THE TALE’S WORTH TELLING:
A THEMATIC COMPARISON OF HOMER’S *ILIAD* AND MALORY’S
*MORTE DARTHUR*

by

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Despite the many thematic similarities between Homer’s *Iliad* and Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, scholarship comparing the two works is decidedly limited. The aim of this research is an attempt to provide an in-depth analysis and comparison of each work to unveil the reason why both texts have remained relevant even today. What is made clear through this analysis is the importance of the mortal characters, most notably the imperfect heroes who come to be defined as such based on very similar codes of heroism. Helen and Guinevere will also be discussed, as their relationships with the heroes reflect a prominent fear both texts propagate – that female sexuality, while a powerful force, is destructive and should be feared. Ultimately, it is the tragic nature of these texts that ensure their lasting legacy.
Introduction: The Influence of Homer and Malory

Homer’s *Iliad* and Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* have each passed the test of time and have been celebrated as unparalleled works of literature. As Jasper Griffin notes, “Western Literature begins with Homer” (*Homer* 1). Homer’s epics “never lost their fascination for the Ancient Greeks” and eventually the “Romans in turn fell under their spell, and Homer was the model of Virgil, who was to be the master and example of Dante and Milton; the Homeric poems are still the inspiration of Tennyson and Kazantzakis and James Joyce” (Griffin, *Homer* 1). In this way, the *Iliad* is one of the “greatest literary treasures” in history (Griffin, *Homer* 5). In the opening paragraphs of *An Introduction to Malory*, Terrence McCarthy recounts how Malory’s text “has been read and admired for five hundred years, it has inspired writers in English from Spenser to Steinbeck; and it has become one of the major landmarks of English literature” (xi). Simply put, *Le Morte Darthur* is “undeniably a great book” (McCarthy xi). Together with their lasting popularity, these texts also have many thematic and symbolic similarities. Yet, academic research on the relationship between these two pieces of literature is limited. The focus of my research will be an attempt to fill the gap by providing an in-depth analysis, and a comparison of each works to the other, to unveil the reason why both texts have remained relevant even today. Ultimately, the continued relevance of these texts is owed to their mortal characters. While both the *Iliad* and *Le Morte Darthur* run rampant with divine intervention and action, their focus is on human imperfections as the central aspect of both works.
Both texts tell the tales of heroes and heroines, both epic and chivalric. The aim of this thesis is to explore the nature of these characters, their motivations and their weaknesses, all of which are determined by the reality that theirs’ is a tragic world. These characters are far from perfect. Homer’s heroes are impressive warriors who are almost all epitomes of bravery and honour, but at the same time they also fall prey to pride, jealousy and anger. Malory’s knights show a “wisdom and restraint” absent in the “childhood abridgments” one is likely more familiar with; but at the same time they can be “brainless boobies ever ready to pick a fight” (McCarthy xii). My first chapter will be an examination of a representative selection of these heroes. Whether it is with Achilles or Lancelot, Hector or Arthur, both of these authors highlight the best of the best and take very deliberate steps to assert their characters’ excellence. It is not just the heroes’ physical abilities that separate them from the lesser warriors. Rather, it is the motivations that drive them throughout their individual trials. Despite the vastly differing settings, the \textit{Iliad} and \textit{Morte Darthur} are both concerned with honor and glory.

My second chapter will be an examination of the role of women in both texts. It is interesting to note that in both \textit{The Iliad} and \textit{Morte Darthur}, there is a clear relationship between female sexuality and the destruction of great kingdoms. Thus, both texts are perpetuating a fear of female sexuality. This chapter will compare the characters of Helen of Troy and Lady Guinevere, each of whom is driven by her desires and used as a pawn in order to incite a war. Also, despite the seeming religious differences behind each text, differences which should create different endings for perceived female transgression, both women are presented as moral transgressors but are ultimately forgiven when they turn away from their sexuality.
Lastly, my third chapter will deal with the theme of inescapable fate and tragedy. Here I will examine the final parts of the *Morte Darthur* and the *Iliad* in order to show that in both cases the tragic endings were unavoidable. Particular attention will be paid to key events throughout the two texts that had to occur in order for the tragic ends to be fully realized. Closely tied to the tragic conclusion of each tale is the question of whether the endings are meant to be punishments for the moral and religious failings of the characters. Consideration for the ways in which each text offers consolation for the endings will also be discussed.

Ultimately, both the *Iliad* and *Morte Darthur* have had a lasting impact on the literature we know and love today. It was through these texts that our perception of the hero was formed and to this day, many still emulate the heroic formula set out by these two foundational storytellers. While some of their influence may be seen as less positive, particularly in regard to their treatment of female sexuality, their influence cannot be downplayed nor dismissed. Both Homer and Malory understood tragedy in a way that would shape literature’s view of mortality for centuries to come.
Chapter 1: The *Timé* of a Hero?

Little appeals to readers of Classical and Medieval heroic literature more than the heroes. Their heroic adventures, notably overcoming seemingly unbeatable foes, terrifying monsters and fighting over beautiful maidens, will always be at the heart of these genres. It is not difficult to see the appeal of such characters as they offer an ideal to strive for. Heroes are meant to represent the best of the best. They are the greatest fighters, most loyal friends and comrades, and they try to be honourable above all else.

Yet, they are also intrinsically flawed, a factor that both humanizes them and makes them all the more compelling. Both the *Iliad* and the *Morte Darthur* contain some of the greatest literary heroes ever written, from the dynamic Achilles to the noble Lancelot. The questions then become, why are these men upheld as the greatest of heroes and what motivates them to be such? For the Greeks, the motivation to be one of the greatest heroes is that it will bring one personal glory that will live on, long after one’s mortal life has come to an end. We might well expect this motivation to be absent or anathema in a Christian text where reward for earthly deeds comes with an afterlife in Heaven rather than what your peers say on Earth. The similarities, however, far outweigh the differences, and earthly honour and glory are still highly prized. Thus, for the Arthurian knights, personal glory is partly a factor, but the emphasis is more on bringing glory to one’s lineage and having one’s family continue that heroic legacy. Furthermore, there is a clear difference between striving to be the greatest of heroes and being the greatest of leaders. In this way, the greatest of leaders in both texts are actually presented as more honorable than the most skilled warriors. Since it is impossible in a short study to
examine all of Homer’s and Malory’s heroes, I shall confine myself to two pairs of heroes as examples. This chapter will accordingly compare the characters of Achilles and Lancelot as the greatest of heroes, and Hector and Arthur as the greatest of leaders. The characters of Patroclus and Gawain will also be discussed as these men are closest in ability to Achilles and Lancelot but more importantly, they are exemplars of loyalty and the strength of relationships between great heroes. It should be noted that this chapter will not be discussing the character of Paris. While he may be a main character in the *Iliad* and favoured by the gods, like many Greek heroes, he is by no means a hero as he repeatedly proves through his unwillingness to defend his city despite his role in endangering it.

The character of Achilles in the *Iliad* exemplifies epic heroism more so than any other fighter at Troy (see, amongst many others, Silk and Nagy). Achilles is described as the “matchless runner” and the greatest fighter, capable of defeating any man at Troy, even the fearsome Hector (*Iliad* 1.99). Though he is at times referred to as the “most violent man alive,” this title seems to have served him quite well as he also receives copious amounts of praise from both the Achaeans and the Trojans (*Iliad* 1.172). Throughout the text, various characters including Agamemnon refer to the warrior as “godlike Achilles” (*Iliad* 1.154). Bernard Knox also makes the claim that Achilles is “godlike” and yet, it is very clear that Achilles is not a god (47). Indeed, it is Achilles’ own mortality that makes him such a heroic character. Discussing the long tradition of the Epic Cycle, Jasper Griffin draws on earlier heroic poetry wherein heroes such as Achilles were very nearly immortal (“Uniqueness” 40). In many of the surviving cyclic poems that mentioned him, Achilles wore “impenetrable” armor and boasted of an “invulnerability” to the attacks of fellow warriors (Griffin, “Uniqueness” 40). However, in the *Iliad*, “real humanity is
insisted upon for all characters” and this raises the stakes immensely (Griffin, “Uniqueness” 41). Achilles can and will die at Troy because he is mortal, and Achilles himself is aware of his fate, as he reveals, “If I hold out here and I lay siege to Troy, / my journey home is gone” (II. 9.499). This acceptance of his own mortality also reveals the bravery and tragic heroism of his character. If Achilles fought at Troy and knew that he was unable to die, there would be no risk or drama and Achilles himself would be far less impressive. The enduring appeal of Homer’s Achilles owes much to the fact that even if he is like the gods, he is far more human than divine and thus both limited in ability and vulnerable to death. This mortality of Homer’s heroes, especially Achilles, is central to Homer’s depiction of heroism in the Iliad (see further Griffin, Life and Death).

