

# *Le Roi Arthur*

*Ernest Chausson*

A Lyric Drama in Three Acts

Guinevere	Mezzo-soprano
Arthur	Baritone
Lancelot	Tenor
Mordred	Baritone
Lionel	Tenor
Allan	Bass
Merlin	Baritone
Plowman	Tenor
Knight	Bass
Squire	Bass
First and Second Soldiers	Tenors
Third and Fourth Soldiers	Basses

Choruses of Knights, Squires, Pages, Bards and Ladies-in-Waiting

Translation by Maxime Alvarez de Toledo

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# King Arthur

## ACT ONE

### Prelude

**Scene I** – *A great hall in Arthur's palace in Carlisle. Tapestries are hanging on the massive red brick walls. The floor is strewn with cut reeds. To the left, on a dais is the royal throne. As the curtain rises, Arthur is standing and looks as if he is just finishing a speech. Guinevere is sitting next to him. The stage is busy with knights, squires and pages. Among them are Mordred and Lancelot, standing in the front row. The women are assembled beneath the throne on Guinevere's side. The bards, dressed in their long white robes, are on the other side of the stage.*

### ARTHUR

Glory to all of you, who fought beside me!  
The one responsible for destroying our cities  
has been defeated!  
The cruel Saxon, now deposed,  
Is now rapidly sailing back to his own isles!  
Before the lightning of the blue sword  
He is fleeing on the deep waves!  
Glory to you, knights!  
Glory to the Round Table!  
And above all, glory to God!  
Why are you not here, Merlin, on the day  
when  
Our common efforts are crowned with  
victory?  
Where are you then?  
Am I to believe that the mighty Merlin  
Could be among the dead?  
Wherever you may be, may your soul respond  
To the war cries of the Britons!  
Look, Arthur is victorious and Brittany is free!  
We have driven the Saxons away!

*(The crowd cheers loudly. The knights strike their shields with the hilts of their swords and squires in the back of the theatre wave branches of oak)*

### CHORUS

Hurrah! Hurrah!  
Glory to our invincible chief!  
When you brandish Excalibur,  
Arthur, your rage is terrible!  
From your sword springs death!

### ARTHUR *(silencing them with his hand)*

My friends, now that the storm is finally  
over,  
Let us forget the hard times and, laying down  
our swords,  
Let us enjoy the charms of peace!  
*(turning to the squires)*  
Let us pour wine, cider, ale,  
And golden mead, the drink of true heroes!  
Let our old Gaelic city be decked out  
In terns, irises, and elder-blossoms!  
*(to the bards)*  
And you, my bards, sing on your ivory harps  
The praises of the invincible, the valiant and  
loyal knight.  
For he is the true victor! I will say it out loud!  
Every one of you has fought hard, it is true,  
But the victory that caused the Saxons to flee,  
Is owed to him!

### MORDRED

Him! Always him!

### LANCELOT *(making a few steps towards Arthur)*

I do not deserve, Sire, such an honor!  
There is not one among us, like me,  
Who is not ready to shed all his blood for his  
King!

### BARDS

It shines like the dawn  
The white armor of the knights! Spurred on  
by their loud voices, The chargers were brisk,

Swift as the great red eagles!

*MORDRED (speaking quietly to a group of knights who are surrounding him)*  
That is going too far, it is always Lancelot!

*EIGHT KNIGHTS (muttering among themselves)*  
Always him! Are we not as valiant as he is on the battlefield?  
That is going too far!  
We are no longer worth anything to the king!  
See, Mordred, you are forgotten, you, Arthur's own nephew!

*BARDS*  
He brandishes his sword made of ash wood,  
Lancelot, the valiant knight!  
Gallop across the plain,  
His charger was brisk,  
Swift as the great black eagles!

*MORDRED*  
Just wait and see, soon I will avenge all of you!

*EIGHT KNIGHTS*  
Yes, yes, let us take our revenge!

*CHORUS*  
Glory be to Lancelot! Hurrah! Hurrah!

*BARDS*  
See how many soldiers lie dead on the moor! Mowed down by Arthur's warriors!  
Lancelot himself is leading them!  
See their chargers, how brisk they are  
Swift as the great white eagles!  
*(Arthur comes down from his throne and approaches the knights)*

*ARTHUR (to Lancelot)*  
Why, my dear Lancelot, among those festive chants,  
Are you the only one bowing your head?  
What cloud casts a shadow over your face?

*MORDRED (with sarcasm and before Lancelot had time to respond)*

The valiant Lancelot, without a doubt, is kindhearted!  
Or does this profound sadness  
Come from not being able to destroy Saxons anymore,  
As he likes to do each morning!

*ARTHUR (severely)* Mordred my dear nephew,  
Do not be haughty  
Nor scoffing, I ask you,  
Towards the most distinguished member of our knighthood! (At Mordred's first words, Guinevere has started to descend from her throne. She takes a cup from one of the squires and approaches Lancelot.)

*GUINEVERE*  
Sir Lancelot, the sword is no longer king  
When the harps start to sing!  
Accept this silver-gilt cup from me  
Forget the cries of rage and terror,  
The chaos of the battle,  
And do not scorn the winged words of the bards  
As they sing of the battles you have won.  
Their hymns, light as clouds, shall grant you immortality  
And your name will only be remembered  
If the bards have sung it throughout the ages!

*(She offers him the cup and whispers, quickly)*  
Tonight...the signal... Come.

*(Then she moves away, passing between the ranks of the knights, and talking to a few of them.)*

*MORDRED (who has been watching her, aside)*  
They're whispering to each other, he's trembling!  
Ah! Guinevere, you have rejected my love,  
And you love him, him, that Lancelot!  
Woe betide you! Woe betide both of you!  
*(Guinevere exits slowly, followed by all the women. Arthur accompanies her to the back of the stage. When he comes back to his guests, tables have*

*already been set up for the banquet. He motions to the knights to be seated. The curtain falls.)*

**Scene II** - *A terrace in the castle. To the right, a covered gallery. In the foreground, a porch and behind it, a door leading to the queen's private apartments. To the left, a park. In the background, a balustrade behind which treetops and towers can be seen. It is nighttime. The sky is overcast. From time to time, the moon appears between the clouds. When the curtain rises, Lionel is alone and sitting on the porch steps. The calls of the night watchmen can be heard in the distance.*

*WATCHMEN (off stage)*

Hey! Hey! Ha!

