

EPIC AND ROMANCE IN ARTHUR'S BATTLES
WITH THE EMPEROR LUCIUS

by

Penny Staples

A thesis
presented to the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
English

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Abstract

This thesis examines the movement from epic to romance in Middle English Literature by examining three Middle English versions of the tale of King Arthur's battle with the Emperor Lucius. After establishing definitions for epic and romance, the thesis analyzes the Arthurian section of Layamon's Brut (early 13th century), the alliterative Morte Arthure (late 14th century), and Malory's "Noble Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius" (mid to late 15th century).

In the course of the analysis, it becomes clear that some Middle English poets were aware of differences between the kinds of literature this thesis terms "epic" and "romance", and were capable of using both genres consciously. Layamon's Brut is based on the French Roman de Brut, but it is a thoroughly epic work, containing few, if any, identifiable romance elements. The alliterative Morte Arthure has romance elements and episodes, but it, too, remains epic in terms of style, atmosphere and action. Even Malory, who transforms the tale by placing it in a romance world, retains many of the tale's epic details.

Each artist has tight control of his material and the genre(s) he chooses to use; where romance material or characters enter the narrative, they have been consciously and deliberately placed. In the Brut, this control takes the form of avoiding any romance influence possible; the Brut is consciously epic in atmosphere, character and action. The alliterative Morte Arthure poet includes romance material, but he uses it carefully. Placed in the context of an epic world, the 'adventuring of romance becomes inappropriate. The alliterative Morte Arthure becomes an anti-romance through its use of romantic material. In Malory's tale, on the other hand, the epic elements--the realistic motivations of Arthur and his knights, together with a treatment of battle that is grimmer than usual for romance--lend a depth and grandeur to the tale and characters.

Looking chronologically at the works studied here, one can see that romance material takes a progressively larger place in Middle English literature: Layamon's work is completely epic, the alliterative Morte Arthure poet employs romance episodes and characters within an epic setting, and Malory incorporates epic elements into what is essentially a romance world. None of the three works qualifies as good romance according to a definition based on medieval French romance. However, as this study has shown, it is a mistake to assume that the poets were attempting to re-create a French type of romance. Even when using plots taken from French romance, English poets, using romance material in conjunction with epic treatment of motivation and action, were capable of adapting their source-works to suit their own and their audience's preferences. The Middle English romances, influenced by epic, remain more active and more realistically motivated than the French romances.

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Chapter I
Epic and Romance

Any discussion of the tale of Arthur's war with the Emperor Lucius must, at some point, deal with the question of genre--specifically the genres of epic and romance. Layamon, the alliterative Morte Arthure poet, and Malory each develop the tale in different ways, and each version has proven difficult to classify according to genre; opinions differ on whether a particular work is epic or romance, and on whether or not a writer has used either genre consciously. Behind the differing opinions is a controversy involving the definition of epic and romance. W. P. Ker began his 1908 study of the genres with the assertion that 'Epic' has been "a term freely applied to the old school of Germanic narrative poetry [while] . . . the name Romance is given to a number of kinds of medieval narrative by which the epic is succeeded and displaced" (3), but the confusion surrounding the definition of epic and romance continues. Both centre on the deeds of admirable men in battle, and each was the dominant form of popular literature in North-western Europe in its time. Defining the terms, however, can be frustrating: nearly everyone agrees that the two genres differ, but few can agree on what their essential, distinguishing characteristics are, or on which works belong to each genre.

Some pieces are easily categorized: no one, for example, is likely to argue against calling Beowulf epic or Ywain and Gawain romance. Unfortunately, Layamon's Brut, the alliterative Morte Arthure and Malory's "Noble Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius" are not so easily placed; although the tale is epic in origin, some romance elements are clearly present, especially in the work of the alliterative Morte Arthure poet and Malory. With this in mind, it is necessary to clarify the meanings of these terms (in the context of this thesis) before one can intelligently discuss elements of epic and romance in the three works in question, or examine a particular artist's use of the genres.

Of the two, epic is the easier to define; although commonly used now to refer to a type of narrative poetry composed before 1100, the word did not enter English until 1589, at which time it was coined from the Latin epicus to refer to "that kind of narrative poetry which celebrates the achievements of some heroic personage of history or tradition." (O.E.D., s.v. epic). "Hero" is first used in classical antiquity to refer to a man of "superhuman strength, courage or ability, favoured by the gods" and does not appear again until 1586, when it is used to refer to "one who does brave or noble deeds" or "an illustrious warrior" (O.E.D., s.v. hero). In other words, the terms we use to name early Germanic poetry ("epic" or "heroic") did not exist in English until long after poets had stopped composing it.

When the words did enter the language, they were applied to classical Greek and Roman poetry, not to native English narrative, and when critics began to deal with epic poetry in Old English and other Germanic languages, their definitions of the genre were based on Greek and Roman epic. Interest in Germanic epic sprang from an admiration for classical epic: early English narratives called 'epic' were so named for their similarities to the classics, and were at one time valued for such similarities almost exclusively. Ker writes:

In spite of the difference of the climate, it is impossible to mistake the likeness between the Greek and the Northern conceptions of a dignified and reasonable way of life. The magnificence of the Homeric great man is like the magnificence of the Northern lord, in so far as both are equally marked off from the pusillanimity and cheapness of popular morality on the one hand, and from the ostentation of Oriental or chivalrous society on the other. The likeness here is not purely in the historical details, but much more in the spirit that informs the poetry. (11)

He calls Beowulf a "Northern Odyssey", and compares the Battle of Maldon to a scene from the Iliad (11). Ker and others before him had a definition of epic based on classical epic before they ever approached medieval narrative, and were able to choose works to match their definition. The works that happened to fit their definition of epic were epics; the works that did not were excluded.

With all of this in mind, epic can be defined, in general terms, as a particular kind of narrative, based in oral

tradition, which deals with the actions and attitudes of brave men in battle or in situations which lead to or result from battle. Its events are realistically motivated, and its heroes are noble of spirit, brave, loyal, honourable and wise. Epic heroes always face forces apparently more powerful than themselves in the form of larger armies, preternatural creatures (Grendel, for example), or in the form of the gods themselves. It is not uncommon for heroes to die in epic, and each is expected to meet his end with courage and dignity.

Defining romance is a completely different and more complex procedure, as there is no clear definition of medieval romance based on anything external to the medieval period. 'Romance', unlike epic, was a term in use at the time the works were written, and this complicates matters. 'Medieval romance' represents a type of narrative which began to replace epic in the twelfth century, but the shift from one to the other happened at different rates in different places: Snorri Sturluson was writing Old Norse epic in Iceland at approximately the same time that Chrétien de Troyes was writing romance in France.¹ Furthermore, the meaning of the word 'romance' changed during the time period it was used. Originally referring to "the vernacular language of France" and other European Latin-based languages

¹ Snorri Sturluson was actually writing epic slightly after Chrétien had written his romances. Cf. Ker, 248-49 and Comfort's introduction to Arthurian Romances, v-vi.

(O.E.D., s.v. romance), in early twelfth century Europe any narrative written in a vernacular language (particularly French) was considered to be written in romans. However, as Strohm points out, "no sooner did romans come to be used in this way than certain particularizations of its meaning became possible" (2), and romance eventually came to refer to a kind of narrative, written to be read aloud, about the deeds of a single hero.

Another obstacle to clear definition of romance is that late medieval writers were not above calling a work something it was not in order to give it authority. A poet has been known to label the same work as romance, geste and lai (Strohm, 28). Compiling lists of 'romances' based on the medieval works which call themselves and other works romances is dangerous for this reason. Finlayson points out that "romance", when used to refer to medieval narrative, has been extended in meaning to the point that it has become a vague term used to refer to all narrative written after 1100 dealing with aristocrats, combat and love, as well as a term referring to a system of values and to a method of treating plot elements ("Definitions of Middle English Romance", 45). Mehl is of the opinion that "the term romance . . . does not really have any precise and useful meaning" (vii) because the variety of works to which it has been applied is too diverse, and considers rejecting it as a name for a medieval genre because its application has led to the grouping together of works that have very little in common.

In spite of these difficulties, one can formulate a general, modern definition for medieval romance.² Like medieval epic, medieval romance may be defined as a particular kind of narrative dealing with the actions and attitudes of brave men in battle, or in situations leading to or resulting from battle. Unlike epic, however, the events taking place in a romance may not be realistically motivated, and while the heroes of romance are as noble, brave, loyal and honourable as their epic counterparts, these qualities are expressed differently. The foes met by romance heroes are of a different nature than those faced by heroes of epic, and while romance heroes may occasionally die, the death of a hero is much less common than in epic.

These general definitions of epic and romance provide a starting point for a more detailed discussion of the differences between the genres. Any literature is the product of a particular culture; a society creates its literature and its heroes by setting the boundaries which limit their action, and conversely, literature and heroes reflect the values of their society (Bolgar, 120). Epic and romance are the products of two different kinds of cultures, and the poets' treatment of the worlds through which the heroes move is the most telling difference between the two. Medieval

² I base this definition on the French romance as characterized by the works of Chrétien de Troyes because 1) most scholars agree that Chrétien's works are romances, 2) his romances appeared before many of the other works called romances, and 3) Chrétien was a major influence on other romance writers.

romance deals with some of the same situations as epic-- situations in which a hero battles against various enemies are common to both genres--but it treats them differently. The society existing within and behind romance is more highly organized and stratified than the society existing behind epic; actions and ideals are ruled by the code of chivalry, an elaborately polite, civilized and civilizing influence which ritualizes battle and sets standards for polite behavior. It is a genre given to the idealistic presentation of people and situations rather than to realism: romance reveals ideals of behavior and setting. Dorothy Everett points out that the characters are clothed in the latest fashions, and take part in activities popular at the time the work was written:

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. In the romances, everything must be of a gorgeousness to which real life could not attain. (8)

The world of epic focuses on different qualities than the world of romance. Epic, rather than dealing with perfect men in an idealized world, places heroes into a hostile environment.³ Epic heroes are great, but, in the end, only

³ Cf. Levy: In her more anthropological study, Levy defines epic as "a formal composition which has drawn into itself the poetry of past ages through many levels of cultural experience: mythical, legendary, often historical" (13). According to her, epic emerges from a particular set of circumstances, a "period of warfare and wandering, when survival depended upon loyalty, initiative and endurance,

human. Their heroism lies in the fact that they go on striving against impossible odds despite their fallibility and mortality:

Hyge sceal þy heardra, heorte þy cenre
Mod sceal þy mare, þy ure mægen lytlaþ

Courage must be the harder, heart the bolder
Spirit must be the greater, as our strength decreases;

(Battle of Maldon, 312-13)

Bowra comments that:

What differentiates heroic poetry is largely its outlook. It works in conditions determined by special conceptions of manhood and honour. It cannot exist unless men believe that human beings are in themselves sufficient objects of interest and that their chief claim is the pursuit of honour through risk. (4)

In contrast, as Everett comments:

all romance heroes conform to medieval ideals of chivalric conduct. In different periods and in the hands of different writers, these ideas are naturally not precisely the same . . . But the common ideas at the basis of all variations are important enough to prevent the statement from being meaningless (5) . . . in fact, knights did not always act in accordance with the highest conceptions of chivalric conduct . . . But in the romances, the hero is a superman. He does his duty whatever it may cost him (Lybeaus Desconus) and should he fail to do it, he only recovers self-respect and the esteem of his fellows after a long-drawn-out period of misery and penance (Ywain and Gawain). (8)

the weakening of the old ties of a settled society and religion, developed individuality and the ideals of personal freedom in which a man might challenge the gods, to his undoing. This constituted an heroic age, the soil from which epic could spring" (86-87).

Motivating forces also differ. In romance, one often finds a single hero who is responsible for no one's life but his own (or possibly his lady's), and whose own honour is more important than anything else. Although he may embody the beliefs and values of his society, a romance hero is likely to be acting alone for reasons of interest only to himself, or at most one or two others. Romance honour has precise rules which have very little to do with life-or-death situations: Lancelot suffers humiliation as a result of riding in a cart while trying to rescue Guinevere. In risking personal reputation he sacrifices a great deal, yet his humiliation becomes a mark of his devotion to her, and all is forgiven because Lancelot is motivated by love. As Auerbach suggests, the knights of romance, lacking other more realistic motivation for action, tend to devote their lives and reputations to love (123). At times, personal fighting prowess becomes an end in itself. Erec's honour is called into question because he no longer fights in tournaments after his marriage to Enide:

All the knights said it was a great pity and misfortune that such a valiant man as he was wont to be should no longer wish to bear arms. He was blamed so much on all sides by the knights and squires that murmurs reached Enide's ears how that her lord had turned craven about arms and deeds of chivalry. . . (Chrétien de Troyes, Erec et Enide, 32)

Although he has already proven himself to be a good lord, Erec must prove his knighthood by setting out to find and fight everything that comes in his way.

The society providing the backdrop for romance is a given; it functions effortlessly, without internal tension, and the boundary dividing good from evil is always clear. Conflict can be external in the form of evil men or monsters, or internal, in the form of a moral choice a knight must make. Lancelot, for example, must choose between being loyal to his king but not to his lady, or loyal to his lady and disloyal to King Arthur. The creatures--human and otherwise--who oppose the heroes externally simply are; they have no reason for existence other than to plague a hero's life and provide adventure for him.

Epic, too, idealizes certain settings and behaviors, but they are of a different nature than the elegantly elaborate world of romance. Unlike romance, epic seldom isolates the hero, and his actions usually affect those around him a great deal. Beowulf, for example, frees a realm from the ravages of Grendel, and dies killing a dragon that has been terrorizing his kingdom. An epic hero acts within his society, for his society. While epic rules for heroic behavior are just as well-defined as those of romance, the rules of epic are grounded in reality. Epic heroes are responsible for others besides themselves, and they do not fight without reason or provocation. Failure to behave properly in epic will bring not only dishonour, but death. Personal honour is important in both epic and romance, but epic honour is based on loyalty to larger and more realistic causes than romance honour.