As the greatest of warriors, Lancelot and Achilles are very similar. It should be noted that in previous Arthurian texts such as Chrétien de Troyes’ Erec and Enide (circa 1170s), Lancelot is not presented as the best knight, but rather “the third best knight after Gawain and Erec” (Lupack 455). In other French texts, however, including Chrétien’s Lancelot, Lancelot is the best of Arthur’s knights (on Lancelot’s character from Chrétien to Malory, see Brewer). Similarly, Malory presents Lancelot as superior to any other knight in terms of skill “for in all turnemente, justys, and dedys of armys, both for lyff and deth, he passed all other knyghtes” (151.39-40). The greatness of Lancelot’s standing amongst his fellow knights is fully realized in a statement by King Arthur near the end of Malory’s Morte when the king claims that “I have worshipt you and yours more than ony othir knyghtes” (667.13-14). To receive this level of recognition from such a great king is a testament to Lancelot and his many achievements. The violence associated with Achilles’ great battle skills are also realized in Lancelot, as can be seen by the fact that
“When in battle or during his madness, Lancelot is a killing machine” (Jesmok 86). These deadly abilities are seen repeatedly, such as when he singlehandedly beheads “two grete Gyauntis” with ease (165.24). However, like Achilles, Lancelot is still a mere mortal and there are still risks involved with the completion of his many dangerous “dedys” (151.39). In the text, Lancelot falls victim to “inchauntments” such as the one cast by Morgan le Fay and his life is repeatedly threatened or endangered (154.27). The danger Lancelot faces does not make him less impressive; rather his bravery in the face of real harm makes him all the more heroic.

Next, in order to understand what it is that motivates these heroes, it is important to examine the conflicts in which they find themselves involved. Though there may be many political and material benefits to conquering as rich a city as Troy, the Achaeans’ siege against Troy is primarily motivated by the supposed abduction of Helen from her husband Menelaus. Many of the Achaean leaders are bound to protect Menelaus’ marriage as a result of the Oath of Tyndareus. When in the process of choosing which hero would marry his step-daughter Helen, Tyndareus, the King of Sparta, feared that choosing one and rejecting the rest would result in a war. In order to avoid such a reaction, Tyndareus and Odysseus conceived a plan that obligated all of the potential suitors to come together and not only honour the marriage choice but protect it against any who would seek to break it. This is the primary reason why so many Greeks sail to Troy to reclaim one man’s wife. Thus, it would stand to reason that this is why Achilles is standing against Troy as well, in order to retrieve Helen and punish the Trojans for their transgression in taking her. As Linda Clader states, “On the surface, she is the reason for his being in Troy, along with all the other Achaians” (Clader 6). Yet, unlike many of the other leaders such as
Odysseus or Diomedes, Achilles “was never one of Helen’s suitors” (Clader 6). This means that Achilles is not obligated to be in Troy by any oath to Helen’s step-father. He is not there for Helen, nor is he even there to rectify the insult to Menelaus. Achilles himself even states that he has no true issues with Priam and his city since “The Trojans never did me damage, not in the least” (*Il.* 1.180).

Indeed, unlike with Menelaus or his brother Agamemnon, the Trojan War is not initially a personal vendetta for Achilles. He is fighting in order to receive honour and glory, or as the Greeks would have known it *kleos*. The heroes fighting at Troy, on both sides, are “there to win *kleos*, as Homer says directly more than once,” and none more so than Achilles (Clader 6). As Clader states, Achilles is “concerned with becoming material for epic poetry,” which is in essence the only true immortality a mortal can achieve (Clader 6). One major aspect of his character that sets Achilles apart from the other Achaeans is that Achilles has been made aware of the two possible fates that await him. Achilles states that:

Mother tells me,

the immortal goddess Thetis with her glistening feet,

that two fates bear me on to the day of death.

If I hold out here and I lay siege to Troy,

my journey home is gone, but my glory never dies.

If I voyage back to the fatherland I love,

my pride, my glory dies[.] . . .
but the life that’s left me will be long,

the stroke of death will not come on me quickly (Il. 9. 497-505).

This speech clearly gives one the impression that Achilles has a choice in what his fate shall be, and even he is undecided on whether or not it is better to cement his role as the greatest of heroes and receive immortalising glory or to live a simple life with a legacy that will diminish over a few generations. Achilles is understandably reluctant to die at Troy, a stance emphasized in his belief that:

No, what lasting thanks in the long run
for warring with our enemies, on and on, no end?
One and the same lot for the man who hangs back
and the man who battles hard. The same honor waits
for the coward and the brave. They both go down to Death,
the fighter who shirks, the one who works to exhaustion (Il. 9. 383-8).

Achilles entertains doubts that eternal fame is worth dying for, as the ultimate fate that awaits the glorious warrior is the same fate that awaits all mortals: both will eventually “go down to Death” (Suzuki 19, Il. 9.387). There are other heroes within the epic that face a similar dilemma. Sarpedon, for example, “explains that the warriors are honored with pride of place as well as with tangible rewards for braving battle; yet he expresses his ambivalence toward a code that necessarily entails the glory of one and the shame and death of the other, musing that were he to escape this battle, he would forgo glory to live on (12.310-328)” (Suzuki 19). In the end, Achilles does not choose to “escape this battle” but to pursue glory at any cost, taking at least some solace from the knowledge that the “will of Zeus in The Iliad operates to guarantee the honor of Achilles” as the fall of Troy is very much a “divine expedient” and it will be his legacy that will reap the benefits
(Suzuki 19; Wilson 151, 157). Critics from Adam Parry to M. S. Silk consider Achilles’ rejection of the Embassy in Book IX to be a rejection of the heroic code (see, e.g., Parry or Silk 84-85), but my reading of Achilles’ lasting concern with kleos and timé suggests these claims to subversion misunderstand his character and Homer’s theme. Ultimately, Homer’s Iliad is concerned with showing that to be a hero is to seek glory - heroism and glory are indistinguishable.

Lancelot’s motivations for becoming the greatest of knights are harder to determine than those of Achilles and his quest to be such is shown in a very different light. Given that the Morte Darthur tries to maintain heavy Christian overtones through the invocation of God and the knights of the Round Table constantly acting under the will of God, it stands to reason that a knight as virtuous as Lancelot would not be seeking glory for himself like Achilles, but instead be seeking glory for God. For this very reason, the majority of Malory scholars argue that Malory eventually rejects earthly Arthurian heroism in favour of Christian morality and a good afterlife in Heaven (see, e.g., Moorman; Guerin; Field; Armstrong). Yet, it is clear that Arthur’s knights are concerned with their own reputations and prestige. Throughout the entire narrative, Lancelot is defined by his “attempt to live up to his reputation as the best of knights, he strives for perfection in all of the codes that a knight should be subject to” (Lupack 135). Despite Lancelot’s flaws, Alan Lupack says it best when he states that Lancelot is “more chivalric and courtly than any other knight; he seeks adventure, champions women and the oppressed, acts in a courtly manner, and serves his king at home and abroad to a degree achieved by anyone else” (135). Lancelot is repeatedly presented as “the best knight in the world and Malory’s paragon of chivalry”; and he is certainly more than willing to laud
his achievements, especially if his past heroics can help his present situation (Jesmok 81). When Lancelot’s reputation is questioned by both Arthur and Gawain, for instance, Lancelot is quick to emphasize all that he has achieved and what he has done for his fellow knights, stating that, “I and myne have done you oftyntymes bettir servyse than ony othir knyghtes have done, in many dyverce placis; and where ye have bene full hard bestadde dyvers tyme, I have rescowed you from many daungers – and even unto my power I was glad to please you” (667.16-20). Not only is this statement meant to prove that Lancelot is a loyal, and thus chivalrous, knight, he is also one of great abilities. It is worth noting once more that it is clear that these achievements are made greater by the achievements of Lancelot’s lineage as he emphasizes the fact that it was “I and myne” who have done Arthur many great acts of “servyse” (667.16). Lancelot is not only concerned with his own standing, but those of his kinsmen as well, for their honour adds to his own.

Though it could be argued that Lancelot is also motivated to be the best knight as an emissary of God, it seems more likely that his greatest inspiration to be the best is none other than his beloved Queen. While Lancelot may be considered “hede of al Crysten knyghtes,” his reputation lives on even more so as the “trewest lover” (696.43, 697.1). It seems unlikely that Achilles would care that much about his own reputation in the eyes of a woman, but Lancelot is certainly concerned with how Guinevere perceives him. It is for Guinevere that Lancelot “dud many dedys of armys and saved her frome the fyre thorow his noble chevalry” (152.6-7). The relationship between Lancelot and Queen Guinevere will be explored further in Chapter Two.
Both Hector and Arthur are interesting contrasts to Achilles and Lancelot as their focus throughout their respective texts is not on personal glory as much as on ensuring the enduring safety and continuing status of their kingdoms. In this way, we see that heroism is not limited only to the pursuit of personal glory but extends to the glory and enduring safety of the kingdom.

Unlike Achilles, Hector is not involved in the Trojan War for glory alone; he is equally trying to protect his kingdom and his family. Though his royal position would allow him to avoid any direct harm and he could simply order his troops from afar, Hector refuses to desert his troops and let them face their imposing enemy without him. This is made clear when his wife Andromache begs Hector to stay with her “on the rampart here” safely far from the battle (Il. 6.511). Hector can only respond with “I would die of shame to face the men of Troy / and the Trojan women trailing their long robes / if I would shrink from battle now, a coward” (Il. 6.523-5). Hector is no more concerned with “winning my father great glory,” than with gaining “glory for myself”, rather he fights because he fears the day he will die and his wife will be “robbed of the one man strong enough / to fight off your day of slavery” (Il. 6. 529, 552-3). Hector even prays to Zeus that his son will one day be “a better man than his father” (Il. 6.571). This emphasis on the abilities of his son is similar to the concerns of Lancelot and his own kinsmen. It seems unlikely that Achilles would ever wish another to be deemed greater than he, even his own flesh and blood. Achilles cannot be the leader that Hector is because he is too concerned with his own enduring glory.