*LIONEL*

Only the cries of the watchmen in the night!  
Everything is sleeping.  
Lancelot, what have you done?  
Oh beloved master, you have taught me about honor and loyalty!  
I was hoping to receive from you the weapons of a true knight!  
Alas! Should my heart condemn you in spite of myself?  
Unfortunate love! Sacrilegious and cursed love...  
Lancelot, you, Arthur's best friend,  
His brother in arms and in glory,  
A traitor! Disgraced! A criminal!  
How can this be?  
His love has overtaken him!  
He lives as if in a dream,  
With no idea of the crime he has committed!  
No longer careful.  
And lets his love shine through his eyes!  
And Mordred is constantly spying on them!  
Mordred! Jealous of Lancelot!  
He who was in love with Guinevere  
And whose love was rejected!  
God! If he were ever to discover the truth!  
Alone, to protect them, I keep watch in the night.

*(He stands up and starts moving up stage while looking around him to make sure no one is coming. Guinevere and Lancelot appear under the porch, clasped in each other's arms. They slowly begin to walk down the steps. Lionel disappears into the trees as soon as he notices them. During the following scene, he is seen crossing the back of the stage once or twice.)*

### **Scene III**

*LANCELOT & GUINEVERE*

How delicious it is to forget about worldly things!

Enchanted dream, bright dream of love,  
Fragrant with the scent of roses.

Sweet and profound exhilaration  
In which our souls come together,  
Silent and lost in ecstasy and bliss,  
Embracing lovingly!

*LANCELOT (sitting down on a stone bench and drawing Guinevere close to him)*

Oh! Let me hold you closer to my breast!  
Closer, closer still. Like a flower, rest  
Your young and proud head upon my heart!

*GUINEVERE*

Yes, I am yours completely.  
My sweet Lancelot.  
Take my mouth! Take my eyes!  
I am yours, I am your servant and your wife!

*LANCELOT*

My Guinevere!  
Like a joyous bird your voice sings in my soul!  
At your side, oh, keep me forever.  
Only here, my Guinevere,  
I forget what my life was before,  
And how our love has transformed it.

*GUINEVERE*

My dear friend, what do you mean?  
What past events are you thinking of?

What inflexible virtue will ever compare  
To the ecstasy which inflames our two hearts?  
Lovers are eternal victors!  
Love is the only master, the supreme master.  
My beloved, be happy as I am!  
I love you passionately, without remorse,  
without fear.  
I know nothing more than  
That I love you, I love you!

LANCELOT

Oh beloved!  
Oh my only love!  
How the dismal dreams,  
Originated in darkness,  
Disappear when daylight comes!  
All my melancholy  
Flies away at the sound of your voice.  
When I see you, I can remember only  
Your beauty, star of my life!

LANCELOT & GUINEVERE

Peacefully in your arms, my heart falls asleep.  
And my troubled thoughts, exhausted,  
Bow to the weight of this overwhelming  
happiness.  
I see only you,  
Only you, alone in the world!  
Our ecstasy is so divine and profound  
That the rest is nothing but a confused dream!  
*(They remain silently still, embracing lovingly and  
seeming to have lost any awareness of their  
surroundings. Lionel suddenly appears. Hesitantly, he  
approaches Lancelot and calls out to him in a low  
voice.)*

#### Scene IV

LIONEL

Daylight, master! Daylight!

LANCELOT *(as if returning to his senses)*

Ah! Who calls me?

LIONEL

Daylight! Daylight is near!

WATCHMEN *(off stage)*

Hey! Hey!

LIONEL

Master, you must leave!

GUINEVERE

Leave? What, daylight already!

WATCHMAN *(off stage)*

Hey! Hey!

Daylight is near!

Daylight is here!

LIONEL

Master, do not delay!

listen to the cry of the watchmen!

Soon the sun will rise!

Do not tempt fate!

GUINEVERE *(rising)*

Alas! My beloved,

We have to part, go!

*(Lionel goes inside and reappears some moments later,  
carrying Lancelot's weapons)*

LANCELOT

The hours drag by far from you.

When will we see each other again?

*(A few moments ago, Mordred has appeared at the  
back of the theatre. Making his way down slowly, and  
remaining unseen, he recognizes Guinevere and  
Lancelot in the first glimmer of daylight.)*

GUINEVERE

Tonight, tonight perhaps.

I will send you... Good Heavens!

LIONEL

Good God!

*MORDRED (immediately running back upstage and shouting with all his might)*  
On your guard, Knights! Treason!  
Treachery! Come, hurry all of you!

*LIONEL*  
Master. it is Mordred!

*MORDRED*  
On your guard, Knights!

*LANCELOT (advancing on Mordred)*  
Coward, pick up your sword!  
*(They fight. Mordred falls, struck down by a wound in his chest. Guinevere, who has been anxiously watching from a far, rushes over to him.)*

*GUINEVERE (looking at Mordred lying on the ground)*  
Dead?  
His mouth is silent, Forever silent!

*LIONEL*  
It is growing lighter and lighter, master; we must leave!

*GUINEVERE*  
Yes, time is short! Go, my beloved,  
Go, without delay!  
His shouting might have been heard.  
If anyone should come...Go, my beloved!

*LANCELOT*  
Abandon you at a time like this?

*GUINEVERE*  
I am lost if they find you here!  
There is nothing you can do to help me!  
Go, time is precious!

*LANCELOT*  
Ah! Guinevere, will I ever see you again?

*GUINEVERE*  
Wait for me in the nearby forest!  
Escorted by Lionel,  
Soon I will join you.  
Since we love each other.  
We have nothing to fear!

*LANCELOT (somber)*  
Unfaithful knight!  
I have drawn my sword to cover my lies!

*LIONEL (urgently)*  
Master. in heaven's name...

