

Book three: The Ill-Made Knight

Chapter 1

1. How is the boy Lancelot characterized in this chapter? What might his characterization foreshadow?

Lancelot is an oddly committed and intense boy. His memory of his conversation with King Arthur serves as his motivation for all of his training, training that he hopes will make him “worthy of Arthur.” What is most striking about Lancelot in this chapter is his contemplative nature. As he gazes at his reflection in the helmet, he ponders what might have gone wrong in his nature to make his face so hideously ugly.

This characterization foreshadows a difficult life ahead for the young boy. Although he is only a boy in this chapter, the author writes, “All through his life—even when he was a great man with the world at his feet—he was to feel this gap: something at the bottom of his heart of which he was aware, and ashamed, but which he did not understand.” Clearly, Lancelot’s doubts about the goodness of his own nature will not disappear as he matures; indeed, these doubts will plague him all his life. The characterization thus serves to paint Lancelot as a troubled character, and to foreshadow a deep inner conflict for his entire life.

2. What does Lancelot mean when he speaks of Fort Mayne?

Fort Mayne is, in effect, the French term for Might, or Strong Arm. Lancelot explains: “The man with the strongest arm in a clan gets made the head of it, and does what he pleases.” Lancelot is opposed to Fort Mayne, just as Arthur is opposed to the idea that Might makes Right.

Chapter 2

1. What effect does the comparison between Lancelot and Bradman and Woolley (well-known cricket players) create?

The comparisons that the author draws between Lancelot and Bradman, as well as the comparisons between knightly exercises and the sport of cricket, serve to portray knightly exercises as little more than sports themselves.

Although readers may think of swordplay as exciting and dangerous, the author makes a point of portraying it as more of a form of entertainment than a deadly struggle. Lancelot and his opponent, as they stand opposite each other just like a cricket batsman and bowler, are surrounded by spectators walking to the refreshment tent while they observe the fighting. This image is another example of the motif of knighthood, as the author continually reminds the reader that knighthood was not always the noble, courageous calling portrayed in legend. Instead, sometimes the travails of knighthood served as little more than art or entertainment.

2. How does the description of Lancelot's training regimen further develop his character?

Lancelot's vigorous training regimen, and his commitment to this regimen despite his young age, further develops Lancelot's fierce dedication to becoming a knight under King Arthur. The author describes Lancelot's training as "weary," "lonely hours," and emphasizes the heavy weights and difficulty of the exercises. Lancelot undertakes these exercises willingly, demonstrating his devotion to becoming a knight and further demonstrating the single-mindedness of his character.

Chapter 3

1. How is Uncle Dap likened to Merlyn and Sir Toirdealbhach?

Uncle Dap is Lancelot's mentor, just as Merlyn was Arthur's mentor and Sir Toirdealbhach was the Orkney faction's mentor. As Lancelot's mentor and trainer, Uncle Dap is the only family member of Lancelot's who takes him seriously, encouraging Lancelot's training and learning. He proves to be much more than just a trainer for Lancelot, however, when he leaves with Lancelot at the end of the chapter, bound on a boat for King Arthur's court.

2. How does Merlyn's appearance at King Ban's castle advance the plot?

When Merlyn informs Lancelot that King Arthur has been married and is well on his way to filling his round table with knights, Lancelot immediately decides that he must travel to England at once to claim his place at the table. Merlyn's appearance also serves to foreshadow Lancelot's future greatness, as he informs Lancelot that he will be the best knight in the world one day. Lastly, Merlyn's appearance with his beloved Nimue reminds the reader that Merlyn will soon be trapped in a magical cave and thus of no use to Arthur in the trials ahead.

Chapter 4

1. The author employs a brief aside directly preceding the joust between Lancelot and the black knight: "The first time you do a thing, it is often exciting. To go alone in an airplane for the first time used to be so exciting that it nearly choked you." What effect does this anachronism create?

Like many other anachronisms in the text, this one helps to establish a familiar, conversational tone and to aid the reader's understanding of the events in the novel. Clearly, there are no airplanes during the time of Lancelot and Arthur, but airplanes are very familiar to the modern reader. Thus, the anachronism places Lancelot's feelings of excitement into a context which the modern reader can easily understand. Additionally, this aside underlines the fact that Lancelot, although highly trained, is still a very young man. This is his first real joust, and the author makes that clear.

2. How does Lancelot's attitude toward Guenever evolve in this chapter?

At the beginning of this chapter, Lancelot feels only resentment and jealousy toward Guenever, because he feels she has stolen Arthur from him. When Lancelot actually meets her, his initial feelings are reinforced, not because of her behavior but because Lancelot does not allow himself to see her as a complex person, only as "deceitful, designing, and heartless." Interestingly, however, Lancelot's feelings toward Guenever change when he hurts her feelings. He snaps at her for her unskillful handling of the falcon, and when he sees the hurt in her eyes, he realizes that she is much more complex than he gives her credit for. "She was not a minx, not deceitful, not designing and heartless," Lancelot realizes. "She was pretty Jenny, who could think and feel."

Chapter 5

1. Describe the tone the author employs when discussing the Roman war. How does this tone affect the novel's thematic development?

The author is relatively uninterested in describing the war or the reasons for it. "There is no reason to go into the whole story of the Roman campaign," he writes, "although it lasted several years. It was the usual sort of war, with a great deal of shoving and shouting on both sides." The author's tone toward the war, especially as shown by use of the terms "shoving" and "shouting," is one of impatience and disinterest. This tone serves to reinforce the author's aversion to warfare in Arthur's story. Even though battles and war definitely play an important role in Arthurian mythology, White is much more concerned with Arthur's political ideas and personal relationships than with his exploits in battle.

Chapter 6

1. How does this chapter foreshadow tragedy for King Arthur?

The foreshadowing in this chapter is rather obvious, almost heavy-handed. In analyzing Lancelot's character, the author considers that if Lancelot were not so morally conflicted, "the tragedy of Arthur would never have happened."

Lancelot is morally conflicted, however, indicating that he will bring Arthur to eventual ruin. Additionally, Guenever's parting words to Lancelot foreshadow some trouble to the astute reader. In wishing Lancelot to "Come back soon," Guenever reveals some depth of feeling for Lancelot.