In many ways, Arthur himself is a “symbolic center from which Lancelot and the other knights can operate” (Lupack 135). It is under Arthur’s rule that the Round Table is
“fulfylled,” and following his coronation all of the surrounding lands were “under their obeissaunce,” resulting in an impressive kingdom (1.11.36). In regard to those who appose Arthur’s God-given rule, Arthur “overcam hem al – as he dyd the remenaunt, thurgh the noble prowess of himself and his knightes of the Round Table” (1.11.37-39). Arthur’s greatness as a leader is also shown through his generosity, as he is shown gifting those loyal to him with “many londys”, and “rychesse and welth” (150. 29, 30). Though much of Le Morte takes our attention away from Arthur, it is because his “pre-eminence has now been fully established” (McCarthy 19) in the first two Tales of the narrative that Malory can turn his and his audience’s attention to the exploits and fame of Arthur’s knights rather than Arthur himself. Arthur has established a chivalric code for his knights as they go out adventuring in the world, and through their “virtuous action inspired by his ideals”, his greatness is further “complemented” (Rovang 11).

Both Hector and Arthur are shown as more than willing to accept the aid of other great heroes even if that may mean sharing in their own glory. Hector leads an entire army of both Trojan fighters and Trojan allies and Arthur leads the Knights of the Round Table. While these great leaders may be willing to accept help, when it comes down to facing their ultimate foes both are more than willing. For Hector, this is Achilles, a foe he knows he cannot defeat but must try nonetheless as “On him falls the whole burden of the war” (Knox 33). When the time comes for Hector to face Achilles, both Priam and Hecuba beg their son not to go, but “they could not shake the fixed resolve of Hector” (Il. 22.110). Hector knows he cannot run from this fight, he would “die of shame to face the men of Troy” as a coward (Il. 22. 125). Hector enters the fight knowing that he cannot possibly win, but like Achilles, he is bound by honour and accepts that he must “die at his
hands in glory” (II.22.131). This is what makes Hector a hero, as Homer’s heroes cannot hide from battle nor “meet so inglorious a death” while attempting to hide (Griffin, “Uniqueness” 46). They must perish “in action” as this is “a proper heroic death’ (Griffin, “Uniqueness” 46).

For Arthur, this willingness to meet both his greatest foe and his death is realized through Mordred, his own flesh and blood, whose betrayal echoes on both a knightly and familial level. Just as Hector knew that he would die at the hands of Achilles, so does Arthur know that fighting Mordred will lead to his own demise. Shortly before Arthur is to face his traitorous kin, the spirit of Gawain comes to him in a dream to warn Arthur that “ye fyght as tomorne with Sir Mordred, as ye bothe have assaynged, doute ye nat ye shall be slayne” (684.4-5). But faced with the loss of so many of his “noble knyghtes” when the attempted truce fails, Arthur cannot turn away and takes up his “speare” for his final battle (685. 23, 44). Like Hector, he receives a “proper heroic death in action” (Griffin, “Uniqueness” 46).

It seems impossible to discuss these leaders without at least mentioning Agamemnon. Despite amassing and leading an impressive army, Agamemnon does not live up to the leadership abilities of Hector and Arthur. Agamemnon is too concerned with his own personal gains. This is evident in his willingness to alienate Achilles, his most valuable ally, by taking Briseis so that Achilles – in Agamemnon’s eyes – will “learn how much greater” is Agamemnon (II. 1.219). To take another warrior’s “prize” in this way is presented as a complete “disgrace” to their heroic code (II. 1.141, 1.148). Agamemnon is insulting Achilles’ in the worst way and to add insult to injury, tells him
to “Desert, by all means – if the spirit drives you home!” for he will “never beg you to stay, not on my account” (*Il*. 1.204-5).

Finally, one must also consider the importance of the characters of Patroclus and Gawain. Though Achilles and Lancelot stand as the greatest of warriors, and Hector and Arthur are the greatest leaders, Patroclus and Gawain stand as the greatest of allies, representing an essential relationship present to both epic and romance literature, the importance of loyalty between comrades. In the *Iliad*, no mortal is closer to Achilles than that of Patroclus and this alone emphasises Patroclus’ own standing. Patroclus is repeatedly shown as Achilles’ most trusted council and he is a skilled warrior in his own right. Knox points out that the relationship between these two warriors is so close that Achilles views Patroclus as “a part of himself,” implying that any glory Patroclus achieves also increases Achilles’ own status (53). The depth of this loyalty is shown by how it is only after Hector slays Patroclus that the battle against the Trojans becomes personal for Achilles. When Achilles discovers this, he laments that his “dear comrade’s dead, / Patroclus – the man I loved beyond all other comrades, / loved as my own life – I’ve lost him – Hector’s killed him” (*Il*. 18. 94-6). Suddenly, killing Hector becomes more than a matter of honor and glory, it is about vengeance. This vengeance becomes the driving force Achilles needed to fulfill his fate. The strength of Achilles’ rage against Hector is the ultimate testament to just how important Patroclus is to him. Achilles clearly values his fellow warrior above any other and his great affection for Patroclus indicates that Patroclus is worthy of that affection in his own right. We can measure Patroclus’s worth by the value of Achilles affection for his fellow warrior.
In *Le Morte Darthur*, Gawain is one of the few knights whose “lust for honor” nearly equals that of Lancelot’s and even as he is shown to be capable of great mistakes, he “possesses an intensity of spirit that inspires individual friendship and can produce acts of intense loyalty. (Rovang 27). Despite Lancelot “supplanting him as Arthur’s right-hand man,” Gawain remains “unwavering” in his loyalty and friendship with Lancelot through the majority of the text (Rovang 27). As Paul Rovang points out, Gawain’s loyalty to Lancelot is shown repeatedly throughout the text but is most notable when he “loally refuses Agravain and Mordred’s proposal to expose Lancelot and Guinevere’s alleged adultery” (29). When Agravain exclaims that he will “disclose hit to the Kynge”, Gawain responds that it will “Nat be my counceyle” and proceeds to discuss Lancelot’s many achievements since “suche noble dedis and kyndnes sholde be remembirde”, not Lancelot’s alleged indiscretions (646.33-34, 647.9-10). As Arthur himself says to the dying Gawain: “here now thou lyghest, the man in the worlde that I loved moste. And now ys my joy gone, for . . . in youre person and in Sir Launcelot I moste had my joy and myne affyaunce [trust]” (681.18-22).

Interestingly, both Patroclus’ and Gawain’s faith in their brothers-in-arms is tested. For Patroclus, this comes when Achilles turns his back on the war as Patroclus feels a great depth of pity for his fellow Achaeans and does not wish to “neglect” them or see them all die (*Il.* 11.1005). Patroclus begs Achilles to turn from his anger and save his comrades, arguing “What good will a man, / even one in the next generation, get from you / unless you defend the Argives from disaster?” (*Il.* 12. 35-37). In spite of Patroclus’ failure to rouse Achilles back into the war at this time, it is important that Patroclus never truly shuns Achilles; instead, he takes up Achilles’ armor, for the good of his fellow
Achaeans, and Achilles’ own glory, and faces Hector. Patroclus is thus shown as embodying the heroic ideals of bravery and uncompromising loyalty.

The rift between Gawain and Lancelot is far deeper as Lancelot murders Gawain’s brothers. After this tragic event, Lancelot tries to make amends and “repentes” his actions (661.35). Many, including Arthur, would “have bene accorded with Sir Launcelot” and welcomed him back into the court but “Sir Gawayne wolde nat suffir hym by no maner of meane” and “made many men to blow uppon Sir Launcelot; and so all at onys they called hym ‘false recrayed knight!’” (662.11-15). Though Gawain was always steadfastly loyal to Lancelot, his loyalty to his kin must take precedence; like Achilles, he can easily find himself motivated by single-minded “vengefulness” (Rovang 28). Despite this catastrophic rift, in Gawain’s final moments before he “yelded up the goste,” Gawain does forgive Lancelot and requests that Lancelot once more join their fellow knights to “rescow that noble kynge” from Mordred (682.34, 15-16). Putting aside his own vengeance, Gawain willingly honours Lancelot for the greater good of their King and fellow knights, revealing a strength of character and heroism.

In light of the enduring fascination with imperfect heroes still rampant in the literature of today, both the Iliad and Morte Darthur are essential to our understanding of the evolving nature of heroism in literature. Homer’s text provides a foundation by which the heroic identity is defined, emphasising personal bravery, honour and the pursuit of glory. Malory’s text builds on this, incorporating the importance of a heroic community where the emphasis on an individual gives way to an emphasis on the greater good of a kingdom. On the one hand, these men are not peaceful diplomats, but rather warriors willing to take action in the most violent of ways. On the other, they are sympathetic and
emotionally deep, motivated by the love of both their fellow heroes and the women they fight for. Knowledge of their own mortality does not hinder them, instead cementing their bravery and furthering the level of glory that they should receive.
Chapter Two: The Dangers of Unrestrained Female Sexuality

When it comes to the downfall of men, no two women ever captured imaginations as successfully as have Helen of Troy and Queen Guinevere (save, perhaps biblical Eve). The name Helen of Troy is synonymous with both indescribable beauty and calamitous devastation. The daughter of Zeus and Leda, she is a demigod fated to ensnare the hearts of men, whether she wants to or not. Despite the common literary trope that outer beauty signifies inner morality, Helen is an obvious transgressor, and whether she was compelled by Aphrodite or chose to elope with Paris of her own accord, in her passion she quit her home in Sparta in favour of following her beautiful prince to Troy. No less infamous is Queen Guinevere, a woman whose adulterous tale has also taken numerous forms. While Guinevere may not be recognized as an incomparable beauty like Helen, she certainly follows in Helen’s footsteps when it comes to problematic morals and falling prey to her own lustful desires. It has even been suggested that Malory’s version of the story of Guinevere’s adultery and punishment, a punishment which sees her sentenced to death but rescued by Lancelot, helped create a literary and cultural precedent for Henry VIII’s actual execution of Anne Boleyn “through an accusation of treasonous adultery” (Lexton 223). This Queen will forever be remembered as the lover of the two greatest warriors, and noblest of men, King Arthur and Sir Lancelot, as well as the key to their ultimate undoing.