The motives behind action are always clear in epic: they have to do with survival in a hostile world. Motives behind the action are less clear in romance, and less likely to be realistic. This is perhaps best illustrated in the reasons epic and romance heroes have for fighting. An epic hero will fight for personal glory and honour, but more often he will fight because of loyalty to his lord, or simply because he must do so to remain alive and free.⁴ In epic, fighting men have a practical function:

a knight setting out on a journey has an office and a place in a politico-historical context, in a social hierarchy. The characters who take part in the action have a function in the real world--the defence of Charlemagne's kingdom against the infidels . . . for example. Such are the political and historical purposes served by the feudal ethos which the knights profess. But in the chivalric romances this ethos serves no practical reality at all: it has become absolute and its only purpose is self-realization. (Gibbs, 5-6)

In romance, a knight's role in society becomes ambiguous, and love becomes an important motivating factor, perhaps, as Auerbach suggests, because of a

complete absence of practical motivation through a political and historical context. Love, being an essential and obligatory ingredient of knightly perfection, functions as a substitute for other possibilities which are lacking. (141)

⁴ Glory-seeking serves a practical purpose in epic: the narrator in Beowulf suggests that a man seek glory so that he will have the respect and support of his people. Cf: Beowulf ll. 18-25.

Morton Bloomfield points out that epic and romance differ in motivation even at a structural level. Both genres are composed of a series of episodes, but in epic, one episode follows another for good reason; "events in Beowulf may be unreal, but they are all properly and rationally motivated and presented within the narrative" (Bloomfield, 102). Grendel could seem to a modern audience to be distinctly unreal, but from the point of view of the narrative, his presence, as a descendant of the cursed race of Cain, and his hostility are properly explained. Similarly, in other epics, "characters may betray immoderation and pride, but they act from explicable motives" (Bloomfield, 103). Romance episodes, on the other hand, tend to be motivated rather poorly. A knight will set off on a quest (because of a challenge or at the request of a lady) and will proceed to have a number of very often unrelated adventures. Other knights appear out of the woods to fight or befriend him (or both); strange creatures and places can appear without warning. In Chrétien's Yvain, for example, Calogrenant tells how he, in search of 'adventure', stumbled onto a road which led him to a strange castle and the magical spring central to the tale:

From the tree I saw the basin hanging, of the finest gold that was ever for sale in any fair. As for the spring, you may take my word that it was boiling like hot water. The stone was of emerald, with holes in it like a cask, and there were four rubies underneath, more radiant and red than is the morning sun . . . (Yvain, translated by W. W. Comfort, 185).

Here is a scenario one will never find in epic. Why is Calogrenant wandering in search of adventure? Knights of romance have little else to do. Where is the spring, who made it, and why does it exist? In romances, places like this spring exist with little explanation: a hero can wander into strange, magical places without knowing why or how he got there.⁵ Used well, as in Yvain or Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the unmotivated episode can be an artistic tool. The castle Gawain comes upon is clearly magical, as are all its inhabitants; their presence, and their reasons for testing Gawain, are never satisfactorily explained in the tale, yet in this case the unexplained and the irrational reinforce the "sense of mystery . . . often inherent in the subject matter of the tale" (Bloomfield, 106). Used poorly, as in The Sgyr of Low Degre, a series of unmotivated, seemingly unrelated episodes becomes confusing and ridiculous.

Thus, epic and romance are reasonably easy to distinguish from one another, as long as one is dealing with early Germanic epic and the romances of Chrétien. The world in Chrétien's romances is consistently less realistic and more idealistic than the rougher, more realistic presentation of the world one finds in epic. Real difficulty in assigning a work to one genre or the other arises in non-French romance. Medieval romance, as has been discussed so far, arose first

⁵ Cf. Auerbach 112-116.

in France, where it is typified by Chrétien's work, and where the audience seems to have been aristocratic. When the genre was introduced to other places by other poets, it developed differently.

There are, for example, glaring differences between English and French romance, many of which arise from the manner in which the romance was introduced to England. Because English romance differs from the French, it has often been considered to consist mostly of poor, clumsy imitations of the more sophisticated French romances. When comparing Chrétien's Yvain to the Middle English Ywain and Gawain, for example, Fichte comments:

Though the English version retains the extrinsic structure of its source, it does not reproduce its meaning, since the author was not fully aware of the profundity of the problems presented and analyzed by Chrétien . . . Such an attitude towards the inherited material is not unique; it is characteristic of the Middle English Arthurian romances as a type . . . (575)

Mehl explains:

As the English poems were mainly approached by way of the French romances and chansons de geste, it was taken for granted that the same criteria could be applied to both and that the English romances were only derivatives of the French--and very inferior ones at that. (1)

The English romances are different from the French; because the romance originated in France, the tendency has been to see the English romances as "shattered fragments of a

foreign tradition, ineffectual in imitation, wrong-headed in innovation" (Barron, 5). The problem, however, is not with English romance, but with its definition.

Epic may have waned in popularity after 1100, but its death was not sudden, and it continued to develop in some Northern countries (notably Iceland) long after it died out in continental Europe. The movement from epic to romance occurred gradually in France and in most other nations, and may eventually have done so in England as well (Daiches, 32). However, romance did not develop gradually in England: its introduction was sudden and reasonably violent. The Norman Conquest led to a situation in which the French-speaking upper classes composed and enjoyed French romances, while the non-French-speaking classes continued to enjoy their poems and songs in English. Epic's popularity did not end with the Norman conquest; it was simply driven underground. The alliterative "revival", as has been recognized for some time, represents a survival of the alliterative tradition (Oakden, 233-34). Epic certainly did not develop in a sophisticated or organized way after the conquest, but it did survive, and when the romances popular among the French-speaking upper classes gradually filtered down into English, the result was a kind of hybrid literature. Epic did not disappear suddenly. Superficially the plots and characters of many English romances resemble those of the French works of which they are "translations", but they have

been influenced by some of the elements of epic style that remained popular among the English. The result is a more active, more practically oriented kind of romance. Epic influence diminished as time went on, but it gave English romance a unique flavour. The medieval English romance differs from the French in that certain epic elements--in particular a preference for realistic motivation and action--never quite lose popularity with the English, and some of the more abstract ideals never become as popular. While one can use French romance to start defining the genre, one must recognize the English romance as a slightly different, although related, genre.

With this in mind, one can trace the development of the romance in English in the Arthur and Lucius tale. There is a gradual shift from Layamon's version of the tale, which is epic, to Malory's version of the tale, which is the most romance-like of the three. Furthermore, close examination of these three works will reveal that each artist had a keen awareness of the way in which he was presenting his material. Rather than being haphazard narratives pieced together by unsophisticated artists in clumsy imitation of French romance, all three works have been carefully crafted. Each writer makes conscious use of the epic and romance elements in his tale.

Chapter II: Layamon and Self-Destructive Epic

Layamon's Brut occupies a peculiar place in English literary history: it does not seem to belong entirely to either Old or Middle English. It exists in a culturally gray area, after the Norman conquest had superimposed a French-speaking upper class on the English people and culture, and before Middle English had asserted itself as a respectable literary language. Baugh and others have noted that the "tradition which he [Layamon] represents is apparently a late one which has left behind some of the older practises and acquired certain new habits in their place" (171). Many would also agree with Noble in naming the Brut as "proof of the Old English poetic tradition in the early Middle English period" (263).¹ There are clear indications in the Brut of

¹ Most critics recognize the Brut's Old English background while pointing out French linguistic and literary influence on the work. Cf.: N.F. Blake, "Rhythmical Alliteration", Modern Philology 67, (1969) 118-24; Daiches, A Critical History of English Literature 2nd ed. 2 Vols. New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1970. I:31-46; H.S. Davies, "Layamon's Similes", RES XI (1960), new series 129-42; D. Everett, "Layamon and the Earliest Middle English Alliterative Verse", Essays on Middle English Literature. ed. Patricia Kean. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955. 23-45; R. S. Loomis, "Layamon's Brut", Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959. 104-11; H. Ringbom, Studies in the Narrative Technique of Beowulf and Layamon's Brut Acta Academiae Aboensis, Ser. A Humaniora. Humanistika Vetenskaper. Socialvetenskaper. Teologi. vol 36 nr 2: Abo Academi. 1968. 58-76; E.G. Stanley, "Layamon's Antiquarian Sentiments" Medium Aevum XXXVIII (1969). 23-37; J.S.P. Tatlock Legendary History of Britain New York: Gordian Press, orig. published 1950, reprinted 1974, 483-531; H.C. Wyld,

the kind of style and language that would develop in early Middle English literature, but at the same time, the work's stylistic and linguistic relationship with older epic and heroic traditions has long been recognized.² Nowhere is this more evident than in Layamon's treatment of his characters: the Arthur and Gawain of Layamon's Brut have been given shape and life by the world of epic. It defines their actions, their strengths and weaknesses; they are nothing like their counterparts in the alliterative Morte Arthure or Malory.

The heroes of Layamon's Brut, like many other aspects of this work, are reminiscent of the heroes of older heroic poetry: they are epic heroes. Layamon's version of the Lucius story begins with feasting and gift-giving (12,225-340). The power relationships are well-defined, as one sees Arthur surrounded by his own retainers and by kings and chieftains who recognize him as king over them:

Arður þe balde king. sat at ane borde.
biuoren him seten kinges. and feole here-ðringes.
biscopes and clærekes. and swiðe ohte cnihtes.
(12,343-45)

"Layamon as an English Poet" RES VI, (1930), 1-30.

² For a discussion of stylistic and linguistic elements in the Lucius section of Layamon's Brut, please refer to Appendix I: "Layamon's Brut and the Old English Poetic Tradition".

The atmosphere is that of an Anglo-Saxon hall rather than of a high medieval court.

The heroes of this work, unlike the heroes of romance, have a practical function in the organization and power structure of the kingdom. Even secondary characters are important: at the council at which Arthur discusses how to respond to the demand from Rome, Cadur stands up to speak as "þe eorl swiðe riche ær" (12,426), and Howel, "hext of Bruttaine" (12,566) tells Arthur:

Mi lond ich wulle sette. to wedde for seoluere.
and alle þe æhten of mine londe. for seoluere
and for golde.
and swa we scullen uaren to Rome. & slan Lucas
þene kaisere.
& bi-tellen þine irihten. I þe lede ten þusend
cnihtes.

(12,562-65)

Howel and the others are powerful in their own right, and the lands they pledge are their own. They tend to be practically motivated: that Howel is the first to pledge support to Arthur's campaign is no coincidence. As Duke of Brittany, his lands stand to suffer first from any attack from Lucius.

Arthur's actions are also realistically motivated. He exists, not in a realm which readily accepts him as king simply because he is Arthur, but in a rough world where men act for reasons of their own and where a leader will remain in power only as long as he can command respect and obedience. As leader, Arthur commands these responses; he is an

epic warrior- king, a powerful, threatening man who is loved and respected, but feared. Arthur concerns himself with power: he has an acute awareness both of his own obligations as king, and of the service owed him by his allies and retainers. Existing in a world where the control of his kingdom cannot be taken for granted, he must maintain the power relationships as they are or risk losing control of his realm.

The opening scenes of the Lucius section of the Brut illustrate this very well. The messengers from Rome disrupt Arthur's court with a message which openly insults and challenges Arthur's power. In return, Arthur must react strongly, but when his own men threaten to kill the messengers in response, he stops them:

ber weoren men Romanisce. reouliche ato3ene.
3if Arður ne leope to. swulc hit a liun weore.
(12,399-400)

He will not allow the messengers to be mistreated, saying, in effect, that they are only obeying their lord (12,401-410). This small episode reveals two important aspects of Arthur's character as king. First, Arthur is fair and just; he can be forceful without being rash or hasty--important qualities in a king. In defending the messengers, Arthur also shows that he values loyalty and good service: the messengers are behaving as loyal retainers should, and he rewards them by treating them well. Second, and most important, Arthur keeps control of his own

retainers and court. Without the control of a strong king, particularly in view of the threat just offered, a court like his could easily become anarchic.

The council in the tower shows again Arthur's concern for maintaining control of his kingdom. He is an able politician. When they first meet, his council cannot agree on how best to deal with the ultimatum from Rome, as the exchange between Cador and Gawain reveals. In the world Layamon presents, Cador, Gawain, Howel, King Angel of Scotland and the other councillors are, in themselves, powerful men. If some of them were to ally against Arthur, or refuse to give him aid, Arthur could do very little to force them to act differently, given the current situation with Rome. If he is to maintain control, he cannot risk ordering his allies and retainers to help him make war on Lucius: he must convince them to lend their willing aid. Arthur allows Cador and Gawain to speak, but then breaks in before the argument can grow more heated, and before any others can take sides.

His speech is a political masterpiece, carefully crafted to manipulate his allies into making the same decision that he has already made. He begins, not by announcing his intentions, but by reminding the assembly who they are, and who he is:

Mine eorles mine beornes. balde mine þeines.
mine duhti men. min freond deoren.
þurh eou ich habbe biwunnen. vnder þere sunnen.
þat ich æm swiðe riche mon. reh wið mine feonden.
golde ich habbe and gærsume. gumenen ich æm ælder.

no biwan ich hit noht ane. ah dude we alle clæne.
(12,465-70)

Arthur establishes himself as lord and treasure-giver, and reminds those assembled that they are all his men, and that with their help he has defeated all enemies. Then, by magnanimously admitting "no biwan ich hit noht ane", he turns his weakness into a strength. He glorifies his allies, reminds them of past victories together and of what has happened to Arthur's enemies in the past (perhaps a veiled threat). His speech also reminds certain individuals that they are in power because he has placed them there.³ However, by indicating that he recognizes and appreciates their abilities and the support they have given him in the past, Arthur ensures a favourable hearing from his councillors. Having put his listeners into a receptive frame of mind and established his own position, Arthur argues for an attack on Lucius: he begins by making an historical claim for his right to govern the lands he has captured. His final argument, however, comes down to:

He wilneð al. and ich wilni al. þæt wit beine aʒæð.
habben hit nu and aʒe. þe hit æð mæʒen iwinne.
(12,531-32)

The moments following Arthur's speech are crucial: there is still dissention, and there are still those who are against going to war (12,537-40). Success for Arthur comes only

³ Lot and Angel, for example, have been placed in power by Arthur. Cf. Layamon's Brut ll. 11,049-11,080.

when Howel (who has his own reasons for wanting to make war on Lucius), and several other powerful allies, pledge their support.

