

**NAXOS**  
AudioBooks

Sir Thomas Malory  
**The Death of Arthur**

*(Le Morte d'Arthur)*

Read by **Philip Madoc**

**CLASSIC  
FICTION**

**THE  
GREAT EPICS**



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1	<b>Book One:</b> The Coming of Arthur	6:44
2	Uther marries Igraine	5:30
3	The Sword in the Stone	3:22
4	Arthur draws the sword	5:28
5	Arthur at Camelot	3:54
6	Balin draws the sword	9:49
7	The deeds of Balin and Balan	4:15
8	King Lot moves against Arthur	9:47
9	Balin seeks Garlon	3:58
10	The wounding of King Pellam	7:06
11	The fate of Balin unfolds	4:20
12	The deaths of Balin and Balan	5:25
13	The wedding of Arthur and Guenever	6:47
14	<b>Book Two:</b> The Tale of Sir Launcelot	2:56
15	Sir Launcelot's good deeds	5:54
16	Launcelot lies with Elaine	7:44
17	Launcelot deceived again	6:33
18	The madness of Sir Launcelot	6:16
19	The madness continues	7:15
20	Le Chevaler Mal Fet	6:23
21	Sir Percival meets Launcelot	5:03
22	Launcelot returns to Camelot	3:53
23	<b>Book Three:</b> The Quest of the Holy Grail	5:56
24	The seat of Galahad	3:18
25	The sword of Galahad	4:39

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26	The Holy Grail	4:36
27	The Quest of the Holy Grail	3:33
28	Launcelot comes to the chapel	2:50
29	Sir Launcelot encounters the Sangrail	5:04
30	Sir Launcelot repents	5:14
31	The parting of Launcelot and Galahad	5:59
32	The long sleep of Launcelot	4:33
33	Galahad attains the Holy Grail	7:55
34	The death of Galahad	5:21
35	<b>Book Four:</b> The Tale of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenever	6:05
36	Launcelot and Guenever discovered	4:43
37	Launcelot fights free	5:31
38	Guenever condemned	3:19
39	Launcelot rescues Guenever	2:47
40	The battle of Launcelot and Arthur	2:11
41	Papal intervention	3:54
42	<b>Book Five:</b> The Most Piteous Tale of the Mort d'Arthur	7:18
43	Arthur and Mordred: The final battle	5:52
44	The death of Sir Lucan	5:49
45	The death of Arthur	2:42

**Total time: 3:57:55**

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Sir Thomas Malory  
**The Death of Arthur**  
*(Le Morte d'Arthur)*

Sir Thomas Malory's 'Le Morte d'Arthur', first printed by William Caxton in 1485, has long been a popular and much-loved work, bringing together into one book most of the great stories and themes of the Arthurian legend, and treating them with a moving simplicity and seriousness. Malory was the first English writer to attempt a comprehensive retelling of the Arthurian tales – the 'Matter of Britain'. Later writers, like Tennyson and T.H. White, have turned to Malory as the source and inspiration for their own versions.

The appeal of Malory's great work is manifold. First, there is the poignant sense of a lost golden age of chivalry which Malory – living at a time when chivalric ideals were declining – evokes so powerfully. Then there is his ability to create in the reader a cumulative sense of impending doom: we know early in the story that Launcelot's passion for Guenever, wife of the King he loves, will ultimately destroy the 'fairest fellowship of noble knights that ever held Christian king

together.' And Malory is wonderfully touching in his insistence on the reality and truth of his tale: literally true it may not be, but as an enduring image of idealism undone by human weakness it remains unsurpassed.

Malory places much of the emphasis on Launcelot, Percival, Tristram and Galahad. Arthur himself is almost a passive figure by comparison: he remains at Camelot, embodying qualities of nobility, kindness and a kind of innocence while his knights embark on a series of adventures. He is the point of stability – yet ironically, Arthur's almost wilful blindness to his Queen's infidelity contributes to the ultimate fall of his kingdom.

I have simplified Caxton's twenty-one books into five, focussing on the fateful love triangle of Launcelot, Guenever and Arthur, as well as dealing with such famous tales as the Quest for the Holy Grail. Caxton himself had rearranged Malory's stories: the most scholarly and accurate edition is that of Professor Vinaver, based on the fifteenth-

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century manuscript found in 1934 in the Fellows' Library of Winchester College.