The similarities between Helen of Troy and Queen Guinevere are in no way a revelation owed to this work. These two scandalous adulteresses have long been connected in many forms. Even before Sir Thomas Malory (writing in the late 1460s),
both had earned a shameful place in history. Dante Alighieri’s account of the Second Circle of Hell in “Canto V” of his Inferno (circa 1308-1321) invokes both of their stories when he catches sight of Helen, “for whom ten years / of ill revolved,” and is shortly thereafter warned that the story of Guinevere and her “much-longed-for smile” influenced other lovers to commit adulterous acts (V. 64-5, 133). Their relationship has even entered into contemporary popular culture. Take, for instance, Josephine Angelini’s Young Adult trilogy Starcrossed (2011) which depicts Guinevere and Lancelot as reincarnations of Helen and Paris doomed to fall in love forever, with devastating repercussions to those around them. As two of the most influential versions of these women’s stories, Homer’s Iliad and Sir Thomas Malory’s Le Morte Darthur can be connected by their similar treatment of their leading female characters. While neither Helen nor Guinevere take up as much space in the Iliad and Morte as their male counterparts, the narratives of their respective works ultimately depend on them as influential forces. However, given the tragic nature of these texts, these women are rarely seen as a positive force in the lives of men.

Through their characterisations of Helen and Guinevere, both the Iliad and Morte perpetuate the idea that female sexuality, left to a female’s own agency, is a profoundly destructive force able to destroy men and their kingdoms. Thus, both texts perpetuate a fear of female sexuality. However, the authors of these works also present the idea that, while females may not be able to control their own sexual desires, and as such are not to be fully persecuted for their weakness, men do have the ability to control and reign in female sexuality. Also, despite the obvious religious differences between the texts, both women are presented as moral transgressors yet are ultimately forgiven when they turn
away from their sexuality. I will compare the characters of Helen of Troy and Queen Guinevere, both of whom are driven by their desires and as such used as pawns in order to incite a war.

The fear that Helen and Guinevere provoke is rooted in the idea that they are dangerous because of their power over men. The danger Helen represents lies in the fact that “she is physically perfect and yet her perfection spawns disaster” (Hughes 5). Hers is a dangerous beauty that “cannot simply be viewed, it is coercive: she forces men and women alike into a state of longing,” and the men “who look at her cannot walk away unscathed. She catalyses desire” (Hughes 116). The ancient Greeks were aware of the dangerous nature of such beauty; “they knew of the dreadful things that could happen if one looked on the transcendental face of a goddess or monster-woman,” as evident from the myths of Gorgons, who could turn people to stone with their looks, or Actaeon, who was turned into a stag for the unwitting crime of viewing “the goddess Diana bathing naked in a pool” (Hughes 116). In the famous Homeric Hymn To Aphrodite, the Trojan Ankhises, upon realizing that he has lain with the goddess Aphrodite, begs “show me your mercy” for he knows that a man “who sleeps with deathless goddesses has no flourishing life” (71-2). In short, “it is dangerous for a man to come face to face with a goddess, for he is liable to leave the encounter crippled or unmanned” (Clader 12). That this danger applied equally to Helen is apparent in a famous scene in the Iliad when the Trojan elders announce that she is a creature of “Beauty, terrible beauty! A deathless goddess – so she strikes our eyes!” (3.190). As Clader states, to these men Helen “is at once irresistibly attractive and terrible to behold” (Clader 12). As Bettany Hughes states, Helen is “clearly dangerous and still men cannot stop loving her” (Hughes 5). When the
“old men of the realm” see Helen on poised Troy’s walls, they exclaim “Ah, no wonder / 
the men of Troy and Argives under arms have suffered / years of agony for her, for such a 
woman” (Iliad 3.179, 187-9). These are Trojan fathers who have lost their sons to a war 
she began, and even they cannot fully condemn her, for her beauty is too powerful. She is 
a “paradigm for the female sex and for the hazards of the entangling female embrace” 
(Hughes 6).

The power Guinevere has over the men in her kingdom is no less threatening in a 
medieval setting. Guinevere’s beauty may not be that of a goddess, but throughout Le 
Morte, she is described as “one of the fairest on lyve” (62.19). Furthermore, Molly Martin 
puts forth the idea that “lesser knights cannot win the love” of a “superlatively beautiful” 
woman and so, both the knights and their love are depicted as “compatible” through their 
“prowess” and their love interest’s “beauty” (Martin 44). By this logic, if Arthur and 
Lancelot are the two of the greatest men in the land, the woman they love must be 
comparably great woman (Martin 44). Guinevere inspires the love of great men so much 
so that they are willfully subject to her. From his “first site of Queen Guinevere”, Arthur 
knew he would love her “ever after” (20). However, when Arthur reveals to Merlin that 
he loves “Gwenyvere, the Kynges doughtir of Lodegrean,” Merlin is less than thrilled by 
his King’s choice and would have preferred to find another “damesell of beaute and of 
goodnesse” but he is aware that he will not change Arthur’s mind because “as mannes 
herte is sette, he woll be loth to returne” (Malory 62.14-5, 21). However, Merlin does 
warn “the Kyng covertly that Gwenyver was nat holsom for hym to take to wyff, for he 
warned hym that Launcelot sholde love hir, and sche hym agayne” (62.25-7). Despite this 
prophesied knowledge, Arthur still chooses to both marry Guinevere and invite Lancelot
to be one of his closest knights. Lancelot too “loved the Quene agayne aboven all other ladyes dayes of his lyff, and for hir he dud many dedes of armys, and saved her from the fyre thorow his noble chevalry” (152.5-7). And the influence Guinevere has over Arthur and his knights is not limited to the effect her physical beauty has over them but also through her connection to the Round Table itself. It is through the marriage of Guinevere and Arthur that her father King Lodegreance gives to Arthur as a dowry present the “Table Rounde with the hondred knyghtes” (63.5). In this way, “The queen and the Table are constantly linked” and as such, “Guinevere, like the Round Table that was her marriage portion, holds the knights at court and is culpable if she drives them away” (Edwards 44, 45; on connections between women and chivalry, see further Armstrong). She is upholding the “bonds between men who uphold the court,” but it is within her power to destroy these same bonds (Edwards 44).

In order to understand just how destructive both Helen and Guinevere’s respective affairs are by the end of their narratives, one must first understand how formidable Troy and Camelot are. Neither Troy nor Camelot are meant to be simple cities; rather they are great kingdoms, each with its own history of overcoming sieges. The Trojan War is not the first time that the city of Ilium has been threatened. According to Tlepolemus, son of the great hero Herakles, his father had once “razed the walls of Troy” with a small army of “just six ships” (Il. 5. 738, 737). It is tempting to dismiss Troy as an easy target given the apparent ease of this victory; however, the fact that it was Heracles who “destroyed the sacred heights of Troy” is telling (Il. 7.745). Heracles is often considered the greatest hero in Greek myth, achieving far more than any other hero (on the many aspects of Heracles’ character, see Galinsky). Just because he was successful in invading Troy does
not mean that any other army would have been successful. Furthermore, the blame for this invasion is placed on the previous Trojan king, Laomedon, who is described as a “fool” who double-crossed the son of Zeus, an act that would not endear you to the gods (Il. 5.747). Under its current ruler, King Priam, who is decidedly more pious, Troy has withstood a ten-year siege, and so it stands to reason that the city is decidedly more formidable. The problem is that this decade-long siege which is destined to end in the destruction of Troy all began with Helen because, despite her epithet “of Troy,” she was initially married to Menelaus of Sparta, and her willing and adulterous elopement with Paris triggered the war. As Clader states, “Helen is certainly Homer’s personification for the Cause of War and as such must be connected with some manner of danger” (Clader 23). The men of Troy would eagerly support Clader’s statement, for they are certainly aware of the “danger” she poses as can be seen in their plea “But still, ravishing as she is, let her go home in the long ships / and not be left behind” (Il. 3.191-2).