Arthur maintains control through careful political maneuvering, but he also controls those around him by inspiring fear, awe and respect. Arthur is an impressive man on a personal level. In council, "ne durste þer na man speken. leste þe king hit wolde awreken" (12,425). On board ship on the way to Barbe-fleot, none dare question the king about his dream:

þa þe king him awoc. swiðe he wes idræcched.
and granen agon. ludere stefenan.
Næs þer nan swa þriste. cniht under Criste.
þat durste þene king fræine. of his fare-coste.
ær þe king him-seolf speke. and spilede wið his
beornen þere.

(12,754-58)

Only the very powerful, kings in their own right, dare address him. After hearing of the dream:

Ne durste þer na cniht. to ufele ræcchen na wiht.
leoste he sculde leosen. his leomen þat weoren him
deore.

(12,792-93)

Before the battle with Lucius, the narrator comments:

Alle Brut-leoden. luueden Arðuren.
alle heom stod him æie to. þat wuneden a þan ærde.
swa dude þan kaisere. of Arðure he hafde muchele kare.
and alle Rome-leoden. of Arðure weoren a-færde.

(13,526-29)

Often the major difference between Arthur's enemies and Arthur's friends is that his enemies fear him more than his friends do.

The opening scenes of the Lucius episode establish Arthur as a powerful and very capable king, but they also show his vulnerability: he is only powerful as long as he controls his allies and retainers, and he can only really control them if they support him willingly. In the end, his downfall results from the betrayal of one of these allies--a trusted kinsman and retainer. Layamon reveals this situation realistically; Arthur is a king with an awareness of his responsibilities and fallibility.

This is further revealed at Mount St. Michael, where Arthur is asked to stop a giant who has carried off Howel's daughter. Unlike later redactions of this tale, the appeal to Arthur in the Brut is made on behalf of the entire land rather than for the sake of one woman:

al þis lond he wule for-fare. buten þu afeollen
ure kare.
lond and þas leode. a þe is ure neode.

(12,818-19)

It is important for Arthur to try to rescue the daughter of one of his most powerful allies, but more important is the plea for him to rescue the land. If the country and people are to help Arthur, he must fulfill his duty to them as protector.

The episode with the giant highlights Arthur's abilities as leader and as warrior. In contrast to later, more romantic, versions of this episode, Arthur's battle with the giant is a small military expedition rather than a romantic quest. He sets out secretly at night with Kay and Bedivere, but they take "sweines sixe"--six soldiers to help them. Taking no unnecessary risks, all nine go to check the first of the two fires. Arthur then sends Bedivere to the other fire with instructions to locate the giant, if possible, and return. Arthur reserves the honour and danger of fighting the giant for himself, yet after proving his battle-prowess in defeating him, Arthur does not bother killing the giant with his own hands. Having fulfilled his duties in defeating the giant, he has Bedivere cut the head off. It is important that Arthur show his ability to fight in this episode because later, in the battle against Lucius, he has no active role. He commands from behind the battle lines and news of Lucius' defeat is brought to him in his tent. His battle with the giant proves that he is a mighty warrior as well as a responsible ruler, but staying out of the battle with Lucius proves Arthur to be a king realistic enough to know that he can be killed.

Arthur, then, is presented by Layamon as a capable king in a world in which people and events are rationally motivated. He rules because he is a man who knows how to rule well and maintain control. Impressive on both public and

personal levels, Arthur inspires respect, awe and fear in those around him, but at the same time has established himself as a generous lord, a gold-giver, one who rewards good service well. Even messengers from an enemy are treated honourably and gifted magnificently. Arthur is also admirable for his wisdom. He knows how to control his court and his allies, and he knows his own obligations as well as what he can expect from his thanes in return. Arthur knows precisely what he can demand and expect to get, and what he must request rather than order: he recognizes the political importance of a consensus. Furthermore, he shows himself to be fair and just, putting the kingdom's best interests before personal interests: Arthur chooses to attack Lucius, not because he likes war (like Cador), but because he recognizes the situation as one which must come to battle at some point, and he chooses to fight on his own terms. He takes no unnecessary risks: Arthur is Britain, but he is also a man who can be killed.

The realistic rules governing the epic world determine the dynamics of the tale. Given the heroic tradition, there is only one way for Arthur to react to the message from Rome: his authority has been challenged and he must defend it in order to maintain control. If he cannot keep control he faces defeat from without, in the person of Lucius, or from within, in the form of civil war. However, the fear and awe he must inspire has its price: Arthur must show no

weakness. Throughout the campaign against Lucius, Arthur's emotional reactions are carefully impersonal and controlled. His only response to the skirmish after Gawain's message to the Romans is to tell the prisoners that they will be sent to Paris, although he had been concerned enough about the welfare of his messengers to send scouts to look for them and reinforcements to support them (13,278 ff.). When Kay and Bedivere, two of his most beloved retainers and companions, are killed, the narrator tells us "Wa wes Arðure kinge. for þa tidinge." (13,771), but there is no expression of emotion. His outward reaction to the news of Guinevere's and Modred's betrayal is vengeful: "Moddred ich wulle s₁lan. & þa quen for-berne" (14,065), but earlier, his private reaction to his dream had revealed his affection for Guinevere: "wale þat ich nabbe here. Wenhauer mine quene." (14,021). Arthur's men swear vengeance before he does (14,052-59); if he is to keep their respect, the only way Arthur can react is with vengeance. He really has very little personal freedom. In fact, Arthur expresses emotion only after the death of Gawain:

Ða wes Arður særi. & sorhful an heorte for-þi.
 & þas word bo₁d₁ode. ri<c>chest alre Brutte.
 Nu ich ileosed habbe. mine sweines leofe.
 Ich wuste bi mine sweuene. whæt sorzen me
 weoren zeuede.
 i-slazen is Angel þe king. þe wes min azen deorling.
 & Walwaine <mi> suster sune. wa is me þat ich
 was mon iboren.

(14,142-47)

However, even at this point, Arthur's is the sorrow of a strong-willed man, one who shows no weakness. Only certain emotions are acceptable.

This Gawain over whom Arthur mourns is one of the king's closest kinsmen and most powerful retainers, and a major character in the Brut. He is completely admirable: wise, brave, loyal and ferocious in battle, Gawain has all of the qualities of an epic hero, and because he is not king, has a freedom to speak and act that Arthur lacks. Heroic tradition demands certain actions that Arthur cannot, as a wise and responsible king, perform. In many cases, Gawain acts as a double for Arthur in order to highlight the personal heroism that Arthur possesses but cannot always show. The two are close in kinship: Gawain is Arthur's "deoreste mæi" (13,098), one whom he trusts unquestioningly. Indeed, the narrator at one point names him "þe alre treoweste gume. þe tuhte to þan hirede." (12,720).

We first see Gawain at Arthur's council, where he speaks angrily to Cador, who has spoken praising war:

Cador þu ært a riche mon. þine ræddes ne beo[ð]
noht idon.
for god is grid. and god is frið. þe freoliche þer
haldeð wið.

(12,454-55)

In epic, war is evil but inevitable: Gawain speaks with a practical wisdom, objecting to the praise of war, and pointing out, realistically, that people are happier without it:

for grid maked godne mon. gode workes wurchen.

for alle monnen bið þa bet. þat lond bið þa murgre.
(12,457-58)

Gawain voices the opinion that Arthur cannot express because he is about to lead his people into a war. However, a king must be concerned with his peoples' welfare, and Gawain gives this concern a voice.

Once on the continent, it is Gawain who is sent with the message to Emperor Lucius. He is chosen for his close relationship with and loyalty to Arthur, but also for his education:

þe et þe king cleopede Walwæin. þe wes his
deoreste mæi.
for Walwain cuðe Romanisc. Walwain cuðe Bruttisc.
he wes iued inne Rome. wel-feole wintre.
(13,098-100)

Thus, as messenger, Gawain speaks eloquently, behaving as a loyal retainer should. He repeats Arthur's arguments and claims to the Emperor, and, even when angry, does not stoop to insult:

He is ure lauerd. we beoð his leod-kempen.
He us hæhte suggen. soð to þe seoluen.
if þu nult a en bu en. þi bone he wule iwurden.
(13,168-70)

He becomes Arthur's voice to the Romans: Gawain repeats Arthur's words and mirrors Arthur's anger at the insults the Romans offer. When he attacks the Emperor's kinsman, he does so because of anger at an insult to British honour:

þa sæt bi þan kaisere. a cniht of his cunne.
Quencelin ihaten. hæh mon inne Rome.

þes cniht andswarede. biuoren þan kaisere.
 & þus him seide. þe cniht was unisele.
 Cnihtes fareð eou aʒæin. and cudeð eower kinge.
 Bruttes beoþ bolde; a;c; heo beoð unwræste italde.
 for æuere heo ʒelp makieþ. heore monscipe is luttel.
 (13,196-13,202)

Gawain's attack is made comprehensible, even noble, because his anger is on behalf of Arthur. His attack on Quencelin represents Arthur's attack on Lucius.

In the battles which follow the message to the Emperor, Gawain fights well personally, and leads men very capably. He is the first to turn to face the pursuing Romans after he has slain Quencelin (13,235 ff.), and is a key figure in the battle which then takes place. During the climactic battle against Lucius' forces, it is he who defends and avenges the fallen because Arthur must command from behind the lines. In this battle, Gawain takes Arthur's place in facing Lucius in single combat, where the Emperor hopes to kill him "þat he miht an uuere daze. ʒelpen uor þere deden." (13,873). Lucius is only saved, it is made clear, by the intervention of his own people.

Later, Arthur says of his prophetic dream: "and Walwain sat biuoren me. mi sweord he bar an honde." (13,987). Gawain becomes an expression of Arthur's personal might and strength. The breaking of Gawain's arms in the dream signifies the breaking of Arthur's worldly power--when they land in Britain, it is Gawain who goes first to clear the way and die instead of and in place of Arthur. Slain early in the attempt to defeat Modred, Gawain dies like an epic hero:

Walwain bi-foren wende. and þene wæi rumde.
 & sloh þer a-neuste. þeines elleouene.
 he sloh Childeriches sune. þe was þer mid his
 fader icume.
 To reste eode þa sunne. wæ wes þa monnen.
 Per wes Walwain a-slæþe. & idon of life-dæþe.
 þurh an eorl Sexisne. særi wurde his saule.
 (14,136-41)

Modred, too, is a projection of Arthur. As Gawain's brother, he also is a close kinsman of Arthur's, and a trusted retainer. Where Gawain represents the completely admirable side of the heroic ethic, Modred represents the dark, treacherous side. Although the dark side is not always evident in Arthur, both sides exist within him. Why, for example, did he move into Lucius' territories in the first place? Modred wants power, more power than he already has: in seizing that power in Arthur's absence, he mirrors Arthur's behavior in seizing Lucius' and other kings' territories. Arthur defeats Modred, but in the process Gawain dies. One is perhaps faced with the destruction of the heroic tradition in the form of Arthur's self-destruction. The two sides of the heroic world destroy one another. With both Gawain and Modred gone, Arthur must also go.

In Layamon's Brut, one can find a thoroughly epic version of the Arthur and Lucius tale. The characters and situations in Layamon's treatment of the story are epic, as are the characters' reactions to situations: all is well

⁴ It is interesting to note that Modred and Gawain do not appear in Layamon's Brut until after Arthur begins to conquer nearby lands simply because he wants them. Cf.: 11,080-84.

motivated within the framework of the tale. Arthur's society is a dangerous one in which power is carefully balanced, and Arthur is the kind of king he must be in order to control that balance of power; he has no choice other than to act as he does. It is, unfortunately for Arthur, a precarious balance: his rule is brought down in typically epic fashion when Modred, a trusted kinsman and dark projection of Arthur, seizes power in Arthur's absence. Keeping control of his kingdom means taking power from others, and in return, being subject to attack from those wishing to have that power. Epic encompasses the treachery and power-seeking one finds in Modred as well as the more admirable qualities represented in Gawain. In living in a world defined by epic, Arthur is doomed. Layamon maintains careful control of genre throughout the Arthur and Lucius episode: he writes an epic which reveals the destructiveness of the epic world and lifestyle.

Chapter III

The Alliterative Morte Arthure as Anti-Romance.

The alliterative Morte Arthure tells again the tale of King Arthur's war with Lucius, and while the basic elements of the tale remain epic, the poet also uses romance material to affect drastically the way in which he presents the major characters and their activities. While the alliteration and style reveal that certain pre-conquest literary practices survive in this poem despite French influence, there are significant differences between this tale and its earlier versions: the poet includes passages and episodes never previously associated with the Arthur and Lucius story. He has used a mixture of epic and romance elements to give this particular rendition of the Arthur and Lucius tale a unique focus. As a result, the Lancelot, Gawain and Arthur of the Morte Arthure are unlike their counterparts in other Arthurian tales.