Of Sir Thomas Malory himself we know little, but it seems likely that he lived in Newbold Revel, Warwickshire, and died in 1471, in prison. He lived through the turbulent period of the Wars of the Roses, and perhaps this reinforced his admiration for the good government of Arthur and his horror at its decline. The text of *Le Morte d'Arthur* ends with these words: 'I pray you all, gentlemen and gentlewomen that readeth this book of Arthur and his knights from the beginning to the ending, pray for me while I am alive, that God send me good deliverance, and when I am dead, I pray you all pray for my soul. For this book was ended the ninth year of the reign of King Edward the Fourth, by Sir Thomas Malory, knight, as Jesu help him for His great might, as he is the servant of Jesu both day and night.'

## **THIS ABRIDGEMENT**

### **Book One: The Coming of Arthur**

Arthur, child of Uther Pendragon and Igraine, is brought up in secret by Sir Ector, following the advice of Merlin. At the great tournament in London at Christmas, he pulls out the mysterious Sword in the Stone,

proving himself to be the rightful king of all England. The tragic tale of the brothers Balin and Balan unfolds. Arthur marries Guenever and receives the 'Table Round' as a wedding present.

### **Book Two: The Tale of Sir Launcelot**

Sir Launcelot, who loves Guenever, is tricked into lying with Elaine, a union which produces Galahad. Sir Launcelot becomes mad and only after being healed by the vessel of the Holy Grail returns to Arthur's court.

### **Book Three: The Quest of the Holy Grail**

Sir Launcelot dubs Galahad a knight and the quest for the Holy Grail begins. Sir Launcelot sees the 'Sangrail' but because of his love for Guenever cannot receive Communion from it. This is achieved by Galahad who, accompanied by Sir Bors and Sir Percival, travels with the 'Sangrail' to Sarras. The deaths of Galahad and Percival follow, and Sir Bors returns, grieving, to Camelot to tell the tale.

### **Book Four: The Tale of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenever**

Sir Launcelot resumes his affair with Guenever and is trapped in her bedchamber

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by Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred. He escapes and later rescues the Queen which leads to open conflict between Arthur and Launcelot, a situation exploited by Mordred.

### **Book Five: The Most Piteous Tale of the Morte d'Arthur**

Mordred seizes the throne and Arthur and Gawain return from abroad where they have been fighting Launcelot. Gawain dies in battle at Dover. Arthur and Mordred meet at Barham Down and wound each other fatally. Sir Bedivere, the last of Arthur's Knights, attends the king, and watches him disappear into the mist on a barge.

*(This version ends here, though Malory goes on to tell of the deaths of Launcelot and Guenever in religious retreat.)*

**Notes by Perry Keenlyside**

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## **The music on this recording is taken from the Naxos catalogue**

ADORATE DEUM – Gregorian Chant from the Proper of the Mass	8.550711
MEDIEVAL CAROLS Oxford Camerata / Jeremy Summerly	8.550751

Cover picture: The Vigil, by John Pettie.  
Courtesy of The Tate Gallery, London.





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# Sir Thomas Malory

# The Death of Arthur

(*Le Morte d'Arthur*)

Read by **Philip Madoc**

The glorious but tragic story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table is one of the great legends of Western civilisation. Storytellers and poets down the centuries have returned repeatedly to the universal themes of the Quest of the Holy Grail and the love between Sir Lancelot and Queen Guenever. Yet the first printed account, written by the fifteenth-century knight Sir Thomas Malory, remains unmatched. In words which speak as directly to us today as they did to his own period, he brings to life a rich tale of heroism and ideals undermined by the poignance of human emotions.



**Philip Madoc** was born in Wales and, after studying languages at university and spending a period as an interpreter, he turned to drama. His extensive theatre work has encompassed many principal Shakespearean roles, including Iago and Antony as well as nineteenth- and twentieth-century drama. His film and TV work is equally varied, including *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*, the BBC TV's *Fortunes of War* and his own detective series, *A Mind To Kill*. His distinct voice is regularly heard on radio.

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