2. How is Lancelot's character further developed in this chapter?

This chapter is focused almost exclusively on Lancelot's character. The character study explicitly reveals Lancelot's contradictory nature, something the reader may only have guessed at before. "It is the bad people who need to have principles to restrain them," the author observes, noting that it is the badness in Lancelot's nature that leads to all his outward honor and chivalry.

Chapter 7

1. What do the presence of Sir Carados and Sir Turquine contribute to the plot? What do their characters imply about knighthood?

Firstly, Lancelot's defeat of Turquine and Carados demonstrate Lancelot's impressive physical abilities. Although they are nefarious characters, both Turquine and Carados are powerful and skilled fighters. Between them, they have managed to subdue and capture several of King Arthur's knights, including Gawaine, Gaheris, and Agravaine. Thus, Lancelot's victory over them solidifies his reputation as a great knight, and confirms that he is also a greater knight than the others of the Round Table.

Additionally, they are used in this chapter to demonstrate the "troubled age of Might." The writer describes Carados and Turquine as eagles, existing only to prey on weaker people, but without an eagle's nobility. Carados and Turquine are thus demonstrations for Fort Mayne, or the idea that might is right. They illustrate what it is exactly that King Arthur's knights are fighting against.

Importantly, Carados and Turquine are knights themselves, despite their lack of justice or a sense of nobility. Even though the protagonists of the novel are fighting against their ideals, it is significant that men such as these can become knights. This serves to cast doubt on the idea of knighthood as a whole, if such men can become knights and do such violent evil.

Chapter 8

1. How do Lancelot's adventures in this chapter help to define Arthur's new ideas of chivalry and morality?

Lancelot meets some rather unscrupulous characters in his adventures, most notably the lady who lures Lancelot into a tree so that her husband can kill him when he is unarmed and without his armor. However, Lancelot's responses to the unscrupulous people he meets illustrate the code of morality to which he is sworn. Despite the lady's nefarious role in the plot, Lancelot does not kill her, because she is a woman. Arthur's new rules for civilization do not allow women to be killed, as Lancelot explicitly points out to the knight he meets in this chapter. Additionally, this chapter illustrates that the rules of chivalry do not allow Lancelot to kill an unarmed man (even when the unarmed man in question has just murdered his wife in cold blood).

2. How do Lancelot's responses to his encounters in this chapter further develop his character? The motif of chivalry?

At the end of both of the adventures recounted in this chapter, Lancelot leaves unsatisfied. After he kills the fat knight and lets his woman leave unharmed, the narrator notes that Lancelot was sorry. Then, after Lancelot spares the murderous knight's life, "Lancelot went away and was sick." It is significant that Lancelot holds so firmly to the ideas of chivalry, despite the fact that he finds them ultimately unsatisfying. This develops the fierce commitment to Arthur's ideals that is so essential to understanding Lancelot's character, as well as the contradictory nature of his personality.

Lancelot's unsatisfied responses also highlight the problems inherent in Arthur's idea of chivalry and morality. Although it is surely better to outlaw the killing of unarmed men and women than to endorse murder, there are nonetheless flaws in Arthur's ideas. Lancelot's feelings about his own actions illuminate these flaws, and these flaws are discussed in great detail in following chapters by Arthur himself.

Chapter 9

1. How do the events in this chapter indicate a change in the relationship between Lancelot and Guenever?

The reader knows from the last sentence in the preceding chapter that Lancelot's decision to send his captives to kneel at Guenever's feet was a "fatal course of action." It is this action that seems to solidify Guenever's love for Lancelot. She thinks of all his prisoners as presents to her; the narrator notes, "It was like the story books." When Lancelot enters the hall, his and Guenever's eyes meet "with the click of two magnets coming together." This image is particularly effective in demonstrating how the two feel about each other: a magnetic attraction that cannot be denied. At the end of the chapter, Arthur notices that his wife and his best friend look at each other "with the wide pupils of madness." This is particularly significant because, even after a year of self-imposed separation, Lancelot clearly loves Guenever, and Guenever is clearly attracted to him. This is so obvious that Arthur forces himself to look away.

2. How have the knights made a fetish of the Round Table, and what theme does this develop?

Arthur believes that his knights are not fighting for civilization and morality for their own sake. Rather, they are competing among themselves to be the best knight under the new order in order to earn notoriety and praise. Arthur thinks that the ultimate goal of his new kind of civilization—for men to learn not to take advantage of weakness—is lost on his knights.

This rather disquieting realization further develops the theme of might and right. Arthur has certainly done his best to build a better civilization—that is to say, to use might in the service of right—but he is beginning to realize that his idea is not as perfect as he expected. Even though his knights operate under his new morality, violence is rampant. Arthur thinks of himself as “up to the elbows in blood.” Thus, the king continues to struggle with his ideals, saying: “I wish I had never invented honour, or sportsmanship, or civilization!”

3. What effect does Arthur’s worry about the Orkney faction create?

Arthur’s worry about the violent nature of the Orkney clan and his warnings to Lancelot about them effectively foreshadow trouble from that faction. Indeed, the reader is reminded just how much trouble the Orkney clan might prove to be when Arthur mentions their mother, Morgause.

Arthur’s worry about the Orkney clan also creates a very somber tone during his speech in this chapter. Arthur is doubting his ideals, or at least the implementation of his ideals, and his worry over the Orkney clan in addition to this doubt gives Arthur’s speech a serious, anxious tone.

Chapter 10

1. How does this chapter further develop the conflict within Lancelot? What theme does this chapter develop, and how?

This chapter defines Lancelot's longing for Guenever, and his struggle to not succumb to that longing, as a conflict between his feelings and his devotion to what he believes is right. Interestingly, the narrator implies that in the modern world, a man such as Lancelot would have no trouble simply running away with Guenever. Lancelot, however, is so obsessed with notions of chivalry and morality that he simply will not allow himself to do so.