The Morte Arthure is one of the most important works of the alliterative 'revival' that produced a number of alliterative poems in fourteenth century England. While the movement seemed to happen suddenly, it is generally agreed that fourteenth century alliterative poetry represents part of a "continuous interest in alliterative verse" (Everett, 46), rather than a revival, and that:

alliterative poetry continued to be composed on a considerable scale from generation to generation without a break, and that the features in fourteenth-century verse that appear to be new to the alliterative tradition were adapted gradually, to meet the demands of new subjects and new tastes. (Everett, 46)

Although at one time considered by many to be a Middle English romance, most scholars now recognize the Morte Arthure as an epic tale to which romance episodes have been added.¹ The essential elements, as one may find them in Layamon's Brut or other earlier versions of the tale, remain unchanged.²

Although influenced by French terminology (Everett, 47; Matthews, 181), and enlarged by romance material, this alliterative poem retains its identity as a predominantly

¹ Some critics continue to consider the alliterative Morte Arthure as romance. Cf: Kathryn Hume, "The Formal Nature of Middle English Romance", Philological Quarterly 53 (1974), 158-80.; D. A. Lawton, "The Unity of Middle English Alliterative Poetry", Speculum 58 (1983), 72-94; L. W. Patterson, "The Historiography of Romance and the Alliterative Morte Arthure", JMRS 13 (1983), 1-32; J. Stevens, Medieval Romance Themes and Approaches, New York: W. W. Norton and Co. Inc., 1974. Most others recognize the Morte Arthure as an heroic tale to which romance elements have been added. Cf: W. R. J. Barron "Arthurian Romance: Traces of an English Tradition", English Studies 61 (1980), 2-23; L. D. Benson, "The Alliterative Morte Arthure and Medieval Tragedy", TSL 11 (1966), 75-87; J. L. Boren, "Narrative Design in the Alliterative Morte Arthure", Philological Quarterly 56 (1977), 310-19; D. Everett, "The Alliterative Revival", Essays on Middle English Literature, ed. Patricia Kean, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966, 46-67; J. Finlayson, "Rhetorical 'Descriptio' of Place in the alliterative Morte Arthure", Modern Philology LXI (1963), 1-11; J. Gardner, alliterative Morte Arthure Notes in The Alliterative Morte Arthure, The Owl and the Nightengale, and Five Other Middle English Poems. Southern Illinois University Press: Feffer and Simons Inc. 1971, 239-256; J. D. Johnson, "'The Hero on the Beach' in the

English heroic work. Stevens, who reads the work as romance, correctly identifies Arthur as the central figure of the Morte Arthure and representative of his society's values (91-92); however, representing his society's values does not necessarily make Arthur a romance hero. Beowulf also represents the values of his society; heroes, both of epic and of romance, characteristically represent the values of a particular society (Bolgar, 120). The Morte Arthure is epic, for the most part, in its treatment of heroes and action. Heroism is central to this work, and, with the exception of a few episodes, the heroes of this poem act together within their society. They are men leading other men into battles where many die, not knights vaguely seeking adventure or fighting in tourneys. Love is not a motivating force in

Alliterative Morte Arthure ", NM 76 (1975), 271-81.

² The tale begins with a great feast, during which messengers from Rome arrive with a message from Lucius which directly challenges Arthur's authority to rule. After taking council, Arthur sails for France with an army, and has a prophetic dream of a battle between a dragon and a bear along the way. Upon arriving in France, Arthur defeats the giant of Mount St. Michael. Next, Gawain delivers Arthur's message to Lucius and sparks a battle by killing the Emperor's kinsman. The British win this battle against a larger Roman army. A party of British knights are then ambushed as they escort the prisoners to Paris, but once again, they win against a larger force of Romans, although Arthur then scolds the leaders for taking the risk of battle. In the final battle with the Romans, Lucius and his army are soundly defeated, but Kay and Bedivere die. Arthur then makes plans for further travel and conquest, but a second prophetic dream signals his fall. He receives news from Britain of Modred's treachery, and returns home with his army to fight a series of battles against Modred and his forces. Modred is killed and his army defeated, but in the process Gawain and most of Arthur's knights are killed. Arthur, mortally wounded, names an heir and disappears.

this poem. There are also, as Everett points out, echoes of Old English heroic poetry:

In all that concerns the relations between Arthur and his knights, resemblances to Old English poetry are striking. The knights, some of them Arthur's kinsmen, and all of them ready to boast of their high lineage, are councillors as well as warriors. . . . Of the gentler virtues comprised under the term 'courtesy', he and his knights show little trace, however, in spite of the opening description of them as "Kynde men and courtays and couthe of courte thews". (62-63)

Benson also comments:

To read the alliterative Morte Arthure is to see Arthur in another light altogether, a harsher, stronger light, undimmed by the chivalric mist in which the romancers enclosed him. This is an Arthur who is pre-eminently heroic . . . the poem seems in many ways closer to Old English heroic verse than to romantic tales of Arthur . . . as in the older heroic poetry, the principal concerns are feasting and fighting, the tone is serious, relieved by occasional touches of grimly ironic humour . . . and the outcome is a defeat . . . Furthermore, Arthur's motives are those of an Anglo-Saxon hero--conquest, revenge, generosity to his friends, and implacable hatred to his foes. (75-76)

In spite of its similarities with older poetry, the alliterative Morte Arthure is also very much a product of its own age. It is not the poetry of Old English, or even a conscious effort to recapture older poetic styles: the Morte Arthure reflects contemporary ideas and attitudes as well as older epic ideals. Benson points out that "Arthur is too clearly a fourteenth-century king to fit into the fictional past of romance or the heroic past of epic. . ." (78). As

well, Keiser suggests that the portrait of Arthur at the beginning of the poem and his treatment of the messengers "is exactly what we should expect from a king or prince in his circumstances in the fourteenth century, at least in a fictional representation" (136). The poet "looks away from romance to medieval life itself" (Benson, 77), and it is the use of these realistic contemporary details that helps characterize the Morte Arthure as epic. The poem's action has clear social and political purpose: Arthur prepares for war in response to a military threat from Lucius. The men at his council are perhaps less autonomous than their counterparts in Layamon's Brut, but each is nonetheless powerful in his own right and has lands and men for whom he is responsible. Matthews comments:

The society he [the poet] describes existed theoretically eight centuries earlier, but he invests it with the values and habits of his own time: his representation of kingship, loyalty, war, arms, shipping, empire, agrees with the ideas of the fourteenth century . . . If at times the poet does call to mind Beowulf or the Battle of Maldon, it is because some concepts are basic to the literary expression of heroic warfare. (97)

Contemporary setting in terms of styles of rule and warfare intensifies the sense of verisimilitude fostered by the poet's treatment of motivation.

The realistic treatment of certain topics (war, warriors) is common to epic, but it does not, in itself, make epic. Epic consists of a particular attitude toward this

kind of material, and it is this attitude toward Arthur's battles with Lucius to which Everett and Benson have responded in comparing the Morte Arthure to Old English poetry. The details of the war have been made contemporary, but the poet's attitude toward these details remains epic: his concern for contemporary realism in fact contributes to the epic spirit of the poem.

Like the Arthurian section of Layamon's Brut, the alliterative Morte Arthure is, in many ways, epic; however, it is of a different nature than traditional Germanic epic. The poet changes the focus of the poem with the addition of romance material that has become the centre of a great deal of discussion and confusion. While some of the changes caused by the added material seem quite minor and insignificant, others are major and striking: all serve to characterize and re-define both the characters and the purpose of the poem. The romance material focuses one's attention on the way in which the characters behave in making war: all of the characters behave heroically, but the poet makes a careful distinction between epic and romance heroism. The effects of the poet's use of romance within epic can best be seen in an examination of three key figures: Lancelot, Gawain and Arthur. His development and use of these characters may well be an important indication of what he was trying to accomplish with this poem.

Although a minor figure in terms of his importance within the action of the Morte Arthure, Lancelot is a major addition in terms of who he is and what he represents. His role in the Morte Arthure is clearly a small one, but it is interesting that he is present at all in a work so based in epic tradition. As a hero from French romance, Lancelot would normally represent values associated with the romances in which he is the soul of chivalric virtue, honour, and courtesy.³ In the romance tradition, Lancelot is admirable as the embodiment of a set of abstract values: he has no practical, tangible existence. Chretien's Lancelot, for example, is the greatest knight in the world, but is not responsible for either land or men; his sole motivation for doing anything, it seems, is love for his lady. His major interests are love and personal reputation, and only for the sake of his lady will he compromise that reputation.

The Lancelot of the Morte Arthure, on the other hand, is portrayed realistically, in a manner more in keeping with epic literature than romance. As in romance, he becomes a model for behavior, but he becomes a model of epic rather than romantic heroism (in so far as he appears). He is mentioned just six times in the poem: at the council in the Giant's tower, he is included as one of the "lesse men" (l. 370), but he clearly has lands and men of his own.⁴ He

³ Cf: Chretien's "Le Chevalier de la Charette"

⁴ See ll. 370, 1720, 1999, 2073, 3638, and 4266.

offers "sex score helmes" to Arthur's aid (l. 380), and later, he is included in the battle with Lucius, where he and Lott lead part of Arthur's army (l. 1999). Although Lancelot kills Sir Lucius "the lorde" (as opposed to Emperor), he does so as part of an army (l. 2073): there can be individual heroism in epic battle, but not the kind one finds in the single combat of medieval romance. Lancelot fights in the defense of Arthur's realm against real enemies, not for the sake of personal honour or the honour of a lady against individual villains. Lives and possessions are at stake as well as honour, and the heroes are both fallible and mortal. In the end, one finds Lancelot dead with many others on the field after the final battle with Modred.

To a certain extent, Gawain plays the same role in the Morte Arthure as he does in older versions of the tale, in which he is a figure of major importance; here, however, he is not as important or as admirable. Although the Gawain of the Morte Arthure does many of the same things as the Gawain of Layamon's Brut, he functions differently. Layamon's Gawain attends Arthur's council, where his opinions hold weight, and Arthur chooses him to deliver a message to the Roman camp because he is educated and trustworthy.⁵ Layamon's Gawain speaks well, and does not stoop to low insult, even after having been goaded by Arthur's younger retainers. He attacks the Emperor's kinsman only after an insult to

⁵ See Chapter II.

Arthur and British honour. Epic heroes are expected to be wise and trustworthy as well as competent in battle, and the Gawain of Layamon's Brut fulfills these criteria. The Gawain of the alliterative Morte Arthure, on the other hand, leads Guinevere into the feast (l. 233) but has no place at the council in the Giant's Tower. Arthur sends him to deliver a message to Lucius, but Sir Boice is put in charge of the group (l. 1263-65). Gawain is less eloquent and more openly insulting in delivering the message than is Layamon's Gawain; he cuts off the Emperors's kinsman's head in response to a personal insult:

Thane answers sir Gayous full gobbede wordes--
 Was eme to be emperour and erle him selfen--
 'Euere ware þes Bretouns braggers of olde.
 Loo! how he brawles hym for hys bryghte wedes,
 As he myghte bryghten vs all with his brand riche!
 3itt he berkes myche boste 3one boy þere he standes.'
 Than greuyde sir Gawayne at his grett wordes,
 Graythes towarde þe gome with grucchande herte;
 With hys stelyn brande he strykes of hys heuede.
 l. 1346-54

In the Brut, Layamon makes clear to us that the Emperor's kinsman is an evil knight. Here, he is an "erle hym selfen", an important man (making Gawain's attack even less excusable). Gawain's violent reaction to personal insult shows no wisdom, no thought; his response, in fact, shows remarkably poor manners by epic standards. The kind of insult the Emperor's kinsman has offered Gawain calls for a verbal response of the kind one finds in the flyting match between Beowulf and Unferth. By resorting to a physical

rather than a verbal attack, Gawain shows the truth of Quencelin's words and precipitates unnecessary battle by reacting violently to an insult to his own, personal honour. Thus, he characterizes himself here and throughout the poem as a rash and somewhat foolish man, one given to acting without considering the consequences.

This episode illustrates the poet's use of romance to question the basis of honour and heroism in the Morte Arthure. In another instance, although Lancelot himself is presented as an epic warrior, his romance reputation becomes an ironic comment on the place of romance heroism in a realistic situation. When taking prisoners to Paris, Cador refuses to retreat from ambush, saying:

Sir Lancelott sall neuer laughe þat with þe kyng
lengez,
That I sulde lette my waye for lede appon erthe!
(l. 1720-21)

For the sake of personal honour, Cador chooses to lead the men for whom he is responsible against a much larger enemy force. Cador's forces win, but in the process, many of the freshly-dubbed knights die (ll. 1738-45; 1824-29). Arthur rightly rebukes Cador:

Kowardely thow castez owtte all my beste knyghttez;
To putte men in perille it es no pryce holden,
(l. 1923-24)

It is not uncommon in epic for a small group of warriors to be forced by circumstance to fight a larger and more

powerful group of warriors; however, it is not common for a leader to choose to have his men fight a much larger force because of his fears about his personal reputation in the eyes of one of his peers. Romance concern for personal honour has no place in epic battle; Cadur risks the lives of all of his men in fighting to save his reputation from Lancelot's laughter. Similarly, when Gawain precipitates unnecessary battle in response to Quencelin's insult, he risks not only his own life, but the lives of all those with him, and by extension the success of the whole campaign. Sir Florent, in advising Gawain against battle in the foraging episode; Sir Wycharde, in advising Arthur against immediate battle with Modred; and Sir Idrous, in refusing to leave Arthur's side even when his fathers' life is at risk, all serve as foils to those around them who behave more rashly. These are men who function as epic heroes in the Morte Arthure: each is willing to sacrifice private honour for the good of his lord. By placing the sort of behavior in which a character will risk everything for the sake of personal honour into the context of a defensive war, the poet questions the validity of romance honour.

These episodes typify the poet's treatment of honour in the Morte Arthure. Gawain and Cadur show poor judgement in risking battle because of, or for fear of, insult. Both behave as caricatures of the heroes of medieval romance, who have the luxury of defending personal reputation. Romance

values do not belong in an epic world; behavior that is desirable and admirable in romance will get men killed in epic. Rash and erratic, Gawain's judgement and courage are both questionable. He can fight competently: he is the first to turn to face the Romans who pursue the message-party after he has killed Quencelin (l. 1368), and he leads men in battle. There is no stability in Gawain's courage, however: where Layamon's Gawain meets Lucius in battle and Lucius barely escapes with his life, this Gawain meets Lucius in battle but does not fight him (l. 2218-33). He shows errors in judgement any time he is placed into a position of responsibility. While in charge as "wardayne" of the foraging party, he temporarily abandons the others to look for adventure. While Matthews finds Gawain's behavior in this episode admirable, Finlayson comments:

the contrast here between the unmotivated joust and the triumph of justice and Christianity in the shape of Arthur over the forces of tyranny and heathendom . . . seems to imply a detrimental judgement on this form of chivalric action, especially as it is followed by a type of battle, (the reckless attack on a vastly superior force by a small band of Arthur's knights ll. 2717-3000) which is explicitly condemned by the king in relation to a similar action undertaken earlier in the poem by Cador. (6)

Matthews comments approvingly: "Having conducted his knights into enemy country, he goes off alone seeking adventure, a procedure common enough in romance but hazardous indeed in a world of vengeful armies and bloody siege" (145). He

considers Gawain to be a romance figure in a positive sense: "little concerned with the conquests, glory and profits of imperial war; more inclined toward devoting his prowess to deeds of daring benevolence and compassion" (145). However, as warden, Gawain is in charge of the foraging party: a knight, especially a knight responsible for the lives and conduct of others, has no business searching for adventure for its own sake. In doing so, Gawain is both irresponsible and foolish rather than daring or admirable.

