



## Le Morte d'Arthur: The New Retelling by Gerald J. Davis

**Gerald J. Davis**

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*Le Morte d'Arthur underscores the heroics, drama, and majesty of the Arthurian legends without the complex, convoluted language often associated with them.*

Gerald J. Davis's modernized translation of the Arthurian myth is *Le Morte d'Arthur*, following in the tradition of his translations of *Beowulf*, *Don Quixote*, and *The Canterbury Tales*.

Originally by Sir Thomas Malory, who collected the legends of King Arthur, Merlin, Lancelot, and the Knights of the Round Table in the fifteenth century, Davis's translation of *Le Morte d'Arthur* adds content of its own, drawing on the Caxton and Winchester copies and creating an amalgam that takes "the best from each." These additions and decisions are part of what makes Davis's presentation such a treat, along with his updating of the book's language.

Set in fifth century Britain and France, these tales capture King Arthur's rise to power and his war against the Roman occupation. They include the origins and adventures of Sir Lancelot, Sir Gareth, and other Knights of the Round Table and the quest for the Holy Grail. Tales of war and chivalry come alongside the legend of star-crossed lovers Tristan and Iseult and the tragic love between Queen Guinevere and Sir Lancelot.

The tales span lifetimes, beginning with Arthur's childhood and continuing past his death. They are arranged according to their place within the larger narrative rather than by historical date, which makes the overarching story easy to follow. The characters are nuanced and complex, and a love triangle between Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot is believable and heartbreaking because they are rendered with such depth.

A good job is done of merging and reinterpreting similar but simultaneously contradictory legends into a smooth story. Events follow actions in a logical way as characters face the consequences of their past decisions. While the pace is slow at times, the book's pockets of action are riveting.

Davis's translation adapts these timeless tales, making them more accessible without compromising their regal and grandiose tones. The book maintains the literary reputation of the work while opening it to a variety of contemporary readers, removing some of the tales' antiquated, Old English style. The dialogue is still antiquated without being abstruse. A choice to leave out footnotes opens the text to all readers, not just academics. What the translation lacks in pedantry it possesses in passion and entertainment value.

While the book itself is large and heavy, its layout is simple and approachable. The cover is plain, placing focus on the title while still drawing the eye to its single image. Pages are crowded with text because of small margins and minimal spacing, and though the work is engaging, this formatting can be distracting. Arthurian mythos is vast and often disparate; this massive book could reasonably be split into volumes rather than presented in a single work to provide an easier reading experience.

*Le Morte d'Arthur* underscores the heroics, drama, and majesty of the Arthurian legends without the complex, convoluted language often associated with them. This translation is a good access point for those seeking cultural

understanding of the earlier texts.

SHANA CREANEY (April 29, 2019)

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