This characterization (or psychoanalysis, as some students may see it) is important because it indicates that Lancelot's conflict is much more complex than merely not wanting to destroy Arthur's trust. Lancelot's conflict about his feelings for Guenever is deeply rooted in his ideas about Arthur's notions of chivalry and morality, and also deeply rooted in Lancelot's feelings about himself. Lancelot is consumed with shame and self-loathing.

This chapter helps to define and development the theme of the conflict between love and duty. This conflict is the driving force of Lancelot's life and serves as the major theme of The Ill-Made Knight. Lancelot himself embodies this theme in this chapter (as well as in many others) as he struggles to find a balance between his feelings for Guenever and his duty as a knight of King Arthur.

Chapter 11

1. Why does Lancelot's adventure in this chapter have such a "dreamlike quality?" How does this quality affect the tone of the chapter?

Lancelot's adventure in this chapter is very meaningful for him for a number of reasons. His rescue of Elaine from the boiling water is his first miracle (The observant reader will remember that, even as a boy in training, Lancelot dreamed of being allowed to perform miracles). More importantly, Lancelot later views this adventure with a kind of "awful grief." "He was to look back on it as the last adventure of his virginity," the narrator explains, "and to believe, day by day for the next twenty years, that before it happened he had been God's man, while, after it, he had become a lie."

Thus, because Lancelot's memory imbues this adventure with so much significance, the narrator presents this adventure with a dreamlike quality. All the people of the village are standing in the street, as if waiting for Lancelot to arrive, and the villagers even speak in chorus when answering Lancelot's questions. Because of these odd circumstances, the events seem almost preordained.

The dreamlike quality is especially evident after Lancelot has rescued Elaine, as he kneels in the church with her. Because of the light reflecting through the stained glass windows, "the whole inside of the place [is] a tankful of colour." It is in this colorful, almost unreal setting that Lancelot realizes he has performed a miracle.

The dreamlike descriptions in this chapter establish the tone as mystical and significant. Lancelot's adventure seems almost predetermined thanks to the dreamlike elements of the village and the oddly mysterious tone. Because this adventure is described so differently than Lancelot's previous adventures, it is clear that this adventure holds more significance.

Chapter 12

1. How are the events in this chapter a turning point for Lancelot?

In losing his virginity, Lancelot believes that he has lost his purity and thus his ability to perform miracles. For Lancelot, his ideas of knighthood and nobility are inextricably tied with his ideas of purity and religion. Thus, Lancelot is sure that the loss of his virginity means the loss of his status as the greatest knight in the world.

Equally bad, Lancelot discovers that he has been tricked, and that the woman he slept with was not Guenever but Elaine. He cannot even console himself by believing that he lost his status as a knight but gained Guenever's love. Rather, he believes he threw away his knighthood for nothing. As he realizes what has happened, Lancelot begins to cry, and the narrator explains, "The thing which Elaine had stolen from him was his might. She had stolen his strength of ten."

Chapter 13

1. How does the long description of “the seventh sense” help to characterize Guenever?

Guenever is an interesting character; the narrator explicitly admits, “It is difficult to imagine her.” Although this chapter begins with a description of the seventh sense—in effect, a kind of emotional maturity—it is important to note that Guenever does not yet have this seventh sense. Instead, she is in a state of maturation somewhere between innocent youth (like Elaine) and the development of that seventh sense. It is interesting that the narrator spends so much time describing and defining the seventh sense, since it does not relate to Guenever’s character in this chapter. Thus, the description of the seventh sense is present in this chapter as a contrast to Guenever’s character, and perhaps to imply that she will one day develop this sense and the characteristics that go along with it. For now, however, Guenever is a young woman “flaming with the impetus of life.”

2. How does this chapter drive the plot forward?

This chapter is of crucial importance in the plot of the novel as a whole, because in this chapter Guenever and Lancelot finally consummate their love. (The reader knows from Merlyn’s warnings and from the heavy foreshadowing earlier in the text that this consummation was inevitable, of course).

Chapter 14

1. How does Lancelot and Guenever’s interaction in this chapter further develop both of their characters?

Even now that he has begun his affair with Guenever, Lancelot is still obsessed with ideas of holiness and guilt. The stories that he tells Jenny about his childhood contain topics of guilt and punishment, and Lancelot tells her directly that he will never be able to perform any more miracles because of his affair with her. It is obvious that, even during the height of his relationship with Jenny, Lancelot is still conflicted and sometimes guilt-ridden.

Guenever is less complex. In fact, she is presented as remorseless about her affair with Lancelot, even though she knows she is betraying her husband. Her only real emotion in this chapter comes when Lancelot seems to regret his relationship with her. She challenges him, speaking coldly: “Personally I have never done a miracle . . . So I have less to regret.” Given the gravity of their crime and the sincerity of Lancelot’s thoughts, Guenever seems surprisingly one-dimensional and self-centered in this chapter.

Chapter 15

1. What does Guenever's jealousy reveal about her character?

Guenever's jealousy and anger in this chapter is certainly not unfounded; after all, she has just discovered that Lancelot has fathered a child with another woman. However, her reaction is disproportionate and illogical. The narrator notes, "She had shame and hatred of what she might say, but she could not help saying it." Guenever accuses Lancelot of not truly loving her, saying that he has loved Elaine all along instead. Guenever says this out of hurt and anger, not even truly believing the words herself.

Students may respond to Guenever in one of two ways: Students may argue that this emotional reaction to Lancelot's secret reveals Guenever to be a more sympathetic character than she has previously been portrayed. This chapter demonstrates that Guenever has more emotional depth than she has shown before, now that she feels her love affair is threatened.

Conversely, students may argue that this extreme jealousy demonstrates Guenever to be more self-centered and cruel than she has previously demonstrated. The extreme emotions she feels over Lancelot's perceived betrayal may reveal that she can feel deeply only about matters that directly affect her.

Chapter 16

1. Describe the contrasting characteristics of Guenever and Elaine presented in this chapter.

Elaine is surprisingly naïve. She hopes to capture Lancelot from Guenever, but she has no real plan in place to do so. "She had no weapons to fight with," the narrator explains, "and did not know how to fight. She was quite without character." Despite the fact that Elaine has Lancelot's child, Galahad, she has no plans to use Galahad to convince Lancelot to marry her.