Gawain's final battle differs very little from any of the other battles in which he involves himself and others. Where Layamon's Gawain goes ahead to clear the way for other troops to land to fight Modred and his army, this Gawain takes a single ship to land to face an army of sixty thousand (l. 3717) without so much as informing Arthur of his intentions (l. 3919-20). Gawain is brave and daring, but his bravery is thoughtless, and his daring misplaced. The narrator comments:

For hade sir Gawayne hade grace to halde þe grene hill,
He had wirchipe, iwys, wonnen for euer!
(l. 3768-69)

If Gawain could have held the hill, he would have won worship forever; however he does not, and cannot, hold the hill. He and his men are hopelessly outnumbered. His brave death, although touching, serves no purpose; it is

meaningless.⁶ Modred escapes with the majority of his army intact. None of Gawain's actions have served any useful purpose throughout the poem: again and again he instigates needless battle and leads men to their deaths for the sake of his own, personal reputation. The poet condemns romance honour by placing Gawain, as a romance hero, into a tale in which this sort of heroism is not admirable or useful. In the Morte Arthure Gawain is a knight so caught up in himself and the ideals of romance that he loses sight of the fact that he and the others are, together with Arthur, fighting a defensive war.

Arthur is the centre of the poet's attempt to show the effect of romance thinking in an epic world, as he traces the progress of Arthur's loss of control, first of himself, then of his retainers and kingdom. While most agree that Arthur changes in the course of the alliterative Morte Arthur, critics disagree on what kind of king he is, and in what ways he changes. In Matthews' reading of the poem, Arthur causes his own fall in seeking to become "ouerlynge of all þat on the erthe lengez" (l. 3211).⁷ According to

⁶ In her edition of the Morte Arthure, Hamel notes l. 3817, "Bot alls vnwyse, wodewyse he wente at þe gayneste": "By this simile, then, the poet indicates that in his drive for revenge Gawain has abandoned chivalry, . . . and with it all judgement and civilization. Cf. his indiscriminate killing of men and horses in line 3822." Also see her notes to lines 3831-38; Gawain becomes animal-like rather than magnificent in his final battle-rage.

⁷ Noting that much of the material added to this version of the poem is drawn from medieval stories of Alexander, Matthews takes the position that the poet is drawing parallels

Matthews, Arthur's plans are for "conquest, subjugation and expropriation" (128); from the beginning "unchristian motivations [are] displayed in the vows made at the council. Step by step, Arthur's conquest becomes a manifestation of mounting cruelty, covetousness and imperialistic ambition" (128). Matthews points out that medieval Christianity places Fortune "into the scheme of God's providence. . . it exists within the framework and serves the purpose of God's unrevealed constancy. And the Christian defense was contempt of the world and faith in the ultimate display of God's justice" (116). For Matthews, Arthur's fall, like the fall of the other worthies on Fortune's wheel, becomes a function of divine justice. Thus, he sees Arthur and his court as being warlike and sinful from the beginning of the poem, and Arthur's fall as just punishment for his sins.

Benson, however, rejects the theory that Arthur ultimately succumbs to sin, and suggests that the Morte Arthure is a tragedy resulting, not from Arthur's sinful and cruel nature, but from his involvement with the world as a hero. For Benson, medieval tragedy involves:

the lesson . . . simply that man is not the master of his own destiny . . . Consequently if a medieval hero has a fault, it is not so much in

between Arthur and Alexander (34 ff.). Alexander, although presented for the most part as an heroic warrior-king, was considered symbolic of wrongful warfare in some medieval works. Like Alexander, "Arthur. . . is in many ways an admirable leader . . . but nevertheless, he is also a man of violent anger, sardonic, ruthlessly cruel in intention and act, and overbearing toward friend and foe alike" (132).

himself as in the code to which he has given allegiance, and the only significant moral choice is the original decision to strive for worldly success. To give one's allegiance to an earthly code . . . is to suffer from moral blindness, but it is also necessary to achieve the excellence that we mortal men admire and that the world . . . requires. (79-80)

Obst, too, sees Arthur as a hero:

Just as in all his wars Arthur consistently defends his rights and the Christian cause, so he is at the same time equally ruthless throughout these wars. The theory that his thirst for power and his aggression increase in the course of his campaign cannot be accepted, because the king is prepared from the very beginning . . . to take Rome from Lucius. . . . The narrator continues to identify himself equally enthusiastically with Arthur's side. (12)

Obst, like Benson, identifies Arthur's fall as the result of the conflict between the way Arthur must behave as an heroic king and the way he must behave as a Christian:

Arthur is always at one and the same time the just heroic conqueror of his lawful inheritance and the external cause of the people's affliction. The real cause of the affliction is, however, the wrongful challenge by his opponents. . . . What does undergo a change is not Arthur's character, but the emphasis of the narrator, who despite great admiration for the hero, gradually turns his attention increasingly to the negative sides of prowess. . . . Arthur's guilt has its roots in his fatal entanglement in the laws of this world. (14-15)

Arthur does begin as an epic king, but his behavior and judgement deteriorate as the poem progresses. The situation, however, is not one that should be analyzed in terms

of heroic (and therefore excusable) or sinful behavior. Arthur's behavior and death must also be seen in terms of epic and romance. He is the personality around whom the poem revolves: his presence controls the action and determines the mood and behavior of the men around him. Like the Arthur of Layamon's Brut, he is very concerned with maintaining control of his realm; however, he is an entirely different sort of king. The poem presents him as a king with absolute power from the opening lines of the poem, as it begins with a lengthy list of his conquests (ll. 28-47). The narrator tells how Arthur dubs knights, distributes land to faithful retainers, and makes his cousins into kings. He is, without question, the most powerful individual in North-Western Europe. He may be described in terms of contemporary kingship, as Benson and Keiser suggest, but his power is direct and unromanticized. This is not the Arthur of romance, who does little more than hunt and preside over feasts. This is a successful epic king, one who is kept very busy with the control of his realm.

Arthur's absolute power is fragile, however. At Christmas,

That comlyche conquerour commaundez hym seluyn
Pat ylke a lorde sulde lenge and no lefe take
To the tende day fully ware takyn to be ende.
(ll. 71-73)

Arthur can and does command obedience from everyone around him. However his commands, his methods of control, differ

from those of Layamon's Arthur. Layamon's Arthur is also forced to exercise his authority in his own hall, but his commands are concerned with controlling the way in which his people support him (see Chapter II). That Arthur forbids anyone to leave his court for ten days at Christmas would indicate that not all of his court stays with him by choice. Arthur may have more power to command in the Morte Arthure than in the Brut, but world conquerors have few real friends, and his people do not support him as readily. Both Arthurs are powerful and forceful, but the Arthur of the Morte Arthure is less secure in his power. As the poem progresses, Arthur becomes more and more successful as a conqueror, but progressively loses control of himself and his realm.

Efforts to maintain absolute control characterize much of Arthur's behavior in the Morte Arthure, and he is not above bullying. Arthur is as concerned with his personal reputation as Gawain and Cador are. For example, in reminding everyone that messengers are not to be mistreated because they are simply serving their lord faithfully, Layamon's Arthur protects the messengers from the enthusiastic wrath of his retainers. He is feared, but admired. In contrast, the Arthur of the Morte Arthure reacts to the messengers with a look so menacing that it is they who remind him that messengers are not responsible for the messages they carry (ll. 116-27). Although he has no intention of harming

the messengers, Arthur chooses to be threatening. He is concerned, not only with being powerful, but also with proving that he is powerful and dangerous, to his own court as well as to outsiders. His own retainers are curiously silent in this episode; the spontaneous burst of outrage at the insult to Arthur's sovereignty in the Brut is conspicuously lacking in the alliterative Morte Arthure. At this point, Arthur is feared, obeyed and perhaps respected, but not universally loved or admired.

Ironically, in view of Arthur's efforts to impress those around him, Arthur's ability to control his people is questionable from the beginning of the poem. After their initial audience, Arthur orders a sumptuous feast with which to impress and entertain the ambassadors. However, he then sets peculiarly difficult conditions on the way in which the messengers must leave Britain: he gives them seven days to ride to port. They must ride sixty miles a day, and never stray from the prescribed path. Their lives depend on this (ll. 446-67). No matter how this is rationalized, or what allowances are made for treating the Roman messengers as spies, these terms are severe in an age when royal messengers were expected to travel no further than twenty-five miles in a day.⁸ When the messengers plead for more reasonable terms and for more protection, Arthur tells them:

⁸ See Hamel's notes to lines 448-82 in her edition of the Morte Arthure.

'Care noghte' quod the kyng 'thy coundyte es knawen
Fro Carlelele to be coste there thy cogge lengges;
Poghe thy cofers ware full cramede with syluer,
Thow myghte be sekyre of my sele sixty myle forthire.'
(ll.475-78)

Apparently Arthur cannot guarantee the messengers' safety everywhere in his realm. His power is not as absolute as the opening lines of the poem might lead one to believe. He places Modred as regent because, of course, he cannot know the future and has no reason to suspect that Modred is anything but reliable. However, his refusal to take Modred's warning seriously is an indication of the insecurity lying behind Arthur's 'absolute' power. To take Modred's advice would be to admit his own possible weakness, to admit having erred in judgement. Arthur cannot do this; his power is precarious.

After an opening like this, Arthur's fall is inevitable: the seeds of disaster lie in his willingness to mask his own weaknesses behind the facade of absolute personal power. His fall is connected to romance behavior: insecure in his position as king and ruler of all the lands he has conquered, Arthur begins to rely on personal reputation (rather than sound judgement) to win the respect and obedience of those around him. In attempting to prove his abilities and prowess, however, Arthur loses sight of his responsibilities as ruler, both to his people and to God. He becomes responsible for his own fall from power and for the destruction of his kingdom.

Arthur knows how to rule wisely and responsibly, as most of his actions and words early in the poem show. Faced with the challenge from Lucius, he has little other choice than to defend his realm against the threat of Roman invasion. However, after his victory against Lucius, his behavior becomes less defensible. Gardner comments that in continuing his wars the way he does, Arthur

lapses in lawful chivalry, . . .and so, when the downswing of Fortune's wheel comes, he goes down raging, ruining even his own homeland and vassals.(244) Vanished utterly is the objective concern with justice for his people, the concern displayed in his first formal council in the Giant's Tower; and gone, too, is the concern with wise strategy which once made Arthur lash out at the rash young Sir Cador. (250)

Boren also compares Arthur's behavior early in the poem with his later behavior. Concerning Arthur's council before the siege of Metz, he points out:

In direct contrast to the earlier council in which Arthur solicited advice concerning the Roman ultimatum, . . . here Arthur is the only one to speak, announcing his plans. . . .power has rendered the king unwilling to listen to any voice but that of his own desires. (314)

The Mount St. Michael episode is an interesting development in Arthur's decay as a responsible king in that he does the right thing in the wrong way for the wrong reasons. The giant has been terrorizing Brittany "all this seven wyntteres" (846), wreaking havoc and eating children. Yet Arthur reacts, not because of his duty to the land and

people as Layamon's Arthur does, but to the fact that the giant has carried off a beautiful lady (ll. 870-75). This is romance motivation: Arthur reacts as a chivalrous knight of romance should react to news of a lady in need. In a king going to war, however, this attitude is irresponsible, as is his insistence on single, unsupported combat with the giant. After the battle, Arthur virtuously tells his people:

'Thankes Gode' quod he 'of þis grace, and no gome ells;
 For it was neuer manns dede, bot myghte of Hym selfen,
 Or myracle of Hys modyre, þat mylde es till all.'
 (ll. 1209-11)

but his reasons for killing the giant have been completely personal.

Once Arthur has begun to act in such a fashion, he cannot condemn his men for doing likewise. Cador replies angrily to Arthur's reprimand after the ambush-battle on the way to Paris:

'Sir' sais sir Cador 'Ȝe knowe wele ȝour selfen
 Ȝe are kyng in þis kythe; carpe whatte ȝow lykys,
 Sall neuer vpbrayde me þat to þi burde langes
 That I sulde blynn fore theire boste thi byddyng
 to wyrche.
 When any stirttez to stale, stuffe þam þe bettere,
 Ore thei will be stonayede and stroyede in ȝone
 strayte londez!
 I dide my delygens to-daye, I doo me one lordez,
 And in daungere of dede fore dyuerse knyghttez.
 I hafe no grace to þi gree bot syche grett wordez;
 Ȝif I heuen my herte, my hape es no bettyre!
 (ll. 1928-37)

Arthur's reaction to these words is surprising:

Dofe sir Arthure ware angerde, he ansuers faire:
'Thow has doughttily donn, sir Duke, with thi handez,
And has donn thy deuer with my dere knyghttez;
Forthy thow arte demyde with dukes and erlez
For one of þe doughtyeste þat dubbede was euer.
(ll. 1938-42)

Arthur cannot do anything to stop or control men like Cador. Cador's words, and Arthur's reply, reveal first, that certain of Arthur's vitally important retainers (both Cador and Gawain are kinsmen, and Cador is heir to the throne) are more loyal to the standards of romance honour they have set for themselves than they are to Arthur or Britain, and second, that Arthur is powerless to change this. Arthur, in fact, is the model for such behavior: he is the source for the kind of anarchic behavior one finds in Cador and Gawain. Gawain's behavior is merely an exaggeration of Arthur's behavior. Arthur, like Gawain, behaves more and more rashly as the poem progresses. His reaction to Cador shows that he knows better than to act as he does, but he is driven by his own sense of slipping control. Once he begins to lose control, he never regains it--Arthur cannot stop. He loses all sense of his political and moral Christian responsibility. He becomes like the giant of Mount St. Michael in taking innocent children as hostages (Boren, 315; Gardner, 244), and in causing the deaths of innocent people in taking Metz and Como. He becomes an aggressor, destroying churches and innocents along with the rest of the cities, rather than a defender of the faith (Gardner, 249-50). In the end, his

reaction to Gawain's death is excessive, and his insistence on fighting Modred at the time and place that he does is foolish.