*GUINEVERE*  
Farewell! Farewell!  
*(Lancelot, led by Lionel, exits on the left. Guinevere, leaning against the balustrade, looks after him for a while, and then starts moving towards the palace. Just as she reaches the door of her apartments, Mordred raises his head and, not seeing Guinevere, calls out with a faint voice.)*

*MORDRED*  
Help! Help!

*GUINEVERE*  
*(turning around with terror)*  
Him! Him! Alive!  
*(Soldiers descend from the ramparts and emerge in the background. They notice Mordred and rush to help him. It is broad daylight. The curtain slowly begins to fall.)*

## ACT TWO

### Prelude

**Scene I** – *(The edge of a pine forest. The tree trunks, straight and regular, seem like a multitude of columns. To the right, a rock covered with moss makes a good place to sit, close to the ground. At the back, fields stretching out into the distance. It is broad daylight. The sun, filtering through the branches, creates bright patches on the ground.)*

*A few seconds after the curtain rises, a plowman moves across the back of the stage, throwing seeds in the furrows.)*

*PLOWMAN (off stage)*

“Rion, the King of the Isles,  
Was eight feet tall, Hey!  
On his sailing horses,  
He sails across the sea  
To take, in our cities,  
Our wives and our daughters!  
The eagles of Lomond  
Were watching over the mountains, Hey!  
*(He disappears on the right)*  
They saw into the night  
The pirates approaching.  
“Merlin, wake up!  
Wake up the King as well!”

**Scene II** – *Lancelot slowly moves forward from the back of the stage, agitated and worried. He lays his sword and cloak down at the foot of a tree.*

*LANCELOT*

Was Lionel able to see her?  
Oh rage! To wail!  
And to be able to do nothing!  
Nothing...Except to wait. *(with anxiety)*  
The daylight was breaking,  
Could the watchmen on the ramparts  
Have recognized me?  
Is Mordred really dead?  
What if with my trembling hand, I had only...  
God! What if he were still alive...  
What if, enraged, he has accused me...

*PLOWMAN (off stage)*

“See the rich lining  
Of my royal cloak, Hey!  
It is made of the beards  
Of the kings killed in battle.  
Arthur, I still miss  
Your golden beard!  
*(He comes back on stage and moves across the back of the theatre from right to left. Lancelot, who had not*

*taken notice of him, Listens to the song with a growing interest.)*

Arthur, white with rage,  
Brandishes Excalibur, Hey!  
He hurls himself, shouting,  
At the monstrous giant!  
And soon the meadow  
Is soaked with red blood!  
*(He walks away. His voice can still be heard after he disappears.)*  
Jesus defends his people  
On the day of the battle, Hey!  
*(He disappears entirely. on the left)*  
And soon the Giant  
Is rolling in the dust!  
Arthur, the falcon-hearted,  
Has brought down Rion!

*LANCELOT (as if returning to his senses)*

Arthur! Arthur!  
The greatest, the holiest of the kings!  
Him! Christ’s own knight!  
The one who defeated the Saxons!  
*(with a sudden explosion of grief)*  
Ah! I am unworthy!  
I am guilty of the most atrocious crime!  
I betrayed the friendship of a man who loves me...  
Of my King!  
My word is not to be trusted.  
My honor is tarnished!  
And my name, once the symbol of loyalty,  
Will soon be spat out  
Like a cruel insult!  
How did I ever stoop so low?  
Disloyal and a traitor!  
Yes, a traitor. Forever, I will be tied  
I know it now, to she who inflames me!  
Everything! Loyalty, oaths, honor, is forgotten  
As soon as I clasp Guinevere in my arms!

*GUINEVERE*

Lancelot! Lancelot!

*LANCELOT*

It is she!

*(He moves upstage to goes to meet her)*

GUINEVERE

Help me!

*(Guinevere rushes in, breathless. She is escorted by Lionel who immediately withdraws)*

LANCELOT

My Guinevere!

### Scene III

GUINEVERE

Mordred is alive! He has accused you!  
Several knights  
Are joining forces against you!  
Arthur alone is defending you.  
He is unsure.  
He still refuses to believe what he has been told!

LANCELOT

Heavens!  
Can I still save you?  
What shall I do?

GUINEVERE

Boldness is your only way out!  
Resolute, your head held high,  
Go back to Carlisle!  
Arthur will not believe that you are guilty.  
You, his best friend.  
Only you can defend me now.  
I've already denied the accusation,  
But he will only listen to you!

LANCELOT

That I should appear before the King!  
To protest my innocence!  
What shall I say in my defense?  
You know how ashamed I am of myself.

GUINEVERE

Tell him what you like,  
But save your Guinevere!

LANCELOT

Must I to lie to everyone,  
I, a knight, I, Lancelot.  
So that I may exonerate myself?

GUINEVERE

You must.

LANCELOT

Must I lie to my noble master?

GUINEVERE

Does one more lie really matter?  
Does loving me not already make you a traitor?

LANCELOT

Alas!

GUINEVERE

Are you so afraid, ungrateful, to tell one more lie,  
That could save the woman who loves you?

LANCELOT

Yes, it is true,  
My love has made me forget everything else!  
I was able to betray a man I revere,  
The valiant Arthur! My own King!  
My own brother! He who made me a knight!  
But to coldly betray  
His noble confidence,  
When in spite of everything,  
He still believes me innocent!  
Guinevere, could this be possible?  
Do not ask of me  
Such a terrible sacrifice!  
I would shed my own blood to save you!  
Let me die for you!

Take my life!

*GUINEVERE*

Ah! To die!  
That would mean losing me at once!

*LANCELOT*

What should I do?  
Is there no other way out?  
Less treacherous and less deceitful?

*GUINEVERE*

It is a horrible thing to do, I know.  
A vile thing, but it must be done!  
My honor calls for it!  
And so does yours!  
It is you, my Lancelot,  
And your love for me,  
That proved my undoing!  
I beg you not to refuse this request!  
It has to be done!  
In the depths of despair,  
Frightened and distraught  
I have come to you!  
I understand just how much  
This terrible pledge  
Is costing you!  
Alas, there  
Is no other way that you can save me!  
The King still believes you to be innocent, but  
he has doubts.  
The more we delay, the more he  
Is suspicious!  
My beloved, time  
Is running short!!