Guenever, on the other hand, is acutely aware of the threat that Elaine represents. "With her prescience, she was aware of dooms and sorrow outside her lover's purview," the narrator notes. Guenever spends time waiting for Elaine's arrival both consciously and unconsciously pondering over the situation with Lancelot, and she becomes restless, cruel and unreasonable.

In short, Elaine is presented in this chapter as so naïve that she is nearly thoughtless. Guenever, on the other hand, is brooding and jealous.

2. How does this chapter further establish Arthur's status as a tragic hero? What theme does this develop?

Arthur is aware of the affair between his wife and best friend, at least unconsciously. After all, he has been warned by Merlyn about the matter, and he knows both Guenever and Lancelot well enough to know that there is something between them. However, Arthur is very careful to never catch them in the act, and he is equally careful to never directly ask either Lancelot or Guenever about their relationship. It is not fear or anger or any other negative characteristic that keeps Arthur from confronting them. Rather, it is Arthur's positive attributes—his strength, gentleness, love, and simplicity—that prompt him to remain unconvinced of the betrayal.

These attributes are what establish Arthur as a tragic hero. Although these attributes are generally good and allow him to be a just, moral king, they do not allow him to confront the betrayal. "He was sadly unfitted for hating his best friend or for torturing his wife," the narrator observes. "He had been given too much love and trust to be good at those things." If Arthur could transcend these traits in order to confront the affair, he could possibly prevent his kingdom from being torn apart. However, he does not do so, leaving him at least partly to blame for the ongoing affair and solidifying his status as a tragic hero.

Arthur's characteristics here further develop the theme of the conflict between love and duty. Arthur's love for both his wife and Lancelot is too great to allow him to do his duty as king and maintain the stability of his kingdom.

Chapter 17

1. What does Lancelot's response to Galahad reveal about his character?

Lancelot does not even meet Galahad until Guenever orders him to, revealing that Lancelot's loyalty is to Guenever alone. When he does meet his son, he is struck by how fair Galahad is. He thinks, "It is a part of me, yet it is fair. It does not seem to be ugly." Even when meeting his own child, Lancelot cannot seem to escape the self-loathing that is at the core of his character. In many ways, Lancelot is a pitiable character.

Chapter 18

1. How is Lancelot's madness inevitable?

Since the moment the reader met Lancelot, he has been a deeply conflicted character, constantly struggling with questions of his own worth and attempting to live up to an ideal that is nothing short of perfection. When Lancelot fell in love with Guenever, his internal conflicts became even more pronounced, as he struggled between his notion of duty and honor and his love for her. After yielding to temptation and beginning his affair with her, he struggles with guilt over his sin and his betrayal of the king. In short, Lancelot is a character with so many warring passions and beliefs that his psyche is fragile.

When Lancelot realizes he has fallen for the same trick twice, and Guenever focuses her rage on him, he has no recourse. He can find no solace in knightly quests because he believes he is no longer pure, and he can find no solace in Elaine because she is the source of the current conflict with Guenever. With nowhere else to turn for comfort, Lancelot's conflicted mind snaps.

Chapter 19

1. How is the conversation between King Pelles and Sir Bliant an effective device at this point in the novel?

The conversation between the two men serves to relay two years' worth of information quickly and efficiently. The narrator informs the reader at the beginning of this chapter that two years have passed since Lancelot's madness began. King Pelles and Sir Bliant, two very minor characters, discuss the Wild Man (whom they suspect was Lancelot) and the time he spent at Sir Bliant's castle. This conversation is an effective device because it informs the reader of the previous two years from the mouths of relatively objective characters, thus imparting the news about Lancelot reliably. Additionally, it is an effective device because it also allows the reader to hear about the current state of another important character: Elaine. Lastly, it informs the reader that the news of Lancelot's madness was not kept quiet at King Arthur's court; instead, it seems to be common knowledge.

Chapter 20

1. How is Lancelot depicted as both pathetic and noble in this chapter?

In the beginning of the chapter, Lancelot (then called A Wild Man) is portrayed as pathetic, as he is naked and is being chased and taunted by a group of boys. He is injured, bleeding, and very thin. His pathetic, hunted look prompts King Pelles to take him in.

By the end of the chapter, however, Lancelot emerges again as a noble character. He is still insane, with no apparent ability to speak, but when he wears the king's grand robe, his presence impresses nearly everyone in the Great Hall. They fall silent in awe. This indicates that, even though he is insane and has no idea who he is, Lancelot is a dignified man at his core.

Chapter 21

1. How has Elaine changed in the two years since Lancelot's madness began?

Elaine has clearly matured since her last appearance in the text. Then, she had come to King Arthur's court with the naïve hope that Lancelot would choose her. She threw herself at Lancelot and sobbed like a young girl when he rejected her. At this point in the text, however, Elaine seems practical and controlled. When she finds Lancelot in the garden, she oversees his rehabilitation with calm and care.

Chapter 22

1. Elaine chooses to call her new home with Lancelot the Joyous Island. What does this reveal about her character?

Although Elaine has undoubtedly matured in the past two years—especially evident during her honest, solemn conversation with Lancelot at the beginning of this chapter—she is still deeply affected by her love for him. Her choice of such an optimistic, happy name for her new home indicates her complete infatuation with Lancelot and her fervent desire to build a life with him. Despite the fact that Lancelot clearly does not love her, Elaine is determined that they can live as if they are in love. “Don't you think we might have a happy time if we are careful?” she asks him. Her hopefulness is achingly apparent, given her choice of name for Bliant Castle.

2. In this chapter, Lancelot finally takes up the moniker he chose as a boy. How does this further develop his character? What might it foreshadow?

The reader should remember from chapter one (and the title of book three) that the Chevalier Mal Fet means the Ill-Made Knight. When Elaine asks him what it means, Lancelot tells her, “You could make it mean several things. The Ugly Knight would be one meaning, or the Knight Who Has Done Wrong.” In his new life with Elaine, Lancelot has an opportunity to choose any name he likes. However, he chooses this name, from so long ago, and it is a name laced with guilt. This indicates that Lancelot, despite his extreme suffering, is unable to forgive himself for his sins and mistakes. He chooses to live under a moniker that emphasizes his sins and moral conflicts.