Unlike the Trojan War, which takes place outside the Walls of Troy, the adventures of Arthur and his knights take place over a large geographical area, though Camelot is the symbolic seat of power. Thus, even enemies that are not fought directly on the city’s doorstep are still a threat to the established order. Also, in Morte Darthur, the focus is less on the strength of Camelot as an actual city, but instead as the location of the symbolic Round Table. Like Troy, the heroes of Camelot have their own history of formidable foes, most notably, the Roman Empire. To best understand the scale of the threat that the Empire represents, consider that Malory is not the first to draw on the legend of Arthur and the Roman General Lucius for creative inspiration. In his work, The History of the Kings of Britain, Geoffrey of Monmouth tells of how the Romans
demanded that Arthur pay “tribute” to his “overlords” in Rome (Geoffrey 177). In Geoffrey’s text, the conflict comes near the end of Arthur’s reign, and even though he does win and “the Britons pushed on to victory, it was only attained through great toil,” weakening Arthur and his knights and contributing to his final demise against “his nephew Mordred, in whose keeping he had left the governance of Britain, and who had proven himself to be a tyrant and a traitor” (Geoffrey 196). While Malory does introduce the Roman threat and the character of Lucius, he diverges from Geoffrey’s narrative by placing the Roman threat within the early years of Arthur’s reign while simultaneously increasing the threat the Romans pose. In Malory’s version, Lucius is Emperor of Rome and he and his army of “horrible peple” seek to “dystroy Arthures londys that he wan thorow warre of his noble knyghtes” (118. 41, 42-43). Not only are Arthur and the knights of the Round Table able to overcome Lucius, Arthur himself is coronated, his conquered enemies offering to “crowne hym there kyndly with chrysemed hondys, with scepture forsothe as an emperoure sholde” (Malory 149.38-9). Despite the different depictions of the Roman threat, the strength of Camelot proves greater than the Roman Empire but, like Troy, its ruin is marked by a single woman taken by love. Camelot’s strength may have been forged in battle, its force of protectors bonded through blood and steel, but “Once the illicit relationship becomes known, adultery damages the king’s status and fractures the Round Table along lines of affinity, destroying the crown” (Cherewatuk 27). It is thus telling that one of the common claims made about Malory’s changes to the Roman War story is that he deliberately expands Lancelot’s role, thereby paving the way for the beginning of Lancelot and Guinevere’s love and adultery (see Dichmann and Archibald 145-51).
The cities are not the only great icons to fall victim to the sexual wiles of these Queens, for both Helen and Guinevere are also associated with the moral destruction of dishonourable men. Each work presents their sexual desires as corrupting socially upright men, namely Paris and Lancelot. However, herein lies a major difference between the *Iliad* and *Morte*. In the *Iliad*, it is clear that Paris is far from a chaste young man before meeting Helen. Indeed, Paris’ own brother Hector, is shown repeatedly degrading “his brother with insults, stinging taunts” (*Il. 6.382*). Hector refers to Paris as “appalling” and accuses him of being “mad for women,” a trait that motivates him to “lure them all to ruin!” (*Il. 3. 43, 44*). Paris may not be celebrated for his actions, but for Homer’s audience his moral standing is not determined by own chastity; rather it is based on his honour under the law of Zeus’ *xenios*, a concept that defined guest-host relationships. According to Hughes, *xenios* was “fundamentally important to Greek society” as it was “a code of conduct” that “denoted an understanding that bound together neighbors and travellers, guest and host” (122). When Paris went to Sparta, he was “honoured as a *xenos* in Menelaus’ home,” treated with all the respect and grandeur befitting a Trojan Prince and potential ally (Hughes 123). Whether it was Helen or Paris who acted as seducer, “Paris defiled the fundamental principles of hospitality, principles that underpinned society and international relations” (Hughes 128). Hughes further enforces the weight of Paris’ sin by arguing that, “had Paris taken [Helen] in battle or seized her on the road, things would not have been so bad, but he was a *guest*” (127). He willfully committed “an act of war” that went against the very principles of the most powerful Olympian in order to possess the most beautiful of women (128). Before the end, Paris also finds himself reviled “as much as death” by the men of Troy who have no respect for their prince and would “have willingly turned him over to the Greeks” (Suzuki 36). There is quite a lot of debate over
whether it was Helen or Paris who ruined the other, and many scholars today seem to lay the majority of the blame on Paris, using words such as the “abduction” and even “rape” of Helen (Hughes 49, 51). Yet, as Hughes claims, “Homer told the world what women like Helen could make men do” and for a Classical audience, Paris is driven to commit his crime by Helen’s sexual attraction (Hughes 4). If Helen is the mortal incarnation of beauty and beloved by Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual passion who has no patience for mortals who turn away from their desires, how could Paris, a man also beloved by that same goddess have resisted Helen?

It is odd that Lancelot does not suffer from such a naughty reputation as Paris. Instead, he is paradoxically presented as the poster-boy for knightly values despite the fact that, for the vast majority of *Le Morte Darthur*, it is common knowledge that he is in love with his Queen. Some of this paradox is traditional, for Lancelot is introduced into the Arthurian legend by Chrétien de Troyes in the *Chevalier de la charrette* (1177-78), and Chrétien and the major medieval French writers after him present Lancelot as simultaneously Arthur’s best knight and the lover of the Queen. As Derek Brewer notes, Lancelot is thus “at once the loyal servant, the loyal lover, and the supreme traitor” (33). Karen Cherewatuk brings up an interesting point that Malory is quite vague in his detailing of Lancelot and Guinevere’s transgressions, attributing this to the fact that “Malory seems uncomfortable when the sources force him to present Launcelot in a negative light because of sexual or romantic desire” (25). This is hardly surprising since the entirety of the text presents contrasting messages regarding Lancelot’s behavior. There are several incidents where other characters confront him about his affections while simultaneously praising his status. For example, during his time at the Castle Chariot with
the four queens, they acknowledge that “can no lady have thy love but one, and that is Quene Gwenyvere” (Malory 155.10-11). But in the same scene, the queens also call him “the noblest knyght lyvyng”, a title one would not think fitting of a knight lusting after his King’s wife (Malory 155.9). And as mentioned previously, Arthur himself is aware that such a romantic connection will be forged between his best knight and wife. Neither his fellow knights nor his king condemns Lancelot’s behavior towards the Queen. Ironically, Lancelot himself condemns the actions of adulterers and lechers on the basis of morality, claiming that “knyghts that bene adventures sholde nat be advoutrers nothir lecherous, for than they be nat happy nother fortunate unto the werryng” (164.37-39). Taken on its own this statement implies that Lancelot disapproves of knights taking illicit lovers, and Beverly Kennedy takes such statements at face value, presenting Lancelot as the ideal of what she terms “True” knighthood in the Morte Darthur. Kennedy, however, seems to misread the text since Malory clearly tells his audience that ever “Sir Launcelot bene in his prevy thoughtes and in hys myndis so sette inwardly to the Quene” and that his desire for her becomes too much (588.13-14). Even piety is not enough to put a halt to his sinful yearnings, since after the relatively religious Quest for the Holy Grail and his attempts to undergo penance for sinfully loving the queen, he “forgate the promyse and the perfeccion that he made in the Queste” for the Sangrail (588.11). In the end, “Sir Launcelot wente to bedde with the Quene and toke no force of hys hurte honde but toke his plesaunce and his lyknge untyll hit was the dawnyng of the day” (633.16-18). In doing so, Lancelot has betrayed his king, and Arthur himself brands him a “traytoure” (649.8). The question becomes, can a noble knight truly be noble if he is a traitor to the noblest king? Like Helen, whether or not Guinevere deliberately lured Lancelot from his moral, Christian path, Guinevere has, in the words of Sir Bors, “destroyed a good knyght”
In these ways, both women are held responsible for the corruption of heroes and kingdoms.

Now we must turn to the Queens themselves in order to understand how they too are shown to be victims of their own sexual desire. It is important to note that despite the sheer force of their desire and the powers hindering their self control, both Helen and Guinevere make valiant attempts to resist falling prey to their own sexual urges. However, they do so quite differently and only after having succumbed to the initial temptations.

Helen was an unwilling slave to her own sexual yearnings, which for the Greeks, are manifested in the goddess Aphrodite. For the Greeks, Aphrodite and one’s own sexual desires are intrinsically linked (the Hymn to Aphrodite is the best gloss on Aphrodite and the power of love). Certainly, many take the stance that “the Spartan queen seduced Paris, or was, at the very least, willing to go with him;” however, it is clear that “inspired as Helen was by the passion of Aphrodite, she was not stolen but left of her own free will” (Hughes 136; see also Clader 12). The goddess is the manifestation of Helen’s desire and the control Aphrodite exerts over Helen is indicative of the lack of control Helen has over herself. Aphrodite’s influence over Helen is quite blatant, as we can see through Helen’s accusations that it is the “Maddening” goddess who is “Lusting to lure me to my ruin yet again” (3.460, 461). Helen’s attempts to resist Paris, whom she now views as a “coward,” are at first quite strong and she is even brave enough to taunt Aphrodite by telling the goddess

go to him yourself – you hover beside him!
Abandon the gods’ high road and be a mortal!

Never set foot again on Mount Olympus, never! –
suffer for Paris, protect Paris, for eternity…
until he makes you his wedded wife – that or his slave (3. 470-4).

However, Helen’s attempts to shun Paris and Aphrodite are met with Aphrodite’s cruel reminder that Helen is acting like little more than a “wretched, headstrong girl” and even threatens that

in my immortal rage I may just toss you over,
hate you as I adore you now – with a vengeance.
I might make you the butt of hard, withering hate
from both sides at once, Trojans and Achaeans –
then your fate can tread you down to dust! (3. 480-5).

As Clader states, this is Aphrodite “cruelly reminding Helen of her ambiguous position in the War and pointing out to her that without a goddess’ aid she is doomed” (Clader 13).

Even when Helen begins yearning for her “husband long ago”, she is “powerless to resist” Aphrodite’s influence because the “goddess of desire, is too strong (3.501, Clader 15).

When Paris comes to bring her to bed, she gives in to that “irresistible longing” that has its grip on them both (3.524). Ultimately, this is a “powerful desire, personally contrived by Aphrodite and controlling the most beautiful of the Trojan women and her beautiful consort” (Clader 14).