Both Gawain and Cadw, in pursuing the ideals of romance, lack any loyalty to king or cause, and, as a result, are chaotic and unreliable as leaders or retainers. The Morte Arthure poet has precise control of his material: the romance episodes are not a careless addition. Instead, the poet uses this material to question the basis of honour and heroism in the Morte Arthure, and to show their effect on central authority. Where romance material has been used to modify the tale, it has been placed for conscious, artistic reason. When romance ideals of personal honour become more important to a king and his retainers than the larger concerns of the realm, then that king has lost any real control he may have had, and will be obeyed only so long as his orders do not interfere with personal glory-seeking. The way is open for men like Modred, and disaster and chaos are only a matter of time. The Morte Arthure is, in a sense, an anti-romance. In a situation in which the well-being of the realm depends on the responsibility of its king and nobility, romance ideals bring anarchy and death. Arthur loses all sense of responsibility--his war becomes a search for personal glory and power. His obsession with this leads him to forget his responsibilities to his people and to God. A man driven by romance cannot be king--Arthur ruins his realm and dies.

Chapter IV

Malory's Use of Epic and Romance in Arthur's War With Lucius

Malory's "Noble Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius" (called "Arthur and Lucius" hereafter) has never been a popular section of the Morte Arthure. Long, and filled with seemingly endless accounts of battle, the tale has been "treated as a violent anachronism among the tales of chivalry" (Stroud, 335). C. S. Lewis, commenting on "Arthur and Lucius" and on its source, the alliterative Morte Arthure writes:

it treats the dullest and most incredible part of the whole Arthurian legend. It is far easier to suspend one's disbelief in enchantments than in vast contradictions of known history scrawled across a whole continent; and a narrative of unbroken military successes, dull even when true, is insufferable when feigned. . . . Malory swallowed this poem almost whole, except that by separating it from the Morte he deprived it of the tragic close and the moral judgement which had saved it from total paltriness. (26)

Malory's tale of the war between Arthur and Lucius, unpopular as it has been, yet merits closer examination. It is a romance version of the story, but it differs in tone from the other tales of the Morte Darthur. "Arthur and Lucius" has been incorporated into a cycle of romance tales, but cannot, in itself, be called romance. Neither can it be considered in isolation: "Arthur and Lucius" is distinctly

different in style from the rest of the Morte Darthur, but it must be studied in terms of its relationship to the whole work. According to Lewis, Malory "surrendered his style without resistance to the influence of the alliterative metre, which, degenerate even in the original, becomes in prose a noisy rumble" (26). However, comparison of "Arthur and Lucius" with the alliterative Morte Arthure reveals that although Malory has used the Morte Arthure as a source, his tale is no mere paraphrase. He consciously adapts his source's language, characters and actions, altering the focus of the tale, and making deliberate use of the Morte Arthure's epic elements. Even in this, its most romantic incarnation, the tale of Arthur's war with Lucius retains epic qualities.

"Arthur and Lucius" is more like romance than its predecessors in the Arthurian section of Layamon's Brut and the alliterative Morte Arthure in a number of ways. The most important difference between "Arthur and Lucius" and the older works is in atmosphere. In both the Brut and the Morte Arthure there is a tension, a sense that although Arthur controls his people and realm for the moment, he could easily lose that control. In both of these works, there is some question as to whether or not Arthur's retainers will support him willingly, and there is always a possibility that Arthur will make a mistake. However, in "Arthur and

Lucius" Arthur is not forced to convince his people to support him. A fairy-tale atmosphere prevails: the council meeting at which Arthur's men pledge their support and aid runs smoothly, without a hint of even potential conflict. Arthur is an ideal king, strong and active, but willing to ask for and listen to advice. In return, his retainers are perfectly brave, loyal and trustworthy. There is no chance that Arthur will make a poor decision or a wrong move, or that any of his men (with the exception of Gawain) will be reluctant or unworthy to serve him.

This atmosphere, in which nothing can go wrong for Arthur and his men, romanticizes the tale's events. The action follows a logical order, but is less well-motivated than the action of the Brut or the alliterative Morte Arthure. Arthur's battle with the giant on Mount St. Michael, for example, becomes an admirable romantic quest in which the king proves himself to be as chivalrous and worthy a knight as any of his men. It is not a small military expedition, as it is in Layamon's Brut, nor is there any sense that Arthur might be behaving irresponsibly in risking his life in single combat with the giant, as there is in the Morte Arthure (see chapters II and III). In Malory's tale, Arthur's life is not in danger, and he can do no wrong.

At the same time that Malory's version of the Arthur and Lucius tale is more like romance than the older versions of the tale, it is also more epic than the rest of the Morte

Darthur. Its similarity with the more epic versions of the tale begins with Arthur's reasons for going to war: the Roman messengers challenge his authority and sovereignty before his entire court, and, like the Arthurs of Layamon's Brut and the alliterative Morte Arthure, the only way he can react is with anger and violence if he is to retain his people's (and audience's) respect. Acting to defend his sovereignty, he leads his people to war. In this tale, Arthur's knights fight because of loyalty to their king rather than for personal honour or the love and honour of ladies. Defence of the kingdom is the motivating force, not love or adventure. The knights and other retainers, while clearly not as powerful or independent as their counterparts in the Brut and the Morte Arthure, do own lands and appear to have functions and responsibilities beyond being knights at Arthur's court. Lancelot, for example, tells Arthur:

'Thoughe my londis marche nyghe thyne enemyes, yet shall I make myne avow aftir my power that of good men of armys aftir my bloode thus many I shall brynge with me: twenty thousand helmys in haubirkes attyred that shall never fayle you whyles our lyves lasteth.' (189: 31 to 190: 1-5)

The council in the Giant's Tower may be free of conflict, but each of the men must pledge his support. They have retainers who are not at Arthur's command unless they, themselves, offer them.

While perhaps less realistically motivated than the Brut or the alliterative Morte Arthure, Malory's treatment

of war in "Arthur and Lucius" is also less romantic and chivalric than in the other books of the Morte Darthur. Stroud comments "The tale is filled with unremitting battle, and the virtues praised are those of a fighter" (335). He calls Arthur "a cruel warrior" (336) and points out the episode in which Lancelot rides over Lucius' body (220: 17-20):

Lancelot has no compunctions about trampling his fallen opponent, and the reaction of Arthur's army endorses such abuse. But riding over a fallen enemy is the worst of chivalric sins, the very act by which the villains of the later tales distinguish themselves. (336)

Compared to the rest of the Morte Darthur, "The society portrayed here is violent and unforgiving, intolerant of weakness and disdainful of compassion" (Stroud, 338). In the final battle with Lucius, no one is spared:

But for all that the Romaynes and the Sarezens
cowde do other speke to y^elde themself there was
none saved, but all yode to the swerde.
(224: 15-17)

Malory has used his source material in a very careful, conscious manner.¹ The blending of romantic and epic elements is not accidental and his modifications of the source material are not haphazard. His style and tone are deliberate, and his treatment of characters consistent. Close

¹ I accept, first, the unity of the tales (Cf: Mary Dichmann, "'The Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius': The Rise of Lancelot", Malory's Originality ed. R. M. Lumiansky, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press), 1964, 67-90.), and second, that Malory modified this tale intending to incorporate it into a larger cycle of tales.

comparison of analogous sections of "Arthur and Lucius" and the alliterative Morte Arthure reveals a great deal about Malory's style and technique in using and modifying his source.

Most obviously, Malory has turned the alliterative verse of the Morte Arthure into prose, and while doing so condenses and shortens the tale a great deal. He includes most of the important details, often using the same phrases as the Morte Arthure. However, Malory changes or deletes lines and sections which fail to suit his purpose and which slow the action. Compare, for example, the two versions of Arthur's angry response to the Roman messengers:

The kyng blyschit on the beryn with his brode eghn
bat full brymly for breth brynte as the gledys;
Kest colours as kyng with crouell lates,
Luked as a lyon and on his lyppe bytes.
(Morte Arthure 116-19)

he loked up with his gray yghen and angred at the
messengers passynge sore. ("Arthur and Lucius", 185: 12-13)

This is characteristic of Malory's technique. He captures the essential elements of a passage and reduces them to simple and direct prose. Later, he reduces the Morte Arthure's magnificent sixteen-line account of Arthur's arming (ll. 900-15) to:

Anone sir Arthure wente to his wardrop and caste
on his armoure, bothe his gesseraunte and his basnet
with his brode shyld. And so he buskys hym
tyll his stede that on the bente hoked.
(200: 3-6)

This technique leads to a certain loss of detail and preciseness, but it also leads to a much more direct, faster-moving, faster-paced narrative.

By using this technique Malory also changes the way in which he develops certain characters. Because he condenses and abbreviates his source material, he can easily remove unwanted details and replace them with others. Lancelot, for example, has a far bigger role in "Arthur and Lucius" than he had in the alliterative Morte Arthure. However, Malory does not delete material from his source indiscriminately. By shortening and generalizing the account of Arthur's anger at the Roman messengers, for example, Malory removes the sense one finds in the Morte Arthure that Arthur's temperament can lack control: he allows Arthur to be a gracious ruler. Malory's major characters have different personalities than analogous characters in the Morte Arthure: he has developed Arthur, Lancelot and Gawain carefully, and each is important in his effect on "Arthur and Lucius".

Lancelot becomes a major figure in "Arthur and Lucius", a far more significant character than he is in the Morte Arthure. As Arthur's most capable and trusted retainer, he takes on many of the roles Gawain had in Layamon's Brut, and also becomes emblematic of both epic and romantic heroism.

Lancelot first appears early in the tale at Arthur's council in the Giant's Tower. As "yong sir Launcelot de

Laake" (189: 30) and the son of King Ban, he has lands, and offers Arthur twenty thousand "helmys in haubirkes" (190: 4) rather than the "sex score helmes" he offers in the alliterative Morte Arthure. This is a Lancelot who has considerable wealth and influence; although young, he is already established as one of Arthur's most famous knights. As a warrior and leader of men, he is more active and 'epic' here than in Malory's other tales. There is no trace of a love interest, and there are no lone quests. Lancelot may stand out on the battlefield as a singularly magnificent knight, but he fights as part of an army for the sake of his king.

At the same time, Lancelot's behavior is admirable from the point of view of romance. Malory achieves this by expanding his role and adding material that develops Lancelot's place in the tale. For example, Malory not only includes Lancelot with the party taking prisoners to Paris, but he also places him, with Cador, in charge of the expedition (212: 4-29). Lancelot is active and dominant: Malory goes so far as to place some of Cador's speeches from the Morte Arthure into Lancelot's mouth.² It is Lancelot who thinks of looking ahead for ambush, and who fights most heroically in the battle which follows. Dichmann points out that, in this episode, Malory "never lets the reader forget that it is Lancelot who makes the decisions, Lancelot who

² Compare, for example ll. 1637-1723 (esp. ll. 1637-44; 1706-07; 1718-19) of the alliterative Morte Arthure with pages 212: 27 to 213: 35 in "Arthur and Lucius".

gives the commands, and Lancelot who is always first to be addressed" (78). Lancelot is clearly the hero of the episode:

And sir Launcelot ded so grete dedys of armys that day that sir Cadour and all the Romaynes had mervayle of his myght, for there was nother kynge, cayser, nother knyght that day myght stonde hym ony buffette. Therefore was he honoured dayes of his lyff, for never ere or that day was he proved so well, for he and sir Bors and sir Lyonel was but late afore at an hyghe feste made all three knyghtes. (216: 19-25)

Malory thus increases Lancelot's importance throughout the tale. In the battle with Lucius, he knocks the emperor from his horse and rides over him. In Layamon's Brut, Gawain had fought Lucius; here Lancelot fights him, taking Gawain's place as the greatest of Arthur's knights.

Lancelot's actions intensify the romance 'feel' of the tale. When, on the way to Paris, Sir Clegis returns to the party of knights with news of a Roman ambush, he suggests retreat as a possibility (213: 29-30). Lancelot replies:

'Nay, be my fayth,' sayde sir Launcelot, 'to turne is no tyme, for here is all olde knyghtes of grete worshyp that were never shamed. And as for me and my cousyns of my bloode, we ar but late made knyghtes, yett wolde we be loth to lese the worshyp thatoure eldyrs have deservyd.' (213: 31-35)

Later, when Arthur tells the knights that they should have retreated rather than have fought, Lancelot answers "'Not so,' sayde sir Launcelot, 'the shame sholde ever have been oures.'" (217: 28-29). He is completely admirable in all of

his actions and words, and his presence and attitudes affect the men around him. The men fight on the way to Paris because refusing to fight would be shameful. Some aspects of battle, the style and ferocity of the fighting, are epic in "Arthur and Lucius", but the attitude of the characters toward battle is from romance. Part of the fairy-tale atmosphere of the work is due to the fact that there is no feeling here, as there is in the Morte Arthure, that choosing to fight can be an irresponsible, reckless thing to do under certain circumstances. Under Lancelot's influence, fighting becomes an elegant, chivalric pastime, an activity in which knights involve themselves whenever possible, rather than a necessity that a prudent knight avoids if he may do so without danger of disloyalty or loss of property or freedom.

Lancelot's expanded role is one of Malory's most important additions to the tale. At the same time that he presents Lancelot as a hero with epic qualities, he also makes him a living standard for romantic chivalry. Like the tale itself, he is made up of both epic and romance elements. He is a brave and responsible retainer, one who fights loyally for his lord, but his attitude toward fighting is such that he is a romance hero as well. On at least one level, the tale serves to show Lancelot at his height, before the affair with Guinevere corrupts his purity and his loyalty to his king. We see Lancelot as all he can be in this tale, and the heights he reaches make his later inadequacies as a knight clearer and more tragic.