Just as significantly, Lancelot does not tell her what else the name might translate to: “the Ill-Starred Knight—the Knight with a Curse on Him.” This rather ominous translation foreshadows further trouble and heartache for Lancelot, in spite of his attempts to make Elaine happy and stay away from Arthur’s court.

Chapter 23

1. What is the predominant tone of this chapter, and how does it emphasize Elaine’s feelings?

This chapter has a melancholy tone of inevitability, especially the sections of the chapter focusing on Elaine. The tournament that she arranges, in an attempt to make Lancelot’s life at Joyous Island normal, is completely devoid of the conviviality common at tournaments. Her son seems indifferent to Lancelot and the toys Lancelot has made for him. Worse still, Elaine realizes that the woman on Lancelot’s shield is meant to represent Guenever, not Elaine herself. Even the reunion between Lancelot and two knights from Arthur’s court is written in a melancholy tone.

The tone of the chapter perfectly mirrors Elaine’s feelings as she watches the two knights reunite with Lancelot. She is profoundly sad because she knows, even before Lancelot knows himself, that these two knights will convince Lancelot to leave her and return to King Arthur’s castle.

Chapter 24

1. Degalis asks Lancelot, “Do you seriously think you can stay here incognito with this wench, and still be yourself?” What theme does he develop with this question?

This question, designed to convince Lancelot to return to Camelot, also expands upon the theme of the conflict between love and duty. Degalis himself is merely emphasizing the point that Lancelot will not be able to participate in any knightly activities if he stays with Elaine. “It would mean absolute retirement—no quests, no tournaments, no honour, no love,” he says. However, the reader knows that Lancelot defines himself not only through his commitment to the chivalric code, but also through his love for Guenever. The reader knows that Lancelot’s identity is linked with the conflict between his love for her and his duty to knighthood. Without these two conflicting ideals, Lancelot would lose his defining characteristic.

2. What effect does the detailed description of Lancelot’s armor create?

Lancelot’s armor is described in loving detail, with visual, tactile, and even olfactory imagery. The effect of the armour on Lancelot is dramatic. After being struck by its familiar look and weight (and by the memory of Jenny), he immediately rides off for Camelot. The effect of the description of the armour on the reader is nearly the same. The description imbues the armour with importance and beauty, giving this brief section of the novel a tone of dignity. Despite all that has happened to Lancelot, this beautiful description of his armour makes his return to knighthood seem absolutely necessary and right.

Chapter 25

1. How does the narrator account for the fact that Arthur, Guenever, and Lancelot have become legends in their own time?

Fifteen years have passed between this chapter and the last, and King Arthur’s new civilization has had a profound effect on the country. Because of the rapid changes that have come to England since Arthur took the throne, and because enough time has passed that a new generation has come to his court to be knighted, Arthur has become legendary to this new generation. Arthur has brought about important changes in England, and so he has assumed a mythic status, as if no mere mortal could bring about such changes.

Likewise, Guenever and Lancelot have assumed mythic status for the same reasons. They have become “figures instead of people” to the younger generation, indicating the success Arthur and his court have had with their new ideals.

2. What is the primary effect of the contrast between the two descriptions of England in this chapter?

The two descriptions of England are separated by “twenty-one years of patient success”; that is, twenty-one years of King Arthur’s rule. The first description paints a picture of a warlike, bloodthirsty country, characterized by “lawlessness and brutality,” children hung in trees by the sinews of their thighs, and marching mercenaries.

The second description paints a vastly different picture of a much more civilized England. The new England is so civilized, in fact, that a large portion of this description is filled with descriptions of scholarly writing, elaborate feasts, and civilized table manners. Thus, the effect of these two differing descriptions is to illuminate the incredible amount of change that has come to England since Arthur took the throne.

3. How does the tone of this chapter change with the last paragraph?

The tone of the majority of the chapter is nearly triumphant, as it describes a country reveling in the peaceful changes Arthur’s rule has brought. However, the final paragraph provides a jarring conclusion to the chapter, ending it with an ominous tone. Mordred, the reader should remember, is Arthur’s illegitimate son, conceived at the end of book two. The narrator’s mention of Mordred as one of the younger generation who has come to court is a sobering reminder to the reader that Arthur’s story is doomed to a tragic end.

Chapter 26

1. How does this chapter foreshadow the fall of Arthur’s table?

This chapter underlines the conflict between the Orkney faction and the Pellinore clan, and also serves to remind the reader of the Orkney faction’s propensity for violence and vengeance. The reintroduction of the Orkney faction, and especially of Mordred, foreshadows great trouble for Arthur.

Additionally, in this chapter, Arthur himself helps to foreshadow his court’s fall. “I am afraid for my Table,” he confides to Lancelot. “I am afraid of what is going to happen. I am afraid it was all wrong.” In this chapter, Arthur’s immediate problem is how to deal with the Orkney faction. However, this immediate problem is overshadowed (in Arthur’s mind, at least) by the problem of the fate of the table itself. This indicates that the Orkney clan will likely be instrumental in bringing about the fall of Arthur’s civilization when it occurs.

Lastly, Arthur foreshadows the fall of his own table when he confides to Lancelot: “Now my sins are coming home to roost. Lancelot, I am afraid I have sown the whirlwind, and I shall reap the storm.” The reader should remember the end of book two, where the narrator describes Arthur’s tale as the tragedy of “sin coming home to roost.” Arthur’s words in this chapter thus remind the reader that his story will end in tragedy, and serve to foreshadow the storm ahead for his civilization.

2. How is Mordred's character developed in this chapter?

Even though the reader has not yet met Mordred, he is clearly an important character. This chapter develops Mordred's character a great deal, despite his absence. The most important part of Mordred's characterization occurs in the last line of the chapter, as Gareth tells Arthur that Mordred killed Lamorak by stabbing him in the back. This action does not characterize Mordred as noble or brave; instead, he seems to be a treacherous, conniving character.