Guinevere may not have a powerful goddess whispering in her ear, but she is no less subject to her own desires. Guinevere’s fondness for Lancelot is established early on in the text but much of their early relationship is coloured by Guinevere’s ensuing jealousies
over any female attention given to her knight. When it is clear that Lancelot has gone to bed with Dame Elayne Guinevere angrily rebukes him, calling him a “false traytoure knight” (472.18). Despite her own marriage to Arthur and Lancelot’s right to pursue a relationship outside their adulterous one, Guinevere’s desire has manifested in a very possessive way. Of course, Lancelot is ultimately forgiven as he truly believed that “he had another in hys armys” and was distraught to find that he had lain with Elayne, and not Guinevere (471.40-1). The impropriety of adultery does little to dissuade the two lovers, especially after Lancelot returns from the Grail Quest after which it is stated that they “loved togydirs more hotter than they dud toforehonde, and had many such prevy draughtis togydir that many in the courte spake of hit” (588.16-18). Eventually Guinevere will be punished for having acted on her desires and is set up to be condemned by Arthur who “commaunde the Quene to the fyre and there to be brente” (655.8). Guinevere risked her marriage, her good name, and her very life because of her desire for Lancelot. Neither Helen nor Guinevere have the power to resist and it is this lack of control that is so unsettling to Homer and Malory’s contemporary audiences. Lust and desire, whether manifested in a divine being or not, are powerful and uncontrollable forces that do not yield to one’s own rationality or regrets.

The Trojan War against Ilium and Mordred’s siege against Camelot yield no small number of casualties and it stands to reason that when all the chaos of the battles are over that Helen and Guinevere would be held accountable for their roles in the instigation of all the violence. Yet, despite their destructive trysts, both Helen and Guinevere are granted a sort of redemption, though only after a period of intense self-recrimination. By the tenth year of the Trojan War, Helen’s guilt is nearly unbearable. With every scene in
which she features, “The picture Homer paints of Helen in Troy is a poignant and lonely one” (Hughes 219). She is now living much like a shade, “passively living out the effects of her fatal act” (Suzuki 36). Furthermore, she cannot even take comfort in her beautiful husband whom she once longed for more than any other, since “she no longer loves Paris, the initial passion having turned into scorn and disgust” (Suzuki 38). Her self-hatred is made abundantly clear in nearly all of her limited dialogue within the *Iliad*, as she reveals how she truly sees herself:

bitch that I am, vicious, scheming –

horror to freeze the heart! Oh how I wish

that first day my mother brought me into the light

some black whirlwind had rushed me out to the mountains

or into the surf where the roaring breakers crash and drag

and the waves had swept me off before all this had happened!

But since the gods ordained it all, these desperate years,

I wish I had been the wife of a better man,” (6.408-15).

Helen goes further, telling Priam that “if only death had pleased me then, grim death, / that day I followed your son to Troy” (3.209-10). It stands to reason that some of Helen’s anger would be directed at Paris; however, Helen’s anger at Paris is overshadowed by her anger towards herself, her bad judgement and weakness in resisting him.

While Helen’s self-recrimination may begin in the *Iliad*, her story does not end here. For that, we must turn to the *Odyssey*, as it is within this work that Helen’s
redemption is found. In Book Four of the *Odyssey*, Telemachus has travelled to the impressive kingdom of Sparta and finds himself in the presence of its king and queen. Gone is the lamenting and lonely Helen of Troy; in her place, is Helen of Sparta, a woman depicted as positively content and in her rightful place. When giving the account of the end of the Trojan War and the Greeks’ impending victory, Helen tells Telemachus that while the “rest of the Trojan women shrilled their grief”, her “heart leapt up” (*Od.* 4.291, 292). The discontent and regret so present in her character during the events of the *Iliad* had only continued to grow and she states:

> my heart had changed by now –

> I yearned to sail back home again! I grieved too late for the madness

> Aphrodite sent me, luring me there, far from my dear land,

> forsaking my own child, my bridal bed, my husband too (*Od.* 4. 293-296).

Helen’s redemption is further emphasised when one takes into consideration her husband Menelaus’ treatment of her. Given the fact that Helen did forsake their marriage vows and not only had an adulterous affair with Paris but also ran away with him, one might forgive Menelaus for being more than a little angry with her. And yet, when Helen refers to herself as the “shameless whore that I was,” Menelaus’ first reaction is to console her and stop her self-deprecation, referring to her twice as “My dear” and proceeding to “assur[e] her” (*Od.* 4. 162, 163). Despite her past, Helen has been reunited with her original family, the place she truly wants to be. Her husband has seemingly forgiven her despite her own lack of control, likely because he, too, is aware of the power of desire. After all, he was willing to go to war for ten years to possess Helen once again. Much of the blame is
placed on Aphrodite and, because of this, Helen herself is able to find some redemption, though at the cost of a lifetime of self-contempt.

Guinevere’s redemption is not so easily found. When contrasted with Helen’s redemption which is coloured by an unforgiving shame which she directs at herself, it seems likely Guinevere’s redemption is halted by her lack of guilt and repentance. This seems even more likely when one considers that Christianity is a faith that emphasises repentance. Unlike Helen, who expresses immense regret over her affair, Guinevere does not regret her part in the destruction of her marriage and kingdom until nearly the very end of the narrative. Guinevere would find much more in common with a younger Helen, the naïve girl who threw her life away for a dashing prince. Helen’s shame in the *Iliad* has been cultivated over nearly a ten-year period, fuelled by watching a seemingly unending war and the slaughter of Spartans and Achaeans alike.

By the time Guinevere has realised her mistake, she cannot physically return to her rightful husband’s side because he has perished, having been “smote” by the traitorous Mordred during their final confrontation (Malory 686.7). Instead, “Guenevere embraces her role as Arthur’s wife by embracing chaste widowhood” (Cherewatuk 28; Malory 689-690). Upon finding out that her husband is dead, Guinevere flees to Amesbury; and there she “lete make herselff a nunne, and wered whyght clothys and blak, and grete penaunce she toke uppon her as ever ded synfull woman in thys londe” (689.32-34). In this new life, “never creature coude make her myry; but ever she lyved in fastynge, prayers and almes-dedes, that all manner of people mervayled how vertuously she was chaunged” (690.1-3). Guinevere’s complete change is secured when Lancelot finds her at the abbey and asks her to be with him. Guinevere’s response is first an
admission of her own role in all of the tragic events that transpired as it was through their love that “all thys warre be wrought, and the deth of the moste nobelest knyghtes of the worlde; for thorow oure love that we have loved togydir ys my moste noble lorde slayne” (691.45-692.3). Guinevere then asks, “Sir Lancelot, I requyre the and besche the hartily, for all the love that ever was betwyxt us, that thou never se me no more in the visayge;” also stating “And I commaunde the, on Goddis behalff, that thou forsake my company; and to thy kyngedom loke thou turne agayne, and kepe well thy realme from warre and wrake” (692.9-11, 11-13). In order for her penitence to be complete and her soul to truly be forgiven, “she can never see Lancelot again”, and she must completely “turn away from all things of this world” (Edwards 54). That she finds redemption is indicated by the fact that when she dies, she is buried next to her husband as was her final wish (694.22-24). The Greeks at the time of the Iliad’s creation did not believe in an afterlife in the way the medieval Christians did. Thus, Helen has to find redemption on earth while she is still alive. Whereas Guinevere, once she has repented, can find redemption after her death by gaining admittance into Heaven.

Powerful women seem always to evoke equal parts admiration, fascination and horror. This is true of Lysistrata and Cleopatra; Eleanor of Aquitaine and Elizabeth Woodville; and Elizabeth I and Victoria. It is equally true of Helen and Guinevere. As my earlier example of Josephine Angelini’s YA trilogy Starcrossed (2011) illustrates, this focus on the female figures surrounding, tempting, aiding or destroying male heroes is arguably even more prominent today than in the past. In part, then, my argument illustrates the enduring fascination strong female characters have on the cultural imagination. I have also shown generic similarities between Homer’s and Malory’s
explorations of heroism and sexuality, despite the different time periods in which each author wrote. Finally, my argument helps to explain why literary writers keep returning to the issue of women, beauty, attraction, and female sexuality: Helen and Guinevere are equal parts transgressors and victims, and the complexity of their characters, situations, and stories is another part of their fascinating attraction.

In today’s day and age, it is easier to forgive these women their transgressions. While we may not condone their infidelity, we would examine of their motives. Were their marriages unhappy or unsatisfying? Neither chose their husband - Menelaus and Arthur were deemed the best choice by their fathers. Helen and Guinevere did choose their lovers, though, and they, along with many others, paid dearly. For the contemporary audiences of Homer and Malory, it is the resulting carnage that is so problematic. Both of these authors are playing on the fear that the desire women provoke in men is an uncontrollable force, capable of bringing men and cities to their knees. Any sexual liberation on the part of a woman is demonized on the grounds of the danger it poses because, in these texts, men no longer hold all the power. The redemption that Helen and Guinevere find is only achieved through a return to an acceptable set of patriarchal boundaries. Ultimately, female desire is presented as enticing but with the caveat that it should be held at bay by men and their institutions.
Chapter Three: The Tragic Cost of Heroism

Having discussed the greatness of the heroes in Homer’s Iliad and Sir Thomas Malory’s Le Morte Darthur, one must now look to the heroes’ world and the forces that are not just acting against them but that are working towards their tragic end. While it is clear that women like Helen and Guinevere find happy endings impossible or, at the very least, hard to come by, one may hope that heroes as great as Achilles or Lancelot might achieve a semblance of a happy ending. They are the greatest of warriors, they should be able to overcome any foes. Yet, even the greatest fighter is no match for fate, and in both the Iliad and Morte Darthur, fate drives the heroes to an inevitable and inescapably tragic end. Through an examination of the ways in which these texts are deeply tragic, it is also made quite clear that an awareness of one’s tragic fate only serves to emphasize that tragedy is inescapable.

