

“Now give me my spear,” said King Arthur unto Sir Lucan, “for yonder I have espied the traitor that all this woe hath wrought.”

“Sir, let him be,” said Sir Lucan, “for he is unhappy. And if ye pass this unhappy day ye shall be right well revenged upon him. And, good lord, remember ye of your night’s dream, and what the spirit of Sir Gawain told you tonight, and yet God of his great goodness hath preserved you hitherto. And for God’s sake, my lord, leave off by this, for, blessed be God, ye have won the field: for yet we been here three on-live, and with Sir Mordred is not one on-live. And therefore if ye leave off now, this wicked day of destiny is past.”

“Now, tide¹⁵ me death, tide me life,” said the King, “now I see him yonder alone, he shall never escape mine hands. For at a better avail shall I never have him.”

“God speed you well!” said Sir Bedivere.

Then the King got his spear in both his hands and ran toward Sir Mordred, crying and saying, “Traitor, now is thy deathday come!”

And when Sir Mordred saw King Arthur he ran until him with his sword drawn in his hand, and there King Arthur smote Sir Mordred under the shield, with a thrust of his spear, throughout the body more than a fathom. And when Sir Mordred felt that he had

◆ Reading Strategy

Summarize the events leading to the death of Mordred and the mortal wounding of King Arthur.

his death’s wound, he thrust himself with the might that he had up to the burr¹⁶ of King Arthur’s spear, and right so he smote his father King Arthur with his sword holden in both his hands, upon the side of the head, that the sword pierced the helmet and the casing of the brain. And therewith Sir Mordred dashed down stark dead to the earth.

And noble King Arthur fell in a swough to the earth, and there he swooned oftentimes, and Sir Lucan and Sir Bedivere oftentimes heaved him up. And so, weakly betwixt them, they led him to a little chapel not far from the seaside, and when the King was there, him

15. **tide:** Befall.

16. **burr:** Hand guard.

◆ Build Vocabulary

peril (per’ əl) *n.*: Exposure to harm or injury

thought him reasonably eased. Then heard they people cry in the field. “Now go thou, Sir Lucan,” said the King, “and do me to wit¹⁷ what betokens that noise in the field.”

So Sir Lucan departed, for he was grievously wounded in many places. And so as he walked he saw and harkened by the moonlight how that pillagers and robbers were come into the field to pill and to rob many a full noble knight of brooches and bracelets and of many a good ring and many a rich jewel. And who that were not dead all out there they slew them for their harness and their riches. When Sir Lucan understood this work, he came to the King as soon as he might and told him all what he had heard and seen. “Therefore by my read,”¹⁸ said Sir Lucan, “it is best that we bring you to some town.”

“I would it were so,” said the King, “but I may not stand, my head works so. Ah, Sir Lancelot,” said King Arthur, “this day have I sore missed thee. And alas that ever I was against thee, for now have I my death, whereof Sir Gawain me warned in my dream.”

Then Sir Lucan took up the King the t’one party¹⁹ and Sir Bedivere the other party; and in the lifting up the King swooned and in the lifting Sir Lucan fell in a swoon that part of his guts fell out of his body, and therewith the noble knight’s heart burst. And when the King awoke he beheld Sir Lucan how he lay foaming at the mouth and part of his guts lay at his feet.

“Alas,” said the King, “this is to me a full heavy sight to see this noble duke so die for my sake, for he would have helped me that had more need of help than I. Alas that he would not complain him for his heart was so set to help me. Now Jesu have mercy upon his soul.”

Then Sir Bedivere wept for the death of his brother.

“Now leave this mourning and weeping gentle knight,” said the King, “for all this will not avail me. For wit thou well, and might I live myself, the death of Sir Lucan would grieve me evermore. But my time passeth on fast,” said the King. “Therefore,” said King Arthur unto Sir Bedivere, “take thou here Excalibur my good sword and go with it to yonder water’s side;

17. **me to wit:** Let me know.

18. **read:** Advice.

19. **party:** Side.

and when thou comest there I charge thee throw my sword in that water and come again and tell me what thou sawest there.”

“My lord,” said Sir Bedivere, “your commandment shall be done, and I shall lightly²⁰ bring you word again.”

So Sir Bedivere departed. And by the way he beheld that noble sword, that the pommel and the haft²¹ was all precious stones. And then he said to himself, “If I throw this rich sword in the water, thereof shall never come good, but harm and loss.” And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree. And so, as soon as he might, he came again unto the King and said he had been at the water and had thrown the sword into the water.