Chapter 27

1. How does the allusion to Richard III further contribute to Mordred's characterization?

Shakespeare's Richard III is one of the most memorable characters in all of literature, as he proves to be the embodiment of evil. In spite of the evil at the core of his character, Richard III is nonetheless a complex, fascinating character. He is charismatic, cunning, manipulative, and power-hungry.

When the narrator draws the comparison between Mordred and Richard III, he is explicitly referring to Mordred's slight deformity and noting the similarity to Richard III's deformity. In making this allusion, the narrator implies that Mordred shares Richard III's evil, scheming characteristics. In short, the allusion helps to establish Mordred as The Once and Future King's antagonist despite the fact that he has not yet spoken a word in the novel.

2. How does this chapter further develop the theme of might and right?

In this chapter, Arthur explores the idea that his attempt to channel might in the service of right cannot be successful forever. Now that his kingdom has become much more civilized and his knights no longer have evil and injustice to fight against, Arthur fears that his table will destroy itself from within. "We have achieved what we were fighting for, and now we still have the fighters on our hands," he explains. "Don't you see what has happened? We have run out of things to fight for, so all the fighters of the Table are going to rot."

This chapter is extremely important in developing the theme of the relationship between might and right. Arthur is slowly realizing that his civilization, as successful as it has been thus far, cannot last long because it is founded on force. A civilization founded on the ideas of force and violence, even if these things are directed toward a just end, is nonetheless a civilization of violence.

3. How does Arthur's plan to send his knights on a spiritual quest further develop the motif of questing?

Questing is an important motif in the novel, and especially in book three. Up until this point in the novel, knightly quests have seemed more like diversions than important missions. King Pellinore's experiences with his Questing Beast illustrate the diversionary nature of knightly quests well. In book three, even Lancelot undertakes quests more in an attempt to escape from Guenever than for the sake of the quests themselves.

The motif of questing changes with Arthur's plan to send his knights on a search for the Holy Grail. Arthur believes that sending his knights on a spiritual quest will strengthen his new kingdom and solve the problem of violence among his knights. "If our Might was given a channel so that it worked for God, instead of for the rights of man, surely that would stop the rot, and be worth doing?" he muses. Questing is no longer a diversionary task for knights at this point in the novel; Arthur believes that questing—if it is focused on the spiritual—can be the savior of his new civilization.

Chapter 28

1. What effect does the narrator produce as he tells the reader to seek the details of the quest for the Holy Grail in Malory's work?

The Once and Future King relies heavily on Thomas Malory's much earlier work, Le Morte d'Arthur. In making explicit reference to this work, and to the influence it has on The Once and Future King, the narrator reminds the reader that King Arthur's tale has been told and interpreted many times before. His reference to Malory establishes this part of the story as neither entirely fictional nor entirely historical. Instead, Arthur's tale, as related in The Once and Future King, is an amalgamation of the Arthurian mythos.

2. What effect does Sir Gawaine's heavy dialect produce?

It is important to note that Gawaine is the only one of the Orkney faction who still speaks with any kind of dialect. The narrator notes that Gawaine's Northern accent is "almost an assumed one." Gawaine's use of dialect indicates his continued allegiance to his family and to his race, despite his service in King Arthur's court. Interestingly, however, Gawaine is not a bad character, despite the allegiance he obviously feels to his extraordinarily violent family. His accent distinguishes him from the rest of the knights in Arthur's court and even from his brothers, characterizing him as a knight who is just as concerned with allegiance to his race as he is with carving out a legacy for himself.

3. What does Gawaine's story of his failed attempt to find the Holy Grail suggest about who will ultimately find it?

Gawaine's tale is full of anecdotes about his own violence. In his quest for the Grail, just as in his life before the quest began, Gawaine has a penchant for brutality. He encounters several holy men who warn him about this tendency for violence, but he pays no attention. One priest tells him directly that manslaughter is "contrary to the quest" for the Grail. Although Gawaine himself is unable to heed these warnings, his story suggests that Galahad will. When Gawaine encounters Galahad, Galahad seems very holy and principled, and avoids killing at all costs. These characteristics, coupled with Gawaine's story of his own failures, suggest that Galahad may well be the knight best suited to finding the Holy Grail.

Chapter 29

1. How does this chapter reveal that adhering to the moral standard required to find the Grail is an extremely difficult task?

This chapter focuses on the moral dilemmas that face Bors in his quest for the Grail. By this point, it should be clear to the reader that the quest for the Holy Grail has more to do with spiritual fitness than skill in questing, fighting, or other knightly pursuits.

However, this chapter demonstrates that spiritual fitness is not easy to achieve. The tests that Bors must endure during his quest include moral ambiguity and uncertainty. For instance, a lady in a castle tells Bors that he must make love to her or she will commit suicide. When he refuses, the lady climbs to the highest keep of her castle, along with twelve other women, and says that if Bors again chooses not to make love to her, she—and all twelve of the women with her—will jump to their deaths. Arthur and Guenever marvel over the difficulty of this decision when Lionel tells them about it.

All of the trials that Bors endures force him to make difficult decisions like this one, decisions that seem to have no clear right answer. "Dogmas are difficult things," says Arthur, and Bors's trials demonstrate this statement perfectly. As the previous two chapters have shown, most of Arthur's knights are not worthy of passing difficult trials like these to find the Holy Grail.

Chapter 30

1. What does Arthur's defense of the Orkney clan reveal about his character?

Arthur is certainly aware of the unpredictable, violent nature of the members of the Orkney clan, especially Gawaine and Agravaine. He knows that they are bloodthirsty and vengeful, despite their status as knights in his court. Nonetheless, when Sir Aglovale expresses his desire to kill them in revenge for their murder of his father and brother, Arthur pleads with Aglovale to show them mercy. This desire for mercy is one of Arthur's essential characteristics. He knows that his kingdom cannot last forever if it is ruled by force (what he calls Might) and violence. Thus, even when force and violence would be a simple solution, Arthur tries to avoid it. Arthur's defense of the Orkney clan reveals that he is genuinely concerned with morality and justice and fully committed to his ideals.

