for easy enough it was to hide, since who would be so bold as to deem that he loved his uncle’s dame? The lady on her side had given her love to a lord of whom much good was spoken; but Mordred was of her husband’s kin! This made the shame more shameworthy (79).

Nevertheless, Arthur is unaware of Mordred’s feelings for the queen, so he leaves Mordred as regent when he travels overseas to fight Rome.

Wace also clarifies Guinevere’s flight from York. “She learned also that Mordred had fled from before the king, because he might not endure against him, and durst not abide in the field” (112). Guinevere suspects Mordred will lose the war. Fearing Arthur, she flees to Caerleon and takes the veil in the convent. “This she did by reason of her exceeding sorrow for her uncle he did treachery” (235). Layamon adds that Mordred and the queen did numerous sorrows to the land, losing their lives and souls as a result (235). Mordred’s evil deeds are again foreshadowed in one of Arthur’s dreams. Arthur dreams he and Gawain are seated on the roof of a hall. Mordred approaches, and with a battle-axe, he destroys the posts holding up the hall, while Guinevere pulls down the roof. Arthur grabs his sword and beheads Mordred, then hacks Guinevere into pieces. When Arthur awakes, a messenger arrives from Britain to tell Arthur of Mordred and Guinevere’s treachery (258-9). The dream clarifies that Guinevere and Mordred’s guilt is equal.

Although Wace and Layamon clarified Guinevere’s guilt, their additions created different treatments of Mordred. Wace suggests that Mordred married Guinevere out of love, while Layamon says it was out of treachery. Furthermore, Wace explains that Mordred has kept his love secret for a long time. This inclusion of love is a looking ahead to the Arthurian romances that would develop in writers such as Chretien de Troyes. Therefore, Wace and Layamon, rather than clarifying the legend, opened up additional complexities, beginning the division between the romance and chronicle traditions in Arthurian literature.

The differences between French romances and English chronicles becomes significant when
Chretien de Troyes introduced Lancelot into Arthurian literature in his late twelfth century romance *Le Chevalier de la Charette*. In the romance, Guinevere is abducted by Meleagant, Prince of Gorre. Lancelot makes his first appearance in Arthurian literature as Guinevere's rescuer and lover. Because Chretien does not mention Mordred, Fries believes Chretien replaces Mordred with Meleagant as the abductor while making Lancelot the lover (“Poem” 40). Such a reworking almost suggests Chretien’s adoption of Layamon’s treacherous Mordred as Meleagant, while Wace’s romantic Mordred becomes Lancelot. Chretien never writes of Mordred or of Arthur’s death because he is more interested in romance than history. However, by creating a lover for Guinevere, Chretien would significantly influence later developments of Mordred and Guinevere’s relationship.

The next work to show major changes in Guinevere’s reactions to Mordred is the *Mort Artu*, part of the Vulgate Cycle and written about 1230-35. The author of this work manipulated the legend in a way which further complicated Mordred and Guinevere’s relationship. The *Mort Artu* author revised the tales of Arthur’s death, so his work would complete the narrative of the earlier works in the cycle, the *Prose Lancelot* and *Quest dei Saint Graal*. However, Chretien had created a great problem for the *Mort Artu* author by adding Lancelot to the legend. Lancelot was so popular, he was the primary character in the cycle the *Mort Artu* was meant to complete, so he could not be omitted from the plot. Therefore, including Lancelot and Guinevere’s love affair into the tale of Arthur’s death created complications. If Guinevere faithfully loved Lancelot, she could not be in love with Mordred. To resolve the difficulty created by Lancelot’s addition to the legend, the *Mort Artu* author found it necessary to make two additions of his own.

First, the author changed the relationship between Arthur and Mordred. In the earlier works, Mordred was Arthur’s nephew, but now, he was turned into Arthur’s bastard son, and even worse, the child of Arthur’s sister, meaning that Arthur had committed incest. Although Arthur is unaware that he sleeps with his own sister, he still commits a sin of lust that must be punished.

The result of lust and incest creates Mordred, who is himself lustful in his desire for his father’s crown and wife. By making Mordred the result of Arthur’s sin, the *Mort Artu* author shows that in Arthur’s sin is created the punishment for that sin (Bruce, *Evolution*, vol. 1, 441).

Secondly, the *Mort Artu* author changed Arthur’s reason for leaving Britain in Mordred’s care. In earlier works, Arthur is on a campaign against Rome. In the *Mort Artu*, Arthur instead goes overseas to fight Lancelot who has committed adultery with Guinevere, and because Gawain desires revenge for the deaths of his brothers, Gareth and Agrivaine, who were slain when Lancelot rescued the queen. During the war, Lancelot returns Guinevere to Arthur, and she is sent back to England. There she is placed in Mordred’s care, while Arthur continues the war because Gawain refuses to stop fighting until he avenges his brothers’ deaths.