While Lancelot becomes more important in "Arthur and Lucius", Gawain becomes even less important and admirable than he had been in the alliterative Morte Arthure. His presence is a reminder that the victories Arthur achieves in the tale and in his reign are ultimately hollow. Just as Lancelot is worthy in terms of both epic and romance, Gawain is contemptible from either point of view.

First of all, as in the alliterative Morte Arthure, his opinion is not considered important enough for him to be mentioned at the council in the Giant's Tower. Arthur sends him with the party taking the message to Lucius, but Bors is clearly in charge (206: 7-10). Gawain and Bors deliver the message together, perhaps because Gawain lacks the authority to deliver it by himself. In this case, the abbreviation of the scene, so characteristic of Malory's adaptation of his source, makes Gawain's actions incomprehensible. Gayus's insult is milder than the equivalent insult in the Morte Arthure and, indeed, arguably milder than the insult Gawain has offered Lucius:

'Hit besemys the ylle,' seyde sir Gawayne,
'that ony such an elffe sholde bragge suche wordys,
for I had levir than all Fraunce to fyght ayenste the.'

'Other I,' seyde sir Borce, 'than to welde all
Bretayne other Burgayne the noble.'

Than a knyght that hyght sir Gayus that was co-syn
unto the Emperour, he seyde thes wordys: 'Loo!
how thes Englyshe Bretouns be braggars of kynde,
for ye may see how they boste and bragge as they
durste bete all the world.'

Than grevid sir Gawayne at his grete wordys,
and with his bowerly bronde that bryght semed he
stroke of the hede of sir Gayus the knyght.
(207: 15-27)

Gawain's response to Gayus's insult is sudden and inexplicable. One could argue that he is defending British honour, but his reaction is excessive and cowardly in terms of the tale. Furthermore, despite his brave-sounding challenge to Lucius, when Gawain meets the emperor in battle, he does not fight him, even after a direct challenge (222: 27-34). Gawain fights by no rules but his own: he is more willing to kill a man by surprise than to engage in honourable combat.

Gawain's character is questionable in the alliterative Morte Arthure but in "Arthur and Lucius", his courage and chivalry are clearly inferior. When the Romans chase the Britons after Gawain kills Gayus, it is Sir Bors who first turns to face them. Dichmann suggests that this detail reflects Malory's familiarity with other sources (71), and while this may be the case, the fact that Gawain is not the first to turn to fight is consistent with Malory's development of the character. Malory reduces Gawain's role in this battle, cutting out some sections completely, and modifying others to make his courage and ability suspect.³ As well, when Gawain does fight, he needs help, a situation which never arises in the older versions of the tale:

But sir Gawayne was on the ryghte honde and dud
what he myght, but there were so many hym agaynste
he myght nat helpe there his ferys, but was fayne
to turne on his horse othir his lyffe muste he
lese. (209: 21-24)

³ Compare, for example ll. 1360-1530 in the Morte Arthure with pages 208: 6 to 211: 7 in "Arthur and Lucius".

He is chased and wounded by a "senatour" who is then easily captured by Idres (210: 23-27), and he sends for help (210: 33 to 211: 5). Gawain is capable of bravery, and can fight well when he chooses (as the fight with Priamus reveals), but he is unwilling to risk his life for his companions or for the sake of Arthur's cause. Gawain is a very dangerous sort of coward: he fights only for himself and he fights by his own rules. His attitudes are despicable by epic or romance standards, and his presence in this tale of victory is an indication that nothing can make Arthur's success in uniting the kingdom complete or final.

Arthur, once again, is the central figure in Malory's version of the war with Lucius. Like the Arthurs of the older versions of the tale, he is a very active king, one who is fierce to his enemies. The only survivors of the final battle with Lucius are those who escape and hide. He is also, however, a personable, chivalrous and democratic king. He, like the Arthur of the Morte Arthure, gives the Roman messengers a look which frightens them into falling to the ground, but he also prevents his knights from harming them (187: 1-5). Rather than showing an Arthur who will become less and less concerned with his people, Malory presents an Arthur who is, one suspects, Malory's model of an ideal king. Always polite and chivalrous, he makes no decisions affecting the realm without the advice of his council. His authority is secure: he feels no need to threaten. In the

romantic atmosphere of this tale, there is no conflict from within, no sense that if he is not strong enough, he will lose control. Everyone agrees with him, and with one another. As a responsible king, he chooses his regents on the advice of his council and names an heir before he goes to war. After his victories, his men do not fear to ask him to go home, and he does not fear to do as they ask.

Arthur's battle with the giant and his behavior on the battlefield prove him to be a fierce warrior. His fierceness, however, is tempered by a genuine concern for his people. When he hears of the abduction of the Duchess of Bre-tayne, he is so overcome with grief that he goes to his tent:

'Alas,' seyde kynge Arthure, 'this is a grete myscheffe! I had levir than all the realmys I welde unto my crowne that I had bene before that freyke a furlonge way for to have rescowed that lady, and I wolde have done my payne. Now, fellow,' seyde Arthure, 'woldist thou ken me where that carle dwellys? I trowe I shall trete with hym or I far passe.'

'Sir Conquerroure,' seyde the good man, 'beholde yondir two fyrys, for there shalte thou fynde that carle beyonde the colde stredys, and tresoure oute of numbir there mayste thou sykerly fynde, more tresoure, as I suppose, than is in all Fraunce aftir.'

The kinge seyde, 'Good man, pees! and carpe to me no more. Thy soth sawys have greved sore my herte.' Then he turnys towarde his tentys and car-pys but lytyll. (199: 6-20)

Arthur's quest to Mount St. Michael shows his personal prowess as a knight, but it also reveals his concern for every one of his subjects, high and low. His concern is not only

for the duchess, but for the old woman he finds weeping (200: 21-22), and for the children the giant is roasting:

And three damesels turned three brochis, and
thereon was twelve chyldir but late borne, and
they were broched in maner lyke birdis. Whan the
kyng behylde that syght his herte was nyghe ble-
dyng for sorow. (202: 11-15)

The Morte Arthure poet gives very little indication that his Arthur cares about his people. He shows very little emotion of any kind until Gawain's death near the end of the poem. Malory's Arthur shows concern for his people's welfare, telling Lucius before the battle: 'Sir, withdraw the! What doste thou here in this marchis and to overren poore peple?'" (218: 6-7). He is also more personable than either of the other two Arthurs, as evidenced by the camaraderie between Arthur, Kay and Bedivere after the giant's death (204: 4-14). Arthur's anger at Cador's rashness in the alliterative Morte Arthure becomes sorrow over the death of his knights:

Than the kyng wepte and with a keuerchoff wyped
his iyen and sayde, 'Youre corrage and youre har-
dynesse nerehande had you destroyed, for and ye
had turned agayne ye had loste no worshyp, for I
calle hit but foly to abyde whan knyghtes bene ov-
ermacched.' (217: 23-27)

When Kay is seriously wounded, his loyalty is plain, and Arthur's reaction immediate:

'Sir kyng,' sayde sir Kay, 'I have served the
longe. Now bryng me unto som beryellys for my fa-
dyrs sake, and commaunde me to dame Gwenyvere, thy

goodly quene, and grete well my worshypfull wyff that wratthed me never, and byd hir for my love to worche for my soule.

Than wepte kynge Arthure for routhe at his herte and seyde, 'Thou shalt lyve for ever, my herte thinkes.' And therewith the kynge hymself pulled oute the truncheoune of the speare and made lechis to seche him sykerly, and founde nothir lyvir nor lungys nother bowelles that were attamed. And than the kyng putte hym in hys owne tente with syker knightes and sayde, 'I shall revenge thy hurte and I may aryght rede.'

Than the kynge in this malyncoly metys with a kynge, and with Excalyber he smote his bak in sundir. Than in that haste he metys with anothis, and gurde hym in the waste thorow bothe sydes. Thus he russed here and there thorow the thyckest prees more than thirty tymes. (222:8-26)

"Arthur and Lucius" shows Arthur reaching the height of power, leading his people in defense against a hostile external force. He has all of the qualities admired by both epic and romance. As an epic hero he is bold and fierce to his enemies; he protects his people and rewards them amply for their service (245: 13 to 246: 5). As a romantic figure, however, he is also polite, chivalrous, kind to his people and merciful to ladies. Arthur is a good king from the point of view of epic or romance. More importantly, Malory shows us a mature, capable and charismatic Arthur in this tale, a man people gladly follow, and a king capable of bringing about the kind of society he creates in the Morte Darthur.

Malory has been as careful about this tale's place in the Morte Darthur as he has been in constructing the tale itself. This can be seen most clearly by comparing the

opening of the alliterative Morte Arthure with the opening of "Arthur and Lucius".

The alliterative Morte Arthure begins with twenty-five lines of pious introduction, calling on God and introducing the subject of the tale. Following this is another fifty-two lines recounting Arthur's victories and conquests. The audience is presented with Arthur at the height of his power, sitting down to a feast. Malory, on the other hand, begins with a short paragraph which reduces the list of Arthur's conquests to one line, and provides the feast setting for the opening of the tale.

From the first paragraph, Malory has adapted the material of the alliterative Morte Arthure to his own purpose. Because the tale is part of a group of tales about Arthur, he has no need to list Arthur's previous accomplishments, as the alliterative Morte Arthure poet does. He must, however, connect this tale with the rest of the cycle, and this he does well. His opening paragraph locates the story chronologically. The events of the tale take place after Arthur has married Guinevere, after the filling of the Round Table, "and so aftir his mervelous knyghtis and he had venquyshed the moste party of his enemyes" (185: 3-4). Lancelot and Tristram are both at court. In other words, the tale does not take place early in Arthur's kingship. His kingdom, and the forces which will ultimately destroy it, are well established. Moorman, in dealing with Malory's chronology, comments that

Read from beginning to end, the Morte Darthur is presented in terms of theme rather than of time. Books I and II chronicle the establishment of Arthurian order and, through the prophecies of Merlin and the beginnings of the Lot-Pellinore feud, sow the seeds of its downfall; Books III, IV and V are the Aristotelean "middle", the great golden days of chivalry, over which the clouds of dissolution and adultery slowly gather; Books VI, VII and VIII are denouement in which the civilization is tested, fails and crumbles. Malory's thematic pattern is perfectly clear. (248)

The presence of Lancelot and Tristram in the opening paragraph of the tale places this tale both chronologically and thematically (Dichmann, 86-87). If both are present, then there is already an attraction between Lancelot and Guinevere, and Modred has already been born: this tale of absolute victory for Arthur is set in a world in which Arthur's doom has already been determined. As Brewer suggests, Malory has not omitted Arthur's tragic fall, he has simply moved it (47). His introductory paragraph, short and clumsy as it may seem compared to the more impressive opening of the alliterative Morte Arthure, accomplishes a great deal.

Malory's use of epic and romance elements is unique to this particular tale. It is a conscious weaving of elements and styles. On the subject of Malory's style throughout the Morte Arthure, Baugh comments:

Malory is terse and forthright. Yet his short, firm sentences, while they give an impression of intentional economy, are seldom abrupt, but flow in a naturally modulated prose rhythm. The style of the Morte Darthur . . . is Malory's greatest distinction, and it is wholly his own. (307)

Malory's prose has the same smoothness in "Arthur and Lucius" as it has in the rest of the Morte Darthur but it is affected by the alliterative poetry of his source. Although Malory is writing prose and not alliterative verse, he retains enough of the style and language of the alliterative Morte Arthure to give "Arthur and Lucius" a unique tone, one which differs from the rest of the Morte Darthur. It is this undercurrent of alliteration which helps to emphasize the epic elements of the poem. Both alliteration and epic style were remnants of an older tradition for Malory. By using both of them in conjunction with the more romantic aspects of his Arthurian world, he gives the actions of Arthur and his men a grandeur, direction and substance that they would otherwise lack. Arthur reaches the height of his power in "Arthur and Lucius": never are he and his men more glorious and successful than when they are fighting together toward a common goal. The alliteration and the epic qualities of the tale help to express the power the Britons have as a unified force.

Conclusion

In 1933, J. P. Oakden, commenting on the continuity of the alliterative tradition from Old into Middle English, wrote:

Laying aside proofs connected with vocabulary, diction and style, the evidence presented by a study of the metre of early and later alliterative poems in English is so cumulative in its effect as to dispel all doubts. (233).

As he, and a number of others have since pointed out, the alliterative style popular in Old English survived into Middle English poetry. Its remnants appear even in the prose of Malory's "Noble Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius". Now, it becomes clear that more than alliteration survived the change from Old to Middle English. Epic, in the form of rationally-motivated, action-oriented plots and characters, survived as a genre, and some Middle English poets used it consciously. Layamon's Brut is based on the French Roman de Brut, but it is a thoroughly epic work, containing few, if any, identifiable romance elements. The alliterative Morte Arthure has romance elements and episodes, but it, too, remains epic in terms of style, atmosphere and action. Even Malory, who transforms the tale by placing it in a romance world, retains many of the tale's epic details.

As one moves from the Brut to the Morte Arthure to the "Noble Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius", romance elements play an increasingly larger role. However it is also apparent that each artist, Layamon, the alliterative Morte Arthure poet and Malory, has tight control of his material and the genre(s) he chooses to use; where romance material or characters enter the narrative, they have been consciously and deliberately placed.

In the Brut this control takes the form of avoiding any romance influence possible; although based on a courtly French work, the Brut is consciously epic in atmosphere, character and action--Layamon removed any trace of romance he could find in style, plot or language. Layamon's is clearly not the poetry of Old English in terms of style, but from the point of view of genre, he succeeds in recreating epic.

The alliterative Morte Arthure poet includes romance material, but he uses it carefully. The romance behavior of some of the poem's characters, when juxtaposed with the epic atmosphere and action of the world in which it takes place, throws both epic and romance into relief. Placed in the context of an epic world, the 'adventuring' of romance becomes inappropriate. The alliterative Morte Arthure becomes an anti-romance through its use of romantic material.