2. What causes Guenever to doubt Sir Percivale's inclusion on the holy boat? What does this reveal about the characteristics necessary to reach the Holy Grail?

Without meaning offense, Guenever wonders why Percivale is included on the magic barge (along with Galahad and Bors) when he has not been subjected to the same caliber of moral tests. Percivale, like his father, is a rather ridiculous, bumbling character. Guenever says, "I don't mean to be rude, Sir Aglovale, but your brother does not seem to have done much." Arthur replies that Percival has preserved his integrity (meaning his virginity), and that he is cleaner than Sir Bors, and thus "perfectly innocent." This reveals that innocence and virginity is extremely important in achieving spiritual perfection, and is thus significant for Lancelot, who lost his virginity (and thus his miracles) many years ago and has never repented.

Chapter 31

1. What does the narrator's description of Lancelot, at his return to Camelot, suggest about his quest?

The tone of the chapter before Lancelot arrives is despairing, as the people of Camelot whisper of his death or insanity. However, Lancelot does return, alive and sane. The man walking back into Camelot, however, is a defeated, humble figure. Lancelot is "wet and small," "threading wearily" through the trees on his way back to the castle. His head is bowed and he does not raise it even when he enters the castle. This description of Lancelot carries a tone of defeated hopelessness with it. Later, as the narrator describes the hair shirt that Lancelot wears under his gown for penance, there is a suggestion of shame lingering about Lancelot as well. This description suggests that, although some knights have reached the Holy Grail, Lancelot's part in the quest has been unsuccessful. The reader is left to wonder whether Lancelot has been irrevocably changed into this defeated, humble man who returns to Camelot.

Chapter 32

1. What is Lancelot's tone towards Galahad as he describes him? What does this reveal about Galahad as a character?

Lancelot speaks of his son with a tone close to reverence. He compares him to an angel, separate from the mundane qualities of the world. "You can understand how Galahad may have seemed inhuman, and mannerless, and so on, to the people who were buzzing and clacking about him," Lancelot explains. "He was far away in his spirit, living on desert islands, in silence, with eternity." This is an interesting description of Galahad, one that explains a great deal about the unsocial characteristics he has displayed during his appearances in the story. Despite the fact that he is Lancelot's son, Lancelot speaks of Galahad as if his holiness has made him separate from the world. After all, Galahad has found the Grail and will never be returning to Camelot. Thus, Galahad's holiness has made him separate from Arthur's world, removing him from it entirely.

2. How do Lancelot's experiences in this chapter relate to the theme of the conflict between love and duty?

As he is questing for the Holy Grail, Lancelot realizes that he will not be allowed to attain it with any unconfessed sin on his conscience. This knowledge prompts him to find a priest and make his full confession. Lancelot believes that he will be able to fulfill his knightly quest to find the Grail only when the sin of his forbidden affair is off his conscience. Despite the fact that Lancelot and Guenever have lived nearly twenty years in sin, Lancelot's conflict obviously still weighs on his conscience. He is sure that it is his biggest obstacle to reaching the Holy Grail.

Chapter 33

1. How has Lancelot matured during his quest for the Grail?

Thanks to his experiences with defeat, Lancelot has developed a sense of humility that he lacked when he set off on the Grail quest. Indeed, his sense of humility has developed so much that he asks Galahad for his blessing and even asks to kiss Galahad's sword, indicating that Lancelot certainly believes Galahad is the greater knight. Lancelot also has a sense of serenity and peacefulness that he has always lacked up to this point. During his time in the ship that picks him up by the water of Mortoise, Lancelot demonstrates an ability to commune with the natural world that his character has always lacked before, being too consumed by his own inner turmoil. The changes in Lancelot's character brought about by the quest for the Grail are striking and profound.

Chapter 34

1. How does the narrator attempt to dispel the myths associated with Guenever's character?

In this chapter, the narrator attempts to define Guenever as a “real” person (by which he means a person of complexity and depth). He attempts to dispel the notions usually associated with her by referring to other tales of King Arthur’s court. “People are easily dazzled by Round Tables and feats of arms,” he explains. “You read of Lancelot in some noble achievement, and, when he comes home to his mistress, you feel resentment at her because she cuts across the achievement, or spoils it.” By referring to how readers of earlier Arthurian legends have felt about Guenever’s role, the narrator argues against these notions.

2. Is Guenever a sympathetic character in this chapter? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Students may answer this question either positively or negatively. Students answering affirmatively will point out that the narrator makes a great effort to explain and defend Guenever’s character. She, after all, has no opportunity for diversions because of the structure of the society in which she lives; thus, it is not at all surprising that she finds herself obsessing over Lancelot. Even though the narrator admits that she has the qualities of a man-eater, she never fully consumes either Lancelot or Arthur. They both lead full lives of their own apart from her influence.

Students who find Guenever to be an unsympathetic character will point to her attitude toward Lancelot at the end of the chapter. Although he is fully committed to his new religious ideals and no longer wants to continue his affair with her, Guenever is fully convinced that he will break this vow. It is difficult not to read her as a cunning temptress as she sits in her bath at the end of the chapter, smiling with amusement as she thinks about Lancelot’s newfound religious fervor. Rather than attempt to support him in his moral ambitions, the queen merely waits for him to fail.

Chapter 35

1. How does this chapter further define Lancelot's internal conflict?

Despite his newfound religious convictions, Lancelot is still plagued by his love for Guenever. The reader may well be surprised that he has managed to remain celibate for a year. Lancelot has chosen his duty—in the form of his religious conviction—over his love. He felt peace and serenity during his quest for the Grail thanks to his beliefs about God, but now it is clear that he no longer feels that peace. He is conflicted, feeling that he is irrevocably harming Guenever by choosing not to restart the affair. It seems that Lancelot will always be conflicted, no matter what he chooses to do. “I feel as if I were sacrificing you, or us if you like, to a new sort of love,” he laments to Jenny. He is torn over whether it is fair to Jenny to choose his love for God over his love for her.