Once Guinevere returns to England, Mordred began to solicit her affections. Arthur’s incestuous act was repulsive, but at least it was an act committed unknowingly. The *Mort Artu* author refused to allow Guinevere willingly to commit incest with her husband’s son. Furthermore, if Guinevere truly loved Lancelot, she would not be unfaithful to him by sinning with Mordred. In the *Mort Artu*, Guinevere clearly has no romantic feelings for Mordred when she is left in his safekeeping. “The queen was very angry that she had been given over to his charge because she knew such wickedness and disloyalty in him that she was sure that suffering and ill will would come of it” (156). Mordred, however, seeks not just power but also Guinevere’s love. “Mordred was so often with the queen that he fell in love with her and did not see how he could fail to die of love, if his desires were not satisfied” (160). Mordred’s romantic feelings clearly go back to Wace. Mordred may even be considered sympathetic in his inability to control his love for Guinevere. He attempts to trick her into marriage by forging a letter from Arthur which says the king is dying. In the false letter, Arthur supposedly requests that Mordred marry Guinevere, because “if Lancelot knew she was not married, he would attack you and take her as his wife” (161).

Guinevere and the court believe the letter to be true. However, Guinevere refuses to remarry, saying, “I could never have such a noble husband as I have had” (163). Later, she tells her cousin, Labor, she will not marry Mordred because he is Arthur’s son, and “Even if he were not his son, he is so disloyal that I would not accept him for anything” (164). Labor then helps Guinevere escape to London Tower. The queen, hoping Arthur is not yet dead, then sends a messenger to him on the continent. Of course, Arthur returns, and Mordred and Arthur slay each other in battle.

The *Mort Artu*’s plot would become the standard for most future versions of the legend. Works such as the *Stanzac Morte Arthur* would also contain the Arthur/Guinevere/Lancelot love triangle, Mordred’s incestuous birth, Guinevere’s refusal to marry Mordred, and her locking herself in the Tower of London. What makes the *Stanzac Morte Arthur* important, however, is that it is an English text using the French *Mort Artu* as its source (Benson 2). The author is the first English writer more interested in creating a romance than a chronicle, a sign that even in England the French romantic tradition was becoming accepted as the proper way to tell the Arthurian legend.

However, one other major English text, the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, would follow the chronicle format. The *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, unlike the slightly earlier *Stanzac Morte Arthur*, rejected French additions by returning to the plot of Guinevere willingly marrying Mordred. The author of the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* was familiar with the French texts, but he chose to
The Alliterative Morte Arthure poet, in deleting French romantic additions, primarily reversed the work of the Mort Artu author. He first removed Lancelot as Guinevere’s lover. While Lancelot remains a character in the poem, he is introduced as merely one of Arthur’s “lesse men” (lines 368-81). Mary Hamel believes that this statement early in the poem is the poet’s warning to the reader that the poem will not be concerned with the themes of the French romance tradition (King Arthur’s Death 266). Rather than being Guinevere’s lover, Lancelot is simply one of Arthur’s many knights, who later dies in battle on the Continent. Perhaps the poet’s only reason for even including Lancelot in the poem is to suggest that the romantic tales about Lancelot are not true. Once Lancelot was removed as Guinevere’s lover, Arthur’s reason for leaving Britain could revert back to the original war against Rome.

The poet also deleted Mordred’s incestuous birth by simply omitting to state anywhere in the poem that Mordred is Arthur’s son; therefore, if Guinevere marries Arthur’s nephew, it will not be as vile an act of incest. Two passages suggest that the poet knew the tradition of Mordred’s incestuous birth, but they are too obscure to be definite proof that Mordred is intended as Arthur’s son in the poem. In one passage, the poet refers to Mordred as “Sir Mordred the Malbranche” (line 4174), which Peck says calls attention to Mordred’s lineage as being the “mal” or ill branch of the family, and therefore, it reflects badly on Arthur as Mordred’s progenitor (173). Benson argues that when Gawain, speaking of Mordred’s treason, says, “Of such a engendure full little joy happens” (line 3743), that the word “engendure” might also be referring to Mordred’s incestuous origins (281). However, both passages are too vague to determine that Mordred is Arthur’s bastard son. Peck suggests that the poet only hints at Mordred as Arthur’s son to keep the blood tie obscure because the incest theme would be embarrassing both between Arthur and his sister, and between Guinevere and Mordred (161). However, one might also argue that the poet is again showing, as he did by introducing Lancelot into the poem, that he knows the French romance tradition, but he is refuting it in this work.