“What saw thou there?” said the King.

“Sir,” he said, “I saw nothing but waves and winds.”

“That is untruly said of thee,” said the King. “And therefore go thou lightly again and do my commandment; as thou art to me loved and dear, spare not, but throw it in.”

Then Sir Bedivere returned again and took the sword in his hand. And yet him thought sin and shame to throw away that noble sword. And so eft²² he hid the sword and returned again and told the King that he had been at the water and done his commandment.

“What sawest thou there?” said the King.

“Sir,” he said, “I saw nothing but waters wap and waves wan.”²³

“Ah, traitor unto me and untrue,” said King Arthur, “now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have weened that thou that has been to me so loved and dear, and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the riches of this sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee I shall slay thee mine own hands, for thou wouldest for my rich sword see me dead.”

Then Sir Bedivere departed and went to the sword and lightly took it up, and so he went to the water's side; and there he bound the girdle about the hilts, and threw the sword as far into the water as he might. And there came an arm

and an hand above the water and took it and clutched it, and shook it thrice and branched; and then vanished away the hand with the sword into the water. So Sir Bedivere came again to the King and told him what he saw.

“Alas,” said the King, “help me hence, for I dread me I have tarried overlong.”

Then Sir Bedivere took the King upon his back and so went with him to that water's side. And when they were at the water's side, even fast²⁴ by the bank floated a little barge with many fair ladies in it; and among them all was a queen; and all they had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur.

“Now put me into that barge,” said the King; and so he did softly. And there received him three ladies with great mourning, and so they set them down. And in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head, and then the queen said, “Ah, my dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me? Alas, this wound on your head hath caught overmuch cold.” And anon they rowed fromward the land, and Sir Bedivere beheld all tho ladies go froward him.

Then Sir Bedivere cried and said, “Ah, my lord Arthur, what shall become of me, now ye go from me and leave me here alone among mine enemies?”

“Comfort thyself,” said the King, “and do as well as thou mayest, for in me is no trust for to trust in. For I must into the vale of Avilion²⁵ to heal me of my grievous wound. And if thou hear nevermore of me, pray for my soul.”

But ever the queen and ladies wept and shrieked, that it was pity to hear. And as soon as Sir Bedivere had lost sight of the barge he wept and wailed, and so took the forest and went all that night.

And in the morning he was ware, betwixt two bare woods, of a chapel and an hermitage. Then was Sir Bedivere glad, and thither he went, and when he came into the chapel he saw where lay an hermit groveling on all fours, close thereby a tomb was new dug. When the hermit saw Sir Bedivere he knew him well, for he was but little tofore Bishop of Canterbury,

◆ **Literary Focus**

In what ways is the description of King Arthur's death characteristic of medieval romances?

20. **lightly:** Quickly.

21. **pommel . . . haft:** Hilt and hand guard.

22. **eft:** Again.

23. **waters . . . wan:** Waters lap and waves grow dark.

24. **fast:** Close.

25. **Avilion:** Legendary island.

that Sir Mordred put to flight.

"Sirs," said Sir Bedivere, "what man is there here interred that you pray so fast for?"

"Fair son," said the hermit. "I wot not verily but by guessing. But this same night, at midnight, here came a number of ladies and brought here a dead corpse and prayed me to inter him. And here they offered an hundred tapers, and gave me a thousand gold coins."

"Alas," said Sir Bedivere, "that was my lord King Arthur, which lieth here buried in this chapel."

Then Sir Bedivere swooned, and when he awoke he prayed the hermit that he might abide with him still, there to live with fasting and prayers:

"For from hence will I never go," said Sir Bedivere, "by my will, but all the days of my life here to pray for my lord Arthur."

"Sir, ye are welcome to me," said the hermit, "for I know you better than ye think that I do: for ye are Sir Bedivere the Bold, and the full noble duke Sir Lucan the Butler was your brother."

Then Sir Bedivere told the hermit all as you have heard tofore, and so he stayed with the hermit that was beforehand Bishop of Canterbury. And there Sir Bedivere put upon him

poor clothes, and served the hermit full lowly in fasting and in prayers.

Thus of Arthur I find no more written in books that been authorized, neither more of the very certainty of his death heard I nor read, but thus was he led away in a ship wherein were three queens; that one was King Arthur's sister, Queen Morgan le Fay, the other was the Queen of North Galis, and the third was the Queen of the Waste Lands.

Now more of the death of King Arthur could I never find, but that these ladies brought him to his grave, and such one was interred there which the hermit bare witness that was once Bishop of Canterbury. But yet the hermit knew not in certain that he was verily the body of King Arthur; for this tale Sir Bedivere, a knight of the Table Round, made it to be written.

Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but carried by the will of our Lord Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the Holy Cross. Yet I will not say that it shall be so, but rather I would say: here in this world he changed his life. And many men say that there is written upon the tomb this:

HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX
QUONDAM, REXQUE FUTURUS²⁶

26. **Hic . . . futurus:** Here lies Arthur, who was once king and king will be again.

◆ Build Vocabulary

interred (in tɜrd) v.: Buried

Guide for Responding

◆ Literature and Your Life

Reader's Response If King Arthur had asked you to throw his sword into the water, would you have hesitated as Sir Bedivere did? Why or why not?

Thematic Focus Would you classify this tale as one of peril or one of adventure? Explain.

Epitaph for Arthur Write an epitaph, or tomb inscription, that captures King Arthur's magical life.

Check Your Comprehension

1. What warning does King Arthur receive in his dream?
2. (a) How does Arthur slay Mordred? (b) What does Mordred do just before he dies?
3. Summarize what happens when Arthur asks Sir Bedivere to throw Excalibur into the water.

Guide for Responding (continued)

◆ Critical Thinking

INTERPRET

1. How are Arthur and Mordred similar and how are they different? [**Compare and Contrast**]
2. What do you think are Sir Bedivere's reasons for twice failing to obey Arthur's request to throw Excalibur into the water? [**Interpret**]
3. How does the ending add to the mysterious, magical quality of the tale? [**Draw Conclusions**]

APPLY

4. Why do you think the legend of King Arthur has retained its popularity for so long? [**Generalize**]

◆ Reading Strategy

SUMMARIZE

As you read *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Morte d'Arthur*, you **summarized** passages so you could identify key ideas and events in the stories.

Use your summaries to answer these questions:

1. If you were retelling *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* for an audience of fifth graders, which key events would you emphasize?
2. As Sir Bedivere, summarize for a curious traveler who is visiting your hermitage the events leading up to King Arthur's death.

◆ Literary Focus

MEDIEVAL ROMANCES

Most **medieval romances** embody the ideals of chivalry, are set in a remote time or place, and combine supernatural events with realistic ones. They also feature a hero engaged in pure adventure and feature spontaneous, unmotivated fighting and include love as a major part of the story.

1. Which of these characteristics is *not* displayed in this excerpt from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*?
2. Does Sir Gawain fit the mold of a medieval hero? Explain.
3. In the excerpt from *Morte d'Arthur*, how do the supernatural events surrounding Arthur's death link the story to the future?
4. King Arthur was supposedly a Briton who fought against the invading Anglo-Saxons. Why do you think Britons kept his memory alive for centuries after their defeat by the Anglo-Saxons?

◆ Build Vocabulary

USING THE WORD ROOT *-droit-*

The word root *-droit-*, which means "right," reveals a historical bias toward right-handedness.

1. Knowing that the prefix *mal* means "bad," what might *maladroit* mean?
2. *Gauche* means the opposite of "socially adroit." Which of these two might it also mean—"left" or "right"?

USING THE WORD BANK: Definitions

On your paper, write the letter of the word that best expresses the meaning of the first word.

1. assay: (a) test, (b) deny, (c) ignore
2. adjure: (a) reject, (b) appeal, (c) ask
3. feigned: (a) revealed, (b) refused, (c) pretended
4. largesse: (a) nobility, (b) insignificance, (c) wisdom
5. interred: (a) included, (b) uncovered, (c) buried
6. righteousness: (a) awkwardness, (b) virtuousness, (c) dishonorableness
7. entreated: (a) pleaded, (b) requested, (c) refused
8. peril: (a) safety, (b) security, (c) danger

◆ Grammar and Style

COMPARATIVE AND SUPERLATIVE FORMS

The world of medieval romances is a world of **comparatives** and **superlatives**. Supernatural wonders are the *most* marvelous ever seen, and one knight is always *braver* or *more* skillful than another.

Practice Identify the comparative and superlative forms of modifiers in the following passages.

	One Syllable	Two Syllables
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Comparative Form:	-er	more
Superlative Form:	-est	most

1. She made trial of a man most faultless by far / Of all that ever walked over the wide earth; / As pearls to white peas, more precious and prized,
2. [W]here battle is joined; / I am the weakest, well I know, and of wit feeblest; And the loss of my life would be least of any;

Writing Application In a brief paragraph, use comparative and superlative modifiers to compare and contrast characters from either story.