It is no surprise that the Iliad is a deeply tragic text; indeed “the serious concern of the poem is death” itself and thus, by nature of necessity the story is intrinsically tragic (Griffin, “Uniqueness” 40). Though we do not see the fall of Troy nor the death of Achilles, it is made clear that both events are impending and most of the main characters are “under the shadow of death” throughout the text (Griffin, “Uniqueness” 42). After all, these heroes are mortal, and unlike the gods “men must die” (Griffin, “Uniqueness” 42; also his Life and Death). Throughout the epic, there are several cases in which the final days of Troy are invoked. One of the most notable is found at the beginning of Book 12, wherein we are bluntly told:

“But once the best of the Trojan captains fell,
and many Achaeans died as well while some survived,
and Priam's high walls were stormed in the tenth year
and the Argives set sail for the native land they loved” (Il. 12. 16-9).

This reference of what is to come foreshadows the death of Hector, who is easily recognized as “the best of the Trojan captains” and further ties the fall of Priam and his city with the prince’s death (Il. 12. 16).

Since most of the text of Morte Darthur is concerned with the creation of Arthur’s kingdom and subsequent knightly adventures, it could be argued that this text is not as tragic as that of the Iliad. However, the very title, Le Morte Darthur, challenges this happy notion as it is literally the story of the death of Arthur and all he has established. As C. David Benson states, “The end of the Morte Darthur celebrates the greatness of the Arthurian world on the eve of its ruin” (221). By the end, we are left with the tale of “an hondred thousand that dyed uppon a day” (Malory 690.40). All of the time spent getting to know the knights and their relationship to one another and their King only emphasises the tragic ending when “the magnificent fellowship turns violently upon itself” (Benson 221). There is an “emphasis on human character and earthly deeds” and this “human element” contributes to their tragedy (Whetter 181). Nowhere is this element more unsettling than in the harrowing final interactions between Lancelot, Gawain and Arthur. As Kevin Whetter points out, the “triad” that is Lancelot, Gawain and Arthur is repeated throughout the text, which can be seen as indicative of the “personal ties between these three men, forcefully announcing their importance to the plot and to one another” (181). Yet, despite their close relationship, they all contribute to one another’s tragic ends. The
rift between Lancelot and Arthur and Gawain results in Lancelot’s absence from both of their deaths which he may have been able to prevent. Even more tragic is the fact that “Although Gawayne dies helping to establish a beachhead against Mordred’s army, his death wound comes as a result of a blow upon the old head-injury given to him by Launcelot [680.42-681.13]” and so “Gawayne accordingly attributes his death to his friend, not his half-brother [681.43-682.13]” (Whetter 181). Similar to the Iliad, the tragedy of Malory’s characters lies in their mortality.

What makes both the Iliad and Morte Darthur even more pitiful is the lack of comfort one experiences upon the heroes’ tragic ends. Neither of these texts center around deplorable humans whom one would wish to see punished. Achilles is “obviously not the truly wicked man” most would actively wish to see punished by a grim fate (Conley 171). As Duane Conley states:

His worst faults are cruelty (in his treatment of Hektor) and selfishness (as noted). But these very faults are themselves related to strong strains of humanity and nobility, respectively, in his character. He is cruel to Hektor precisely because of his intense love for Patroklos. For however relentless he may be in his treatment of the enemy, he feels deep love for those close to him (171).

Thus, Achilles is imperfect but not deplorable. His tragic end is not brought on by his own evilness. Likewise, Troy itself is not a wicked city. Michael Winterbottom brings attention to this when discussing what “Priam and the sons of Priam” have done to “deserve the destruction of their city” (33). Winterbottom claims that there is no true “conversation of the innocence or guilt of the Trojans” as a whole, instead the gods have simply chosen to punish the entire city for Paris’ “sin” (33). Even if one does take into
account the wrongdoings of Paris, the impending death of the gentle Priam or the actual
gruesome death of the noble Hector easily remove any sense of comfort one may feel at
the Trojans’ demise.

Correspondingly, Malory’s heroes may be flawed but they are in no way evil
either. Lancelot’s biggest crime is his adulterous relationship with Queen Guinevere, yet
this act is fueled by love and desire not a malicious attempt to undermine his King and
friend. As King, Arthur stands as a beacon of justice and, though imperfect at times, he is
shown as actively trying to uphold and promote the values of courtly virtue and goodness
in himself and his knights. Thus, early in the narrative Malory records after one of
Arthur’s adventures that “all men of worship seyde hit was myrry to be under such a
chytftayne [as Arthur] that wolde putte hys person in adventure as other poure knyghtis
ded” (38.34-36). Arthur’s concern with justice and knighthood is also evident in Malory’s
version of the creation of the Round Table and the Pentecostal Oath that Arthur makes
knights swear to each year. According to the Oath, Arthur’s knights swear

never to do outerage nothir mourthir, and allwayes to fle treson, and to gyff

mercy unto hym that askith mercy, uppon Payne of forfiture of theire worship

and lordship of Kynge Arthure for evir more; and allwayes to do ladyes, damesels,

and jantilwomen and wydowes socoour, strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to

enforce them uppon Payne of dethe. Also that no man take no batayles in a

wrongefull quarell for no love ne for no worldis goodis. (77.27-34)

As Whetter observes, “Malory’s Round Table Oath is essentially a feudal contract centred
around the maintenance of worship [what Malory terms honour and glory], with a threat
of dishonour and lost fealty to those who violate its precepts” (121). At the same time, some critics suggest that the fact that Malory’s knights must be sworn to behave highlights the possible tragic shortcomings of Arthurian knighthood (Guerin 273-74).

It is of great import that in both the *Iliad* and the *Morte Darthur*, there is an awareness of the inevitably tragic end. This awareness incurs the inescapable feeling of the texts’ respective tragedies in both the characters and the readers alike. It is worth considering the relationship between the divine, fate and prophecy as each of these elements combine to ensure an initial awareness of the eventual tragic endings. In the *Iliad*, it is made clear that the fall of Troy is a “divine expedient” and that Zeus himself has committed to seeing Ilium destroyed (Wilson 57). Zeus has made this decision, at least in part, because of the requests of the goddesses Hera and Thetis. Hera wishes to see Priam and his city burn and Zeus has agreed, telling his wife “I gave you this” despite his own personal attachment to Priam’s kingdom (*Il.* 4.50). When Thetis begs Zeus to “guarantee the honor of Achilles”, a request that relies heavily on Achilles’ ultimately decimating the Trojans’ defences, Zeus responds by saying “I will see to this. I will bring it all to pass” (Wilson, 51; *Il.* 1.625). Because Zeus’ word is the “truest sign” there is in Greek myth and once given “no word or work” of his “can be revoked”, the fate of Troy is sealed (*Il.* 1. 628, 629). Zeus’ interactions with Hera and Thetis occur fairly early in the epic, so the knowledge that Zeus has determined the fate of Troy is an ever-present shadow from then on.

Though we do not see God debating his decision eventually to destroy Arthur’s kingdom in *Morte Darthur*, we are made aware of his will through the character of Merlin who represents the “divine/human partnership” as “God’s prophet” (Kennedy, “Idea of
Providence” 8, 6). Merlin functions “as an intermediary in that continuous process of interaction between divine and human wills” (Kennedy, “Idea of Providence” 6). It is through Merlin’s early prophecies that we learn of the eventual destruction of Arthur’s kingdom. Merlin warns Arthur that because Arthur has lain with his half sister Morgawse, God is “displeased” (Malory 32.5-7; Kennedy, “Idea of Providence” 6). Furthermore, Merlin shares with Arthur the prophecy that it will be “youre owne son, begotyn of youre syster, that shall be the destruccion of all thys realme” (37.10-11). This is the prophecy of Mordred, “chivary’s bastard son, the bad seed that grows to choke the garden” (Rovang 111). Just as Zeus has chosen to see Troy fall, so too will God see Arthur’s kingdom fall.

An awareness of the impending tragedies is not just limited to the divine either. In the Iliad, both Achilles and Hector are aware of fates awaiting them. As discussed in Chapter 1, Achilles knows that to stay and fight at Troy will certainly mean his “journey home is gone” and that this is ultimately the fate he will choose (Il. 9.501). Achilles even understands that killing Hector will put events in motion that will seal his own fate, as Thetis had warned her son “hard on the heels of Hector's death your death / must come at once” (18.112-13). Hector is also painfully aware that his days are numbered. This is made apparent when Hector makes his own prophecy of sorts to Andromache, claiming “For in my heart and soul I also know this well: / the day will come when sacred Troy must die, / Priam must die and all his people with him” (6.530-2). As Bernard Knox states, Hector knows his efforts to defend Troy are “futile” and that “Troy is doomed” (34). Hector knows that his end is inevitable; even if he can “claim to be the best man, Greek or Trojan” early on in the Iliad, it is only “because we have not yet seen Achilles in battle” (Knox 35). Knox further claims that:
The whole poem has been moving toward this duel between the two champions, but there has never been any doubt about the outcome. The husband and father, the beloved protector of his people, the man who stands for the civilized values of the rich city, its social and religious institutions, will go down to defeat at the hands of this man who has no family, who in a private quarrel has caused the death of many of his own fellow soldiers, who now in a private quarrel thinks only of revenge, though that revenge, as he well knows, is the immediate prelude to his own death. And the death of Hector seals the fate of Troy; it will fall to the Achaeans, to become the pattern for all time of the death of a city (35).