*LANCELOT*

Ah! That would be too despicable!  
I would never be able to look him in the eye!  
I will never find the courage, you see,  
To lie to him right to his face!  
My embarrassment will give me away...  
No. No. I cannot do it.

*GUINEVERE*

Ah! Coward! Coward!  
So then, you tell me that you love me  
And you will do nothing to save me!  
Your ludicrous scruples  
Prevent you today  
From saving my honor!  
Already a seducer and a traitor,  
The loyal Lancelot  
Suddenly loses heart!  
So be it! Forsake me!  
I will go alone and find the King!  
I will admit everything! After that...  
Let it be all over!  
What do I care now?  
But you must leave right now!  
Our love was a bad dream!  
I do not want to see you anymore!  
I disown you! Go away!  
*(Exhausted, Guinevere collapses on a grassy bank  
and hides her head in her hands. Lancelot, taken  
aback, remains motionless in the center of the stage)*

*LANCELOT*

What have I said?  
Am I to forsake  
The woman who responded  
To my imploring call?  
As long as I remained faithful  
To my condemnable love,  
I had a semblance of loyalty!  
Now, it is over.  
There is nothing left.  
*(suddenly coming to a decision)*  
Ah! What do I care?  
Dishonor, lies, disgrace!  
There she is, weak,  
As pale as death...  
Above all, I have to save her. After that...  
*(Overwhelmed with emotion, he stands motionless for  
a while, staring at the ground. Then he slowly makes  
his way upstage and retrieves his cloak and sword.  
Guinevere silently looks after him. Lancelot hesitantly  
stops several times, as if he were waiting for Guinevere  
to call him back. But she remains silent. He slowly  
walks to the left of the stage, ready to leave. Just as he*

*is about to disappear, Guinevere, motionless, calls out to him in a taint voice.)*

**GUINEVERE**

Lancelot, my Lancelot, wait!  
Tell me. Where are you going?

**LANCELOT**

Before the King,  
I will swear, my head held high,  
That no one is more loyal to him than I.  
Guinevere, here is the supreme test!  
But you tell me that he will believe me,  
*(bitterly)*  
Because he loves me.  
So be it. I shall lie.  
In order to save you, I will suffer shame.  
After that, on the battlefield,  
I shall find  
A quick and noble death.

**GUINEVERE**

You! To die!  
*(Quickly rising to her feet and moving towards him)*  
Ah! Do not speak of such things!  
Forget about the harsh words I said.  
Alas! Lancelot, I was out of my mind!  
I am yours!  
I belong here, upon your heart.  
*(She squeezes up against his chest)*  
What is it that I told you?  
Turn your eyes towards me.  
Forgive me.  
I do not know what delirious state  
I was in, to be able to tell you  
Such horrible things!  
Oh, beloved,  
Could I live without you?  
Without your love,  
Without your passionate kisses?  
I surrender to my fate with you,  
No matter what it is!  
We have nothing to fear  
As long as we're together!

**LANCELOT**

Your love, your anger,  
Alas, it is all torture!  
You said so yourself,  
We have to part.  
Even if one last time  
I lied to the King,  
Can we keep our own eyes  
From looking at each other in public?  
Mordred's hate for us  
Will not die.  
We will be spied upon, and eventually caught.  
Your adorable sweetness towards me  
Will give you away!

**GUINEVERE**

Let us run off then!

**LANCELOT**

To run away?

**GUINEVERE**

My love prevails in the end!  
Dead or alive, Guinevere  
Shall never be parted from you!  
Let our common fate bind us together!  
I no longer wish to be queen  
So that I can love you all the more!  
My heart quivers with joy!  
I am your reward, your prey!  
Take me away, let us run off!  
Your castle awaits us.  
Let it be our refuge.  
Come, come! Let us run off!  
Let us love each other freely!  
Oh beloved,  
Love shall be our only judge!  
Arthur will come after us,  
And were he to prevail over us,  
At least we will have loved each other.  
Until parted by death!

**LANCELOT**

Guinevere ...

*GUINEVERE*

Lancelot!  
My Lancelot, I love you!  
Take me far away,  
Wherever you chose!  
My royal title, even my honor.  
I will have no regrets  
If I lose them all for you!

*LANCELOT (in a low voice)*

Forever united!  
To live together!

*GUINEVERE*

And never to be parted from each other  
again!

*LANCELOT*

Is this all real, Guinevere?  
It seems like a dream.  
Ah! To love you without lies.

*GUINEVERE*

Joy we did not even dare to dream of!  
Free! Certain happiness!  
Divine joy!

*LANCELOT*

To be free! At last!  
Divine happiness!  
*(They fall in each other's arms, embracing each other  
passionately)*

*LANCELOT & GUINEVERE*

Our bodies are forever  
Bound together,  
Just like our two hearts are united!  
No love is like our love!  
Oh how delicious it is to love!  
Oh infinite pleasure!

*LANCELOT*

Guinevere, my Guinevere,  
Proud and divine soul,  
I am yours forever!

*GUINEVERE*

I love you, Lancelot!  
Hold close to your chest  
Your faithful  
And happy lover...

*LANCELOT*

Come...  
*(He leads her off stage. The curtain quickly falls.)*

**Scene IV** – *The curtain rises slowly. An inner courtyard in Arthur's castle at Carlisle. Resembling a cloister, it is surrounded by large galleries, which come together at the center of the stage, supported by stately columns. Through the columns, a view of a garden at the center of the courtyard, and the castle roofs in the background. The garden is overgrown with large trees, thickets and climbing plants. At the end of the gallery on the right, several steps lead to the door of the King's apartments. The curtain rises on a group of knights speaking among themselves in hushed voices. Arthur enters from the left and addresses one of them.*

*ARTHUR*

Lancelot has not appeared yet?