Malory's tale, on the other hand, unites epic and romance elements harmoniously, at levels of plot and

character. The epic elements--the realistic motivations of Arthur and his knights, together with a treatment of battle that is grimmer than usual for romance--lend a depth and grandeur to the tale and characters, set as they are in a romance world.

None of the three works examined in this thesis qualifies as good romance according to a definition based on medieval French romance. However, as this study has shown, it is a mistake simply to assume that Middle English narrative poets were attempting to write a French type of romance. Even when using plots taken from French romance, English poets, using romantic material in conjunction with epic treatment of motivation and action, were capable of adapting their source-works to suit their own and their audience's preferences.

Looking chronologically at the works studied here, one can see that romance material takes a progressively larger place in Middle English literature: Layamon's work is completely epic, the alliterative Morte Arthure poet employs romance episodes and characters within an epic setting, and Malory incorporates epic elements into what is essentially a romance world. However, epic influenced the development of romance in Middle English in a way that it had not in France. The Middle English romances remain more active and more realistically motivated than the French romances. This does not mean that the Middle English romances must be

inferior to or less sophisticated than the French: as Finlayson points out, the themes in Middle English narrative "are expressed in action rather than through the narrator's comments . . . [but] the import of these themes is in no way lessened" ("Ywain and Gawain and the Meaning of Adventure", 314). The three writers examined in this thesis, at least, were capable of recognizing and controlling both genres. Rather than being bad translations or imitations of more sophisticated French romances, poorly understood and even more poorly reworked and adapted, Layamon's Brut, the alliterative Morte Arthure and the "Noble Tale of King Arthur and the Emporer Lucius" can stand on their own as complete and conscious works; in light of this, perhaps other Middle English works are in need of re-evaluation.

Appendix I

Layamon's Brut and the Old English Poetic Tradition

Layamon's Brut represents an interesting development in English literature and language: his treatment of setting and characters makes the Brut epic (see Chapter II), but his style and language also contribute a great deal to the epic atmosphere of the poem. Layamon makes some important changes and modifications in translating Wace's Roman de Brut. Although style and language differ enough from Old English for the poetry to be termed early Middle English, Layamon's work is clearly related to Old English epic poetry.

Layamon, as with most medieval 'translators', does not hesitate to add his own touch to the narrative: he chooses places in the Roman de Brut to expand, to introduce what Ringbom terms "concrete dramatic scenes" (104). Ringbom identifies certain themes, "clearly discernible narrative units within a literary tradition" (77) of importance in Beowulf and other Old English poetry:

Certain recurring topics were repeatedly described and elaborated upon Battles, exile, journeys, and banquets are some of the most frequently recurring topics. . . . (77)

Examination of Layamon's expansions reveals that he has relied on themes popular in Old English epic poetry. Throughout the entire Brut, as well as in the Lucius episode, narrative passages dealing with feasts and battles, arrivals and departures consistently have more detail than the equivalent passages in Wace.¹

Because he has amplified his source to emphasize themes that had been important in Old English literature, the kinds of details Layamon provides are of a different quality than those in Wace. Layamon has translated both the language and character of the work. Dorothy Everett comments:

Layamon converted the French Brut into a poem that is astonishingly English--English that is, in the sense that its conceptions and its manner constantly reflect the earlier poetry of England. (34-35) What Layamon tells us of the doings of kings and their warriors also reminds us of the earlier poetry. Warriors vow to do great deeds in battle, and are bound by their vaunts. . . . In descriptions of sea-journeys and battles, as might be expected, these echoes are constant and all-pervasive. But it is Layamon's battle descriptions that show most clearly the hold the older poetry had over him. (36)

However, while many of the same themes seem to have remained popular in Old English poetry and the early Middle English of Layamon's poetry, the poetic vocabulary, the

¹ Cf. Ringbom 105-107; Layamon consistently expands Wace's narrative, but some sections have been amplified more than others. For example, where Wace includes 78 lines (10,093-10,170) in the description of Arthur's distribution of land and gifts after his fight with Frolo, Layamon devotes 208 (23,987-24,194--Madden's line numbers). Similarly, Layamon's account of Arthur's preparation for and voyage to France is 244 lines long, as compared to 162 in Wace.

language reserved for poetic expression in Old English, had become reduced in the late twelfth century. Ringbom suggests that by Layamon's time, "the inherited body of fixed formulas had apparently disintegrated; stock rhymes largely replaced the formulas, of which only traces are left. Recurring phrases and expressions abound in the Brut, but they have no fixed form" (76). In his study, Ringbom compares Layamon's Brut to Beowulf and finds that although "the heroic spirit of Lawman's Brut . . . can hardly be disputed (the contrast with Wace's courtly tone is too marked)" (61), the Brut is not formulaic in the way that Beowulf's verse is formulaic:

Whereas in Old English verse rigid metrical rules had influenced the syntax of the lines, the syntactic arrangements of the Brut appear to be conditioned by much freer rules, which do not seem to differ very much from those of prose. (74) It seems that in the Brut the binding force of alliteration, as well as of rhyme, resides in single words, not in words as part of fixed word groups. This allows much greater freedom in the choice of the remaining words of the half-lines. . . . with a few possible exceptions. . . . Lawman's alliterating half-lines are no longer fixed metrical units of formulaic word groups, but creations ad hoc, characterized by greater freedom and variety. (75)

By Layamon's time, then, the literary vocabulary had become smaller and the rules for versification less rigid.

Old English influence is most evident in the language of Layamon's Brut, but reminiscent as it may be of Old English, Layamon's language and style are clearly different

from the language and style of Old English poetry. Meanings of individual words, for example, had become less precise. Everett points out that:

duzud, which in certain passages in Beowulf meant 'a body of tried retainers', 'comitatus', is mostly used by Lazamon in the vaguer sense of 'body of men, host of warriors'. And so it is with many other of the old words; something of their meaning has gone and they have become less pregnant, more generalized. (37; see also Ringbom, 76)

Many of the differences between Old and early Middle English have been attributed to French influence. However, one of the greatest difficulties in tracing the development of the language lies in determining how much effect the Norman conquest really had on English language and literature--deciding what changes were caused by direct French influence after the conquest, and what were the result of natural developments in the English language. According to Baugh:

There is, of course, no way of telling what English literature would have become if it had been allowed to pursue its own course, but its normal development was interrupted by the Conquest. . . . The decay of literary activity is sufficiently explained by the destructive effects of four years of ruthless war, the rapid displacement of English bishops and English abbots in the monasteries, the eviction of the English language and English culture from the place they should have occupied in the national life. . . . (117)

The Norman conquest imposed a French upper class on the English, and French culture had an enormous effect on English literature: it introduced rhyme and eventually affected

vocabulary, pronunciation, versification and style (Daiches, 32). However, these changes were not instantaneous; there is evidence to suggest that English language and culture continued to develop in ways that had very little to do with French influence. Certain changes in English were perhaps inevitable, as Daiches comments: "The influence of French literary methods and French literary attitudes was felt all over Europe, and would have been felt in England even if there had been no Norman Conquest" (32). Furthermore, Everett offers evidence to suggest that Old English poetry was changing even before the conquest. In commenting on a particular type of Middle English alliteration, she comments:

Their appearance in alliterative verse has been taken to mean that poets of this period found it hard to keep the rhythms of alliterative verse unaffected by that of Middle English couplet metres derived from French; but since a similar tendency appears in the late Old English lines on Alfred and Godwin, it is likely that it was a natural development in 'popular' verse. (28; see also p. 26)

The question of Layamon's language and poetic diction is not a simple one. Although the poem's date of composition has been placed in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, the two surviving manuscripts have both been dated to the second half of the thirteenth century.² The language and style of one manuscript, MS Cotton Caligula A.ix, is much closer to Old English than is the language and style of

² Cf. E.G. Stanley, "The Date of Layamon's 'Brut'" *N & Q* 213 (1968). 85-88

the other, MS Cotton Otho C.xiii (Stanley, "Layamon's Antiquarian Sentiments", 23). The Caligula manuscript is commonly held to represent the state of the original work more accurately than does the Otho manuscript, and comparison of the two manuscripts has been seen as one way of judging how the English language was changing in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Caligula manuscript differs from the Otho in that it contains very few words of French origin (Stanley, "Layamon's Antiquarian Sentiments", 32-33). Ringbom points out

the occurrence of certain elements in Old English poetic diction. Though not as many as in Old English, the synonyms for key concepts such as 'warrior', 'lord', 'people', 'sea', 'death', and 'go' are relatively numerous and to some of these close parallels can be found in Old English poetry.
(60)

He theorizes that "the French impact had not yet made itself fully felt on the West Midlands dialect in which Lawman wrote" (59). The scribe of the Otho manuscript, on the other hand, changed spellings and forms of words to meet with contemporary standards, replaced many of Layamon's more archaic English expressions with equivalent contemporary expressions derived from French, and condensed the narrative at places in which particular themes had been amplified (Stanley, "Layamon's Antiquarian Sentiments", 29 and 31). The language and style of Layamon's Brut as it stands in the Caligula manuscript, while still comprehensible in the late

thirteenth century, was considered archaic enough to need modernization by at least one scribe.

There is some question, however, as to whether or not the language of Layamon's Brut in the Caligula manuscript accurately represents a language commonly in use in Britain in Layamon's time. E.G. Stanley offers linguistic evidence to suggest that Layamon may have deliberately archaized the language of his poem:

even if the poem were of the late twelfth century, it is clear that not all archaisms were genuine survivals of archaic phonological features. Sometimes in C (MS Cotton Caligula A.ix, a is used finally where we should expect e or even nothing at all; thus makeda (6000), and the nominative singular kinga with a spurious a to rhyme with Melga (12,870). . . In other cases, however, archaisms do seem to go back to OE forms. (27-28)

The language of the Caligula manuscript is older, and much more like Old English than the language of the Otho manuscript, but it is, at least occasionally, consciously so: Layamon has avoided French linguistic influence as much as possible in an attempt to re-create the language of the older, heroic style of English poetry.

Layamon's language and style, while consciously reminiscent of Old English, do not precisely recreate the style of classical Old English poetry. His poetry is less tightly composed, the lines are longer and less regular, the alliteration is erratic by Old English standards, and the use of rhyme has been adopted from French literary tradition

(Tatlock, 486). Tatlock comments: "His versification . . . has long been recognized as close to but not identical with the older. . . . Lawman's style in regard to both versification and the other features links him rather to the looser popular verse of the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries. . . ." (486).

Tatlock attributes this 'loosening' of the rules for literary composition and the degeneration of Old English poetic style to a popular movement, which, he believes:

may have been merely introduced by a disintegration of the classical style, or far more likely may have lived beside and beneath it from the earliest times. . . . But we must surmise that in his poem we have the best indication of the kind of narrative poetry which most of the English listened to, from early times till after the adoption of the French manner. (487)

Loomis, too, comments:

It is generally recognized that Layamon employed the verse form and the conventions, not of the great Anglo-Saxon masterpieces but of the popular poetry of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the medium of the humbler minstrels who succeeded the courtly scops and learned clerics. (105)

According to this theory, Layamon's poetry follows a popular, mostly non-literary, tradition, one inferior in learning and craftsmanship to the tradition followed by the poets of the "great Anglo-Saxon masterpieces" (Blake, 118). N.F. Blake, however, rejects the theory that Layamon's verse represents a popular but inferior kind of poetry that had

always existed alongside and beneath classical Old English poetry, claiming that it was invented "to explain Layamon's alliteration" (118). There is evidence that some men were still producing, or at least copying, prose works in Old English long after 1066 (Blake, 120). There are, for example, "twelfth-century copies of King Alfred's Boethius, the Distichs of Cato, the Gospel of Nicodemus numerous homilies of Ælfric and others. . . the Old English Annals were kept up for nearly a hundred years" (Baugh, 117). Blake suggests that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries the boundary between prose and poetry became blurred (120), resulting in a style of narration which he calls "rhythmical alliteration":

At times the rhythm in rhythmical alliteration becomes so regular, as in passages of great intensity or emotion, that the result is close to poetry; at other times, when the rhythm becomes less insistent, prose results. The writers in the twelfth century would not have thought of some lines as verse and others as prose; they would have regarded different passages as being in high or low style. (Blake, 120)

Layamon's style, rather than representing a degeneration of Old English poetic style as a result of Norman-French influence, could be the product of perfectly normal literary and linguistic evolution.

The Norman Conquest, disruptive as it was for English literature, did not in itself cause changes within the English language, although it ultimately had a great effect on the direction and rate at which the language changed. Baugh

observes that "England was in a transition stage and Old English literature was likewise in transition. We can hardly expect new Beowulfs in the eleventh century" (117). After the conquest, prose works continued to be written,

following the tradition popularized by Ælfric and Wulfstan. Manuscripts of their works. . . were copied in the twelfth century, whereas there are no late copies of Old English poetry. It was from this. . . that Laamon and other early Middle English poets drew their examples and inspiration. (Blake, 120)

Although French would eventually have a much greater effect on the English language than is evident in the Brut the only aspects directly attributable to French influence in this work are Layamon's use of rhyme and the occasional French word. Layamon may have consciously avoided French influence in terms of language, but the other qualities that differentiate the Brut from Old English poetry, the changes in metrical style and language, are those which could have developed in English eventually even without French influence.

While Layamon's Brut differs in style and language from classical Old English poetry, its relationship to and connections with this poetry contribute to the heroic atmosphere of the Brut, as discussed in Chapter II. Layamon relies on themes popular in Old English poetry, and although the Brut's language is less precise and its alliterative style looser, such developments are consistent with the ways in which Old English poetry had been changing before the

Norman Conquest. Despite evidence showing the Brut to be a deliberate attempt to recall the older, classical Old English style of heroic poetry, Layamon's Brut represents a style of poetry which could have grown naturally from late Old English poetry. By using the language and themes of Old English poetry, Layamon has lent echoes of older heroic verse to his work, providing his audience with a means of placing Arthur and his world in time: the language and style call up memories of older epics, and contribute to the sense one gets that the events of the tale take place among great people long ago.

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