And Hector knows this all too well. When he finally faces Achilles “at the point of death,” Hector tells his foe "I know you well - I see my fate before me. / Never a chance that I could win you over. . .” (22.418-20).

In Le Morte Darthur, Arthur is also aware of the inevitable tragedy that will befall his kingdom. As mentioned above, Merlin warns Arthur that his son would “destroy hym and all the londe” (39. 22-3). Arthur does attempt to prevent such tragedy from coming about by rounding up “all the children that were borne in May Day,” following which “all were putte in a shyppe to the se” (39.26). Most of these children perished, “save that Mordred was cast up; and a good man founde hym and fostired hym tylle he was fourtene yere of age, and then brought hym to the courte,” where he remained without incident (39.29-31). Arthur seems to have accepted Mordred’s presence in his court, despite the threat. This could be the result of Arthur’s understanding of fate and Divine Providence as “according to the orthodox idea of Divine Providence no future event is certain until it has actually happened” (Kennedy, “Idea of Providence” 8). Malory is explicit, though, that
Mordred alone survives the May-Day slaughter “by fortune” (39.28), thereby raising the idea of impending and destined tragedy in the *Morte*. Though Arthur’s fate was already discussed in Chapter 1, it is worth remembering that Arthur is made aware of his own imminent death by other forces than Merlin. Prior to the final battle between Arthur and Mordred’s armies, the spirit of Gawain warns Arthur that if “ye fyght as tomorne with Sir Mordred, as ye bothe have assynged, doute ye nat ye shall be slayne” (684.4-5). Like Hector and Achilles, Arthur also knows that his own death is ultimately inevitable.

Finally, though characters such as Achilles and Arthur are given opportunities to turn from their fate, even if they had chosen to live, the endings of the *Iliad* and *Morte Darthur* are still inescapably tragic. Indeed, the tragedy of these texts is made clear by one simple realization: while women may often represent the impending destruction of kingdoms, the sons they beget should represent hope, but this is far from the case in either the *Iliad* and *Morte Darthur*. In the *Iliad*, Troy’s ultimately tragic fate is realized through Priam’s losing of his sons. Though Hector is by far the greatest loss that Priam and Troy experience, he is by no means the only loss. By the end of the epic, Priam faces Achilles’ actions, lamenting the loss of the “many sons he slaughtered, just coming into bloom” (*Il.* 22.498), including Lykaon, Polydoros, and Troilus in addition to Hector. Sadly, Priam is left with Paris who has proven to be lacking as both a warrior and a diplomat. Hector knew that the fall of Troy would be marked by the fall of his “own brothers” who would “in all their numbers, all their gallant courage, / … tumble in the dust, crushed by enemies” (6. 536-8). These are Troy’s warrior’s and Troy’s heirs and their death marks the end of the once great city.
The relationship between inescapable tragedy and sons is more fleshed out in Malory’s text than it is in Homer’s. (Several recent studies focus on genealogy or kin in Malory: see especially Cherewatuk and Rushton.) The dark truth is, even without the numerous conflicts that make up the final book, Arthur’s kingdom simply could not have continued as is because Arthur has no legitimate heir. As Dorsey Armstrong states, Guinevere’s “sterility, never explicitly spoken of, haunts the final pages of Malory’s text; there is no heir to Arthur’s kingdom” (193). Though Arthur does have a son, Mordred is not only illegitimate, he has proven more than willing to violate “kin loyalty” by falsifying news of Arthur’s death to become king and marry Guinevere, an act which is recognized as a form of incest in itself (Armstrong 194). Mordred is truly “a traitor in every sense of the word” (Armstrong 196).

Mordred’s actions force the text to come to its tragic conclusion. During the final battle, even though Arthur and his remaining knights have “won the fylde” and even though Gawain’s prophecy is still fresh in his mind, Arthur cannot allow the man responsible for “hys people so slayne frome hym” to remain alive (685.37, 19). As Armstrong points out, “in destroying the greatest threat to his kingdom, however, Arthur also paradoxically puts the chivalric community in great peril, as he has destroyed any possibility of effecting the patrilineal transference of wealth, status and name so essential to the functioning of the king-based patriarchy over which he rules” (196). Arthur has “simultaneously slain both his enemy and his heir” (Armstrong 196). Crofts draws attention to the “tragic (and, to some degree, transcendent) power” of the final battle between Arthur and Mordred, a scene notable, in Crofts’ eyes, for its “cathartic shuffling-
off of mortalities and hatreds” (147-48). But Malory also makes explicit the mutual slaying of father and son:

and there Kyng Arthur smote Sir Mordred undir the shylde, with a foyne of hys speare, thorowoute the body more than a fadom. And whan Sir Mordred felte that he had hys dethys wounde he threste hymselff with the myght that he had up to theurre of Kyng Arthurs speare, and ryght so he smote hys fadir, Kynge Arthure, with hys swerde holdynge in both hys hondys, uppon the syde of the hede, that the swerde perced the helmet and the tay of the brayne. And therewith Mordred daysshed downe starke dede to the erthe. And noble Kynge Arthure felle in a swoughe to the erthe.

(686.3-12; my emphasis)

In conclusion, both the *Iliad* and *Le Morte Darthur* are deeply tragic because the focus of both texts is on mortal characters and as such, death and tragedy are inevitable. These are not stories meant to comfort, but to capture the reality of what it means to be human, everything in life must come to an end. This is why these texts continue to hold so much appeal, they represent the reality that “human life is defined by the double inevitability of age and death” (Griffin “Uniqueness” 42). Even the greatest heroes, their achievements and even their kingdom, no matter how formidable, are not meant to last, it is their stories that continue on.
Conclusion: An Enduring Legacy

Over the course of this thesis, we have examined some of the most famous characters in literary history. Through the *Iliad* and *Le Morte Darthur*, Homer and Sir Thomas Malory have shaped our perception of what it means to be a hero even when one’s life is deeply tragic. Given their subject matter, it is of little surprise that Homer and Malory’s texts would share at least some similarities. Yet, it is clear that the similarities between the *Iliad* and the *Morte Darthur* are more than plentiful. The fact that they were written in vastly different historical periods has not prevented the two texts from finding common ground. Their commonality reveals a continuing human preoccupation with what it means to be a hero, a role that from the ancient Greek period to the end of the Medieval period has changed very little, and I would argue, is still quite similar today. This commonality is made even more significant when one considers the religious differences between the Pagan Greeks and Medieval Christians. These religious differences make for vastly different societies, yet, their ideas on heroism are similar.

Recognition of the importance of *Iliad* and the *Morte Darthur* is paramount to our understanding of literature as a whole. Though the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would primarily use these texts as models for young boys, the emergence of novels such as Josephine Angelini’s *Starcrossed* trilogy shows that the *Iliad* and the *Morte Darthur* are also being used as models for female heroes as well (Lupack and Lupack 3). The emphasis on “morality and character” present in Homer and Malory’s heroes is no longer limited to male heroes, and the “idealized conception of knighthood” is not reserved for men either (Lupack and Lupack 3). Furthermore, the strength of
characters like Helen and Guinevere are also being better recognized. Now, novels such as Angelini’s have sought to embrace the power of female sexuality, taking the fear present in these ancient and medieval texts and subverting it in an empowering manner.

Furthermore, the enduring popularity of characters such as Achilles and Arthur, Helen and Guinevere, owes much to the deeply tragic nature of their stories. Perhaps the words that best sum up the continued draw of the *Iliad* and *Morte Darthur* are those of Samwise Gamgee in J.R.R Tolkien’s *The Two Towers*. Near the end of the novel, Samwise reflects on his and Frodo’s quest offering perhaps the clearest insight into the heart of heroic appeal in literature:

And we shouldn’t be here at all, if we’d known more about it before we started. But I suppose its often that way. The brave things in the old tales and songs, Mr. Frodo: adventures, as I used to call them. I used to think that they were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting, and life was a bit dull, a kind of sport, as you might say. But that’s not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in mind. folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually – their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn’t. And if they had, we shouldn’t know, because they’d have been forgotten. We hear about those as just went on – and not all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end. You know, coming home and finding things all right, though not quite the same – like old Mr. Bilbo. But those aren’t always the best tales to hear, though they may be the best tales to get landed in. (931-2).
Imperfect heroes like Achilles and Hector, or Lancelot and Arthur may not have achieved their happy ending, instead coming to a deeply tragic end, but this is why their stories will live on. These are the “brave” ones Samwise invokes, the heroes that could have chose to turn back but didn’t (Tolkien 931). Achilles could have left Troy, Arthur could have chosen not to face Mordred, but then as Samwise says, “they’d have been forgotten” (Tolkien 931). Instead, Achilles achieved his immortality through his enduring fame and Arthur will forever be remembered as “rex quondam rexque futurus”, the once and future king (Malory 689.25). The love of tragic heroes has endured from our earliest text to our latest. Their appeal is owed largely to their imperfect nature. A nature that does not detract from the greatness of their heroism. The heroes we favour face their tragedies with bravery, character and genuine human flaws and their reward was our lasting interest.


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