*A KNIGHT*

Not yet, Sir.  
*(Arthur motions to the knights to withdraw. He begins to walk slowly along the gallery)*

*ARTHUR*

Always, always the same thought!  
I try to get it out of my head,  
But in vain.  
Peace has left my troubled soul,  
And I can no longer find my faith.  
How can I put an end to  
This horrible doubt?  
Guinevere! Lancelot!  
No, no! It is impossible!  
But why is he not coming?  
Lancelot, please, I call you!  
I open my arms to you!

Tell me he lied! My heart believes that you  
are loyal to me.

*(in a low voice)*

I overthrew the altars

Of the pagan gods.

I chased the terrible Saxons

Away from this land!

I founded the Round Table

So that justice would triumph

In this world.

And I believed my work to be

Immortal and visionary.

Alas! I now discover

A seed of death! The knights

Are all jealous of each other.

It has become a painful effort

For them to abide

By the austere rule that ties them.

They listen to Mordred

Who is secretly inciting them to revolt!

He is fascinated by the power of my crown,

And I feel that he hates me!

Conspiracy is all around me!

Maybe they are plotting

Something terrible

Against my loyal Lancelot!

Or am I also to suspect him?

Ah! Why?

Why have you abandoned me, Merlin?

You who have always helped me,

Ever since the first days of our struggle!

See how our work is crumbling,

And how I am trying to resist, in vain.

I am unable to prevent its fall.

Merlin, oh my sweet friend,

In days gone by,

What spell is keeping you

Far away from the pleading Arthur?

Look at me flagging and weakening

Under a burden too heavy for me!

Come! Come! Where can you be?

Merlin, hear my voice!

**Scene V** – *The trees part slightly, revealing an old man in a halo of green light, lying on the branches of an apple tree. It is Merlin. He is wearing a long white robe and his white beard reaches down to his waist. Throughout the entire scene, he remains completely*

*still. When he appears, Arthur is facing the audience. He only becomes aware of Merlin's arrival when he hears him speak.*

**MERLIN**

Arthur.

**ARTHUR**

Merlin!

Beloved and faithful friend! My pleas have  
finally Reached you?

*(He goes out into the garden)*

**MERLIN**

Green apple trees, prophetic apple trees,

Who reveal the magical words,

How many centuries have passed by

Under your thick leaves!

Oh green apple trees, blossoming apple trees!

The supreme day has arrived!

Woe betide us!

The hundred-year-old eagles

Have left Lomond this night,

And cried out their bad omens!

Oh green apple trees, ancient apple trees.

**ARTHUR**

Your words are as somber as

The laughing of the ocean.

Merlin, I dare not ask what you mean.

**MERLIN**

Do not expect anything for the future.

Our common work has been destroyed.

Corrupt and despised,

The Round Table will perish!

**ARTHUR**

So it is all over.

No hope is left for us?

And what is the cause

Of our downfall?

Once you said

That our work was indestructible!

You were looking into the future.  
But what mystery surrounds you?  
Why are you so still?  
And why chained to those flowers?  
Am I the object of a dream?  
Oh! Speak, speak to me!

**MERLIN**

How blind we were,  
We have placed too much faith  
In men's virtue!  
If our sacred place  
Is now choked with nettles,  
It is because a crime still unknown,  
Along with arrogance and mean jealousies,  
Have proved the prophecies to be wrong!  
Question me no more, Oh King!  
My tongue must remain silent.  
I have left my secret prison  
In order to tell you to accept your fate!  
You will soon depart the earth.  
The strange murmuring of water  
Will surround you with mystery,  
Like it once did in your cradle.  
But when the day comes  
Of the glorious awakening,  
Oh, son of Pendragon,  
Oh, unrivalled warrior,  
Then, the oaks in their joy  
Will adorn themselves with red flowers!  
Dressed in silver, gold and silk,  
The dead warriors shall rise up from their  
graves,  
And the bright and radiant sun  
Shall wreath your head  
With its blazing disc!

**ARTHUR**

Then let death come, I await without fear!  
Merlin, one more word.  
*(freely)*  
What is this deadly crime  
That you spoke of, trembling?  
*(hesitantly)*  
Guinevere,  
Guinevere and Lancelot

Are innocent, are they not?  
Merlin, see how I am suffering,  
Answer me!  
By your silence you condemn them!  
Merlin, I am your King!  
Speak, speak to me, I command you!  
*(The trees close up. The vision of Merlin disappears.  
Arthur remains motionless for a moment, overwhelmed  
with emotion, and then suddenly rushes back out to  
the gallery, shouting.)*

Guinevere! Guinevere! Help!  
*(He makes his way across stage and exits through the  
rear door.)*

**Scene VI** - *(At the sound of Arthur's cries, the  
knights come running on stage one by one, and begin  
to question each other.)*

**KNIGHTS**

Someone is crying out! What is the matter?  
Why these cries?  
The king! What is the matter with him?  
He seems to be beside himself with rage!

**EIGHT KNIGHTS** *(rushing in)*

What is the matter? Why all this shouting?

**KNIGHTS**

The King was here, furious and shouting!  
The King! What does all of this mean...

**A KNIGHT**

Do you not know what happened?

**KNIGHTS**

What? Speak, speak!

**A KNIGHT**

The queen has disappeared!

**KNIGHTS**

The queen! Disappeared?

Off with Lancelot, no doubt.  
With Lancelot?

*A KNIGHT*

In the nearby forest,  
Someone saw them together.  
Then, on horseback they fled  
Towards the coast!

*KNIGHTS*

Ah! Misfortune has fallen upon us!

*EIGHT KNIGHTS*

What? What are you saying?

*KNIGHTS*

Why did Mordred have to speak?

*EIGHT KNIGHTS*

What? Should he have remained silent?

*KNIGHTS*

Yes! Yes!

*EIGHT KNIGHTS*

To unmask Lancelot! What a joy!

*KNIGHTS*

Have you forgotten about the King  
And the honor of the Round Table?

*EIGHT KNIGHTS*

Down with the Round Table!  
No! We do not want to abide by  
Its absurd rules anymore!  
No more restraint!  
Down with the Round Table!

*KNIGHTS*

Traitors! Be quiet! Treacherous knights!

*ARTHUR*

War to the abductor!