Fries remarks that the Alliterative Morte Arthure poet even deleted any traces of romance Wace and Layamon had added (“Poem” 34), but I would argue that the Alliterative Morte Arthure is probably closer to Wace’s poem than any other text. Despite the focus on history rather than romance, as in Wace, Mordred is in love with Guinevere, and she returns his love. Unlike in the Roman de Brut, however, the reader does not immediately know Guinevere loves Mordred although it is clear she respects him. When Arthur leaves England, he tells Guinevere “Sir Mordred, that thou has mikel praised, Shall be thy dictour, my dere, to do what thee likes” (lines 711-2). Only after Arthur is gone will Guinevere’s respect for Mordred turn into love.

Once the poet had removed the obstacles to Guinevere and Mordred’s love, he made some surprising additions to the legend to ensure Guinevere’s love for Mordred and her equal guilt in committing treason. First is Mordred’s objection to being left as regent. He does not want to remain in England when he could win glory through military deeds with the rest of Arthur’s knights. In the Mort Artu, Mordred proposes himself as regent, and in the Stanzaic Morte Arthur, a council of knights proposes Mordred as the best candidate to be regent in Arthur’s absence. However, when Mordred denies a desire for power in the Alliterative Morte Arthure, he appears less suspicious than in earlier works. Nor does the author accuse Mordred of secretly wanting power despite his words, as Layamon alleges by condemning Mordred at the first mention of him.

A more striking addition in the Alliterative Morte Arthure is that Guinevere bears Mordred’s children as a sign of her and Mordred’s love for each other. No other text makes Guinevere the mother of Mordred’s children. Fries remarks that the poet may have been trying to explain the inclusion of Mordred’s sons in the Mort Artu, who attempt to rule the kingdom after Arthur and Mordred are dead, and who are slain by Bors and Lionel (“Poem” 38). Fries overlooks that these sons are also mentioned in Geoffrey of Monmouth, where they are slain by Constantine (262). Oddly enough, in both Geoffrey and the Mort Artu, Mordred’s sons are old enough to bear arms, but the time span of the Alliterative Morte Arthure makes it impossible that Guinevere and Mordred’s sons would be old enough to bear arms immediately after Arthur and Mordred’s deaths. Therefore, in Geoffrey and the Mort Artu, one must suspect that Mordred’s sons have a different mother than Guinevere. To avoid confusion, the Alliterative Morte Arthure poet never mentions Mordred’s children as grown, simply that Guinevere gives birth to them.
Peck argues that the children are only included in the text to verify Guinevere and Mordred's mutual affection (173). Later, when Mordred warns Guinevere to flee with their children to Ireland because Arthur has returned to England (line 3907), it is because of his concern for Guinevere, but also a concern that his heirs will succeed him to create a dynasty. Arthur orders the children slain to destroy this ambition of Mordred's (Fries “Poem” 41).

The final addition the Alliterative Morte Arthure poet makes is to show Guinevere as aggressively committing treason against Arthur by giving Mordred Arthur's sword, Clarent, which she has in her keeping (lines 4196-4208). Guinevere is the only one Arthur trusted with the sword, so when she gives it to Mordred, she is actively betraying Arthur's trust. There is no more traitorous act she could commit than to use Arthur's own sword against him.

Despite all Guinevere's treason, Arthur holds no grudge against Guinevere in the poem. He orders her children by Mordred slain, but says of her, "I forgive all gref, for Cristes love of heven!" If Waynor [Guinevere] have well wrought, well her betide!" (lines 4324-5). Guinevere, however, realizes her own guilt, so she takes the veil (Fries “Women” 31-2). Despite Arthur's forgiveness of Guinevere, the Alliterative Morte Arthure, unlike its many predecessors, leaves no doubt about Guinevere's treasonous involvement with Mordred.

Although Malory was well versed in the French tradition, the Alliterative Morte Arthure and the Stanzaic Morte Arthure are the only English romances we know he read (Benson 3). In compiling the Arthurian legends into Le Morte d'Arthur, Malory used both French romances and English chronicles. Benson argues that Malory had a preference for the English versions, for when composing the final tale of the Le Morte d'Arthur if “the English and French versions differed, he almost always preferred the English version” (3-4). The Stanzaic Morte Arthure is one of the English versions, but because of the French influence upon it, it is more French romance than English chronicle. Because the Le Morte d’Arthur’s ending reflects the Stanzaic Morte Arthur, I believe Malory actually preferred the French version. Therefore, the love triangle of Lancelot/Arthur/Guinevere and Mordred’s incestuous conception were both retained while Guinevere appears innocent of any involvement with Mordred. Malory’s work would become the standard Arthurian tradition for centuries to come, making the romance tradition dominant over the chronicle, and freeing Guinevere from any charges of adultery or treason with Mordred.

**Works Cited**


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