*KNIGHTS*

War!

### **ACT THREE**

**Scene I** – *A rocky hilltop overlooking the battlefield.  
To the right, a few pine trees. On the horizon, the sea.  
As the curtain rises, Guinevere rushes on stage,  
followed by her old squire.*

*ALLAN*

Mistress, stop, I beg you.  
The battlefield is near.  
Be careful!

*GUINEVERE*

Go away! I am not afraid!  
*(She moves over to the far right of the stage and gazes  
anxiously into the distance)*  
The die is cast. Finally!  
Until the last moment  
I thought that Lancelot  
Would back out once again!  
Be gone, my fears!  
Lancelot has joined the battle!  
Lancelot will be victorious!

*ALLAN (sitting on a rock and shaking his head  
sadly)*

Yes, there is no doubt he will triumph!  
Everything points to  
His imminent victory!  
But Mordred, who said that he stayed behind  
To nurse his own wound,  
Has proclaimed himself King!  
His numerous followers,  
Tired of the Round Table,  
Have deserted Arthur's cause!

*GUINEVERE (interrupting him)*

Be quiet! Be quiet, old man!

*(Allan moves away. Guinevere continues to gaze at the plain. All at once, she turns away as if struck by a sudden thought. She moves back to the center of the stage and sits on a rock.)*

*GUINEVERE (with a low voice)*

Ah! Sometimes I am overwhelmed by fear!  
My heart is racked by the most terrible doubts!  
Does Lancelot, my Lancelot, still love me?  
I've abandoned everything for him,  
Without regrets nor efforts,  
But him! How he has changed!

*ALLAN (leaning against a tree and gazing into the distance)*

Those knights over there...  
Riding away at breakneck speed...  
It seems... but no!  
It is impossible!  
Ah! A horse has fallen down!

*GUINEVERE (not hearing him, lost in her own thoughts)*

Moody, silent,  
His profound despair  
Casts a shadow over his face.  
At times his eyes  
Seem to be avoiding mine.

*ALLAN*

Hurriedly,  
On foot they now follow their path!

*GUINEVERE*

Ah! What if it were true!  
What if this feeling of remorse that has  
overcome his soul  
Has killed his love for me?

*ALLAN (coming back down towards Guinevere)*

Mistress, look! It is he!  
My lord Lancelot!

*GUINEVERE*

Allan, are you mad?  
For Lancelot to desert...

*ALLAN*

It is him! It is he!  
And he is headed this way!

*GUINEVERE (rising)*

Then he must be wounded!

**Scene II** – *(She makes her way to the back of the stage and gazes once again at the plain. Lancelot suddenly appears, unarmed and obviously distraught. He is followed by Lionel and by several squires. He stops short at the sight of Guinevere.)*

*LANCELOT*

God! Guinevere!

*GUINEVERE (rushing over to him)*

You have been wounded! No!  
Then...what is the meaning of all of this?  
Speak! Speak to me!

*LANCELOT*

I deserted.

*GUINEVERE (quickly)*

What are you telling me?  
You ran away! You deserted!

*LANCELOT*

Ah! Guinevere,  
It was you who wished it so!  
Despite my horror  
Of this sacrilegious war,  
Convinced by your pleas  
I joined in the battle.  
At first I was overwhelmed  
With excitement!  
And I forgot I was fighting  
Against my King!  
But suddenly, I saw him,

In the midst of his knights,  
Standing above them all  
Brandishing in his hand  
Excalibur, red with blood,  
I saw him... Arthur!  
Then a sudden  
And terrible clarity  
Overcame my scull  
An unspeakable shame took hold of me!  
I threw down my weapons,  
And I fled! I fled!

*GUINEVERE (aside)*

Ah! All is lost!  
At the last moment  
I have lost his love forever!

*LANCELOT*

What have I done?  
Why have I fought  
In this fratricidal war?

*GUINEVERE*

How ungrateful! Are you forgetting?  
Our love demanded it!  
Does your faithful Guinevere  
Mean nothing to you?  
At the mere sight of Arthur,  
You have lost your love  
As well as your courage?  
You abandon the fight  
At the very last moment,  
You flee! Useless cowardice  
Of a faint heart!  
But in spite of yourself  
The inevitable chain of events  
Shall grip you in an iron circle!

*LANCELOT (with a low voice, as if talking to himself)*

Yes, to flee is futile.  
The past cannot be erased.

*GUINEVERE*

The past does not matter anymore!  
We are forever bound together

By an ungovernable love!  
Forever together!  
It is our most precious possession,  
And all we have left in the world!  
our only remaining duty  
Is to defend it to your death!  
*(Lancelot remains still. Guinevere looks at him with anxiety)*  
Lancelot! What is going through your mind?  
That look in your eye is scaring me. Ah!  
*(most tenderly and moving closer to him)*  
Go back and fight. Come back victorious.  
My dear beloved, this is the very last ordeal,  
And then I shall be yours forever!

*LANCELOT (making up his mind. He calmly stands up)*

I have thrown down my weapons  
And I will not take them up again  
To fight as a rebel!

*GUINEVERE*

Dear God!

*LANCELOT*

I will go and stop the fighting.

*GUINEVERE*

Are you insane?  
That is impossible!

*LANCELOT*

Well then, even if it should cost me my life,  
I will try to find the King himself,  
And I will ...

*GUINEVERE*

So you prefer death  
To your Guinevere's love?

*LANCELOT*

I love you with all my soul!

GUINEVERE

Be quiet! Be quiet!

LANCELOT

On the day of reckoning,  
I have to rid my heart  
Of all the things that made my life happy  
And brought me such guilty love!

GUINEVERE

Ah! If you loved me as much as I love you,  
would there be anything on earth  
More precious to you than our love?

LANCELOT

The most sacred of vows commands it!  
A veil has finally been torn from my eyes.  
Now I can see! I finally understand!  
And I surrender to the voice  
That speaks in my heart!  
Guinevere, will you accept  
To share my fate?

GUINEVERE

What do you mean?

LANCELOT

United in love!  
United in sin!  
Will we also be united  
In the expiation of our crime?

GUINEVERE

What are you thinking of?  
To see Arthur? Subject ourselves to his pity?  
Perhaps even his forgiveness?  
Never! Never!

LANCELOT

Guinevere!  
*(The sounds of battle become increasingly louder. The sounds of the trumpets can be heard from both sides of the stage.)*

Listen. Those calls, over there.

They are still fighting! Blood is being shed...  
And for a vile cause!

What am I doing here? Time is flying...  
What if the King has lost, or been wounded...  
Guinevere, it is all over then ...  
I will never see you again!

*(He stands gazing at her passionately with a desperate look. Then, with great effort)*

Farewell! Farewell!

*(He makes his way to the back of the stage and addresses the squires)*

I am entrusting you with the honor  
Of watching over the queen.

Take her to a port in Gaul

Onboard my ship.

There, she will be safe from danger.

Lionel, you come with me!

LIONEL

My dear master!

GUINEVERE *(throwing herself into Lancelot's arms)*

Lancelot! Do not leave me!

If life drives us apart,

Then let our death bring us together!

United in love,

United in sin,

United, forever united in death!

LANCELOT

Guinevere! From now on,  
My life only belongs to my King!

GUINEVERE

Ah!

*(She violently pushes him away from her and rushes over to the other side of the stage. Lancelot, led by Lionel, exits with a gesture of despair. The sound of the trumpets off stage seem to be getting louder and louder. After a brief pause, the squires silently approach the queen. She notices them and in a hoarse and broken voice)*

What are you doing here?

Go down to the ship! To the ship!  
*(As the other squires exit to the left, Allan hesitates to follow them)*  
Get ready for us to depart! Go now! Leave me!

**ALLAN** *(timidly)*  
Mistress, pardon me...

**GUINEVERE**  
Go away, go away!  
*(Allan slowly withdraws and Guinevere is left alone. She begins pacing back and forth across the stage, letting out inarticulate sounds. The sounds of battle gradually fade away.)*

### **Scene III**

**GUINEVERE**  
Ah! I was betrayed! Abandoned! Despised!  
I implored him, but in vain,  
Him, my Lancelot! I even begged him  
To let me die happily in his arms!  
And him, pitiless...  
What if the memory of his Guinevere  
Stopped him at the last moment?  
What if ...My cowardly heart,  
Overcome with love!  
He runs away from me!  
And yet I still love him!  
*(Suddenly realizing that the sounds of the battle have ceased entirely, she moves to the right and gazes out to the plain)*

God! Suddenly so calm...how silent...  
Can it be?  
*(broken-heartedly)*  
Yes, it is over. The battle has ended.  
He accomplished the ultimate sacrifice!  
*(She collapses on a rock and remains silent for a while, her head buried in her hands)*  
How could he believe that I could survive without him?  
Why would I go on with a useless life,

Without glory, without love.  
Forsaken! Abandoned!  
The day is coming to an end.  
Night is falling on my destiny.  
Without complaint, without a word, Enter,  
Guinevere,  
Enter into the shadows forever ...  
*(She rises to her feet, in search of some sort of weapon. While touching her brow with her hand, she stops short, as if struck by a sudden idea. She then begins loosening the plaits in her hair.)*  
Ornament of a vain beauty,  
Hair as dark and blue as the night,  
You, who have failed to keep Lancelot  
In your silky nets,  
Help me now, as a friend!  
You were the pride  
Of my happy days, Now, help me die...  
*(She winds her hair around her neck and strangles herself. She collapses)*  
Ah! Ah!  
*(She dies. The curtain falls very slowly.)*

### **Scene IV**

*The plain at the edge of the sea. In the foreground, to the left, a number of small trees, low rocks, and clusters of gorse, asphodels and everlasting flowers. At the back, the shoreline below forms a sort of bay surrounded by large rocks. A steep cliff falls into the sea. It is the end of the day. As the curtain rises, Lancelot is lying unconscious in the middle of the stage. A number of soldiers are surrounding him while others are busy recovering the dead and wounded stretched out at the back of the scene. A small group is leaning over Lancelot's body.*

**THIRD SOLDIER**  
His body is covered with wounds!

**FOURTH SOLDIER**  
Here, on the arms!

**FIRST SOLDIER**  
On the head as well!

THIRD SOLDIER

Ten wounds in the chest!

SQUIRE

But is he still alive?

FOURTH SOLDIER

*(Placing the flat of his sword in front of Lancelot's mouth)*

There is no breath coming out of his lips.

*(Bending over his chest)*

His heart Is beating...so faint

That you can barely hear it.

SECOND SOLDIER

Maybe the rays of the sun

Will revive him!

SQUIRE

Carry him to that rock over there!

*(The soldiers pick Lancelot up and lay him down in the sunlight next to rock, on the left)*

THIRD SOLDIER

How tall and strong he is!

FIRST SOLDIER

And how handsome!

See how manly and proud

His pale face is!

FOURTH SOLDIER

Who could ever equal Lancelot?

SQUIRE

Alas! The most noble,

The most valiant of all knights!

And yet he dies a rebel.

*(Other soldiers have gathered around and heard the squire's last words)*

SOLDIERS

Yes! A rebel! A traitor to his King! =

If today the Round Table Is dying, =

Who is to blame for it If not him?

SQUIRE *(interrupting them)*

Who are we to judge him?

*(to the first soldier)*

Go and Inform the King!

THIRD SOLDIER

Lionel already ...

SECOND SOLDIER *(looking to the right)*

The king himself is coming!

**Scene V** – *(The soldiers line up behind Lancelot. Arthur enters in the company of Lionel who has just finishing telling him about his master's death.)*

LIONEL *(still walking)*

They would not obey! So, without a weapon,  
He threw himself among the warriors!

*(Arthur interrupts him with a gesture, pointing to where Lancelot is lying on the ground, surrounded by soldiers. He moves closer to him and contemplates him silently for a long time. The soldiers retreat to the back of the stage.)*

ARTHUR

Guinevere! Lancelot! Both of them dead!

The ones I loved the most in this world

Have ruthlessly broken my heart!

But the wound is too deep

The only thing human I have left is my grief!

Everything, everything is crumbling,

Everything Is collapsing at the same time!

My life's work is ruined!

No one can answer

The cries of my broken heart.

LIONEL *(kneeling over Lancelot's body)*

Sire! Look! He has opened up his eyes!

His lips are moving! He is alive!

*LANCELOT (regaining consciousness)*  
Stop, stop the fighting!  
*(He is facing the audience and unaware of Arthur's presence)*

*LIONEL*  
Master, the fighting is over!  
You are suffering! Speak: what do you wish?

*LANCELOT*  
Arthur, here I am... I surrender myself to you!  
Here, take my sword...  
Oh! Strike me down, strike me down!  
*(As he turns around, he sees Arthur)*  
Arthur!  
*(Supported by Lionel, he tries to sit up, but he falls back down again)*  
I cannot...  
My strength is abandoning me...  
Take your revenge! Kill me...  
And avenge your honor!

*ARTHUR (proudly and extremely calm)*  
My honor! Do you really believe  
That it depends on anybody else but myself?  
No doubt time has come  
For me to leave this earth.  
Alas, without regrets!  
I am barely a man at all!  
The breath of death  
Has already turned my face pale!  
Worldly things  
As if through a shroud  
Appear to my eyes.  
At the beginning of the unfathomable night,  
I look back with no feeling of anger,  
Hurt, but resigned,  
On what was once my life!

*LANCELOT*  
Ah! Eyes full of bitterness!  
If only I was who I could have been!  
Pointless life! Withered life!

*ARTHUR*  
Poignant embrace of fate!  
Ah! I believed in the power of effort,  
In the energy of willpower!  
I struggled relentlessly!  
And now, what is  
Left of my entire life?  
Dashed hopes!  
Useless, useless efforts!

*LANCELOT*  
Who can know the strength of thoughts,  
And how long things last?  
Throughout the ages your name may die,  
But, more lasting than Its brilliant ring,  
Your thoughts, Arthur, are immortal!  
The love which filled your heart  
Flows out of the eternal flame!  
You shall live! You shall live!  
For others, death is the eternal oblivion.  
They disappear forever!  
Alas! Alas, like me.

*LIONEL*  
Sire, he is dying! Ah! My master!

*ARTHUR (approaches Lancelot and looks down at him with sadness)*  
Rest in peace, poor soul.  
*(At a sign from Arthur, soldiers come forward and carry away Lancelot's body. Lionel follows behind them)*

## **Scene VI**

*ARTHUR*  
Lord, I deliver myself without strength  
Into your hands!  
My courage has left me.  
My hopes are dashed.  
In an unending slumber,  
Put to sleep, if you can,  
Put my suffering to sleep!

*CHORUS (off stage)*  
Ah...

*VOICES*  
Come beyond the blue waves,  
And beyond the stars...

*ARTHUR*  
What am I hearing?

*VOICES*  
In a world where  
The mysterious secrets are revealed,  
Beyond all things  
That one day must perish,  
Come, Arthur, come and fall asleep  
In the calm and rose heavens...

*ARTHUR*  
Mysterious spirits, I dare not understand you!  
Have you come to spread  
The veil of eternal forgetfulness over my eyes?

*CHORUS*  
Come... He who sends us  
Has chosen for you a sublime fate!  
Sleep, not death,  
Will cradle your unhappy heart.  
Come...

*ARTHUR*  
To sleep... to forget...  
To no longer exist  
And to no longer suffer.

*CHORUS*  
Come...  
*(At the back of the stage, now bathed in the pink and golden light of the setting sun, a barge filled with women appears on the horizon and approaches the shore. One of the women, standing at the back of the vessel, spreads open her wings as if they were sails.)*  
Come...

Ah...

*VOICES*  
Forget an impure world,  
O large and hurting soul!  
Come to an Island caressed  
By waves of gold and azure!  
Refreshing and calm breezes  
Make the lush trees sing  
In an eternal peace!  
You shall sleep under palm trees!  
The carnation, the rose and the lily  
Shall bend towards your lips,  
And In order to perfume your bed,  
The iris flower shall bloom!

*ARTHUR*  
Oh my beloved land!  
Oh Brittany, oh my homeland!  
Sacred ground bathed  
In my ancestors' blood!  
Wild Camelard,  
And you, green Cambria,  
Receive my last farewells!  
Over are the days  
Of great adventures,  
Vallant knights  
Bedecked with gold and iron!  
Kind to those in need,  
But terrible to the traitors!  
Like rocks standing against the waves!

*CHORUS*  
Arthur, oh noble victim!  
The object of an eternal dream!  
Come...  
The world was cruel  
For your too-sublime soul!  
Your intentions were deceived by fate!  
Your work totters and crumbles  
Into the inevitable swell  
That engulfs all human beings!

*ARTHUR (slowly unfastening his shield and sword)*  
You, my faithful friends in the days of battle,  
Pridwann, Excalibur, farewell!

I leave you forever.

Sleep In the ocean

That bathes Cornwall.

No one shall ever take you up now!

*(Arthur goes over to the edge of the cliff and throws his weapons into the sea. The barge has now reached the shore and Arthur slowly descends the path that leads down to it. He disappears behind a large rock and climbs unto the vessel.)*

### CHORUS

Ah...

Your crumbling work is grand!

Those who fought relentlessly

For eternal justice

Are heroes!

But when the day of reawakening shall come,

You shall tear your veils!

And with your head crowned with stars,

You shall come down tram the sun!

*(The vessel reappears and makes Its way to the back of the stage. Arthur is lying on a couch and seems asleep.)*

Like a sublime builder,

You shall come back to the earth,

To carry on with your great work,

And to keep on fighting your noble battles!

Arthur!

Ah...

### VOICES

Ah...

Arthur!

Over your regal brow

Once turned away by victory itself,

Hangs the supreme glory

Of believed in an ideal world!

*(the sun plunges into the sea, its blinding light temporarily obscuring the barge. By the time the sun has disappeared, the stage is empty. As the blaze of the sunset softens, the sky darkens and the curtain slowly begins to fall.)*

THE END