Chapter 36

1. How does the changing atmosphere of Camelot make the setting dangerous for Guenever?

Camelot has changed a great deal since the end of the quest for the Holy Grail. The narrator calls this phase of Camelot's evolution "the maturest or the saddest phase." King Arthur's court is no longer the noble, chivalrous place it once was (The narrator implies that this phase is only temporary, noting: "All glorious reigns have these blank patches"). Nonetheless, King Arthur does not inspire the same respect he once did. Guenever inspires even less respect than Arthur does. The younger generation believes that she is ridiculous and overemotional, and they mock her attempts to remain fashionable. Additionally, Guenever's unfaithfulness is common knowledge among the court, even though none have approached the king with this information. With these changing attitudes, and the absence of Lancelot to defend and protect her, conditions are ripe in Camelot for Guenever to be challenged.

2. How does this chapter advance the plot?

After several chapters focusing on the quest for the Holy Grail, this chapter reminds the reader of the ongoing feud between the Orkney faction and the Pellinores. Even though Aglovale has decided not to seek vengeance on the Orkney clan himself, bad blood still exists between the two families. Additionally, this chapter places Guenever in great danger. She faces the possibility of being burned at the stake if her champion loses the battle.

Chapter 37

1. How does this chapter further develop the theme of might and right?

Despite all the changes in action and attitude Arthur has brought into England since he took the throne, this chapter demonstrates that might is still the law of the land. Interestingly, the author notes that under the old law, anyone accusing the queen of treason would be executed. Under Arthur's new law, however, the queen must mount a defense against these accusations instead, and if her side loses, her punishment is execution. Arthur has certainly changed the system in England, but the system is still based around displays of force and violence. The joust that will decide the queen's fate is an indication that might still makes right in Arthur's England.

Arthur himself recognizes this in this chapter. He understands that his efforts to use might to enforce right have been imperfect, and that he must establish a new system altogether. "He was groping towards Right as a criterion of its own—towards Justice as an abstract thing which did not lean upon power," the narrator explains. Arthur's ideas about might and right have evolved a great deal; this chapter marks the next important step in that progression.

2. Why does Lancelot return to fight for the queen, and what does this reveal about his character?

This chapter again analyzes Lancelot's character. He returns to fight for the queen because she is in danger; thus her need for Lancelot is greater, at the moment, than God's need for Lancelot. In defining Lancelot's moral struggles, the narrator explains that Lancelot believes in a personal God, a God so personal that Lancelot is somehow in love with Him. To return to his affair with Jenny would be tantamount to being unfaithful to God, in Lancelot's eyes. Again, the reader sees the conflict between love and duty that is so central to Lancelot's character. His love for Guenever is in constant conflict with his duty towards God. However, this chapter also adds an interesting dimension to this old conflict. When Guenever is in danger, Lancelot feels a strong sense of duty toward Guenever as well, riding "back to her side as soon as he knew that she was in trouble." In this chapter, Lancelot's primary motivation for rescuing Jenny does not spring from a sense of love, but rather from a sense of duty.

Chapter 38

1. How does this chapter further define Guenever's character?

The author spends a good deal of time analyzing, describing, and characterizing Guenever in this section of the novel. This chapter paints Guenever in a very unflattering light, demonstrating her tendencies toward manipulation, jealousy, and selfishness. Certainly she is in a painful position, but the way she responds to her pain makes her very unsympathetic in this chapter.

Elaine is not Guenever's rival for Lancelot's affections. Nonetheless, Guenever chooses to blame Elaine for Lancelot's lack of interest in her, and thus Guenever becomes increasingly jealous of Elaine. This demonstrates a marked ability for self-deception within Guenever.

Guenever redeems herself a bit in the end of the chapter, when she notices what mental strain Lancelot is being subjected to because of her cruel behavior. Just when Lancelot feels that his mind is about to break into pieces again, Jenny stops speaking to him cruelly and kisses him. Even with this small conciliatory act, Guenever is decidedly unlikeable in this chapter.

Chapter 39

1. The narrator makes a point of leaving out the details of the tournament, referring again to Malory's work instead. What might this suggest about the narrator's attitude toward the tournament?

The Once and Future King *simultaneously acknowledges itself as a derivative work and as an imaginative adaptation of King Arthur's story, thanks to sections in the narrative like the section that begins this chapter. The narrator acknowledges the supremacy of Malory's text, urging the reader to find the details of the tournament there. It is significant that the narrator chooses to avoid the details of the tournament—just as he avoided details of battles earlier in the novel—because it indicates his attitude toward such knightly displays of force and skill. His choice to omit details of the battle, in favor of description of the characters and interaction between Lancelot and Elaine, indicates that this text is more concerned with character development than the medieval setting itself. The tournament is merely the setting during which Lancelot and Elaine reunite; the narrator finds the details of the tournament unimportant except as they relate to Lancelot.*

2. How does Elaine's characterization set her apart from Guenever?

Elaine's primary characteristic in this chapter is a kind of hopeful naïveté. She is so naïve, indeed, that she believes Lancelot has come to Corbin not only for the tournament, but to finally fulfill his promise and return to her. Elaine is an extraordinarily sympathetic character in this chapter. She is careful to be kind and sensitive toward Lancelot, and her simple hope that Lancelot will stay with her is heartbreaking in its earnestness. She presents a stark contrast to Guenever, who has been argumentative, manipulative, and resentful since Lancelot ended their affair. The reader will find it difficult not to pity Elaine, due to her sensitive nature and her "unfounded conviction" that Lancelot will stay with her forever.

Chapter 40

1. How does Elaine's final act exacerbate the conflict between Lancelot and Guenever?

Elaine commits suicide when Lancelot leaves Corbin, unable to bear the idea of living without him again. The narrator notes that her suicide is "the only strong blow of her life." Elaine's death does not bring Lancelot and Guenever together in grief or sorrow, however. Instead, Elaine's death furthers the rift between the two.

When they realize that Elaine has killed herself, Guenever wastes no time in blaming Lancelot for the suicide, saying, "You might have showed her some bounty and gentleness, which would have preserved her life." Knowing how inclined Lancelot is toward self-blame and self-loathing, this comment is sure to hurt him deeply. It is especially striking that the queen makes this comment when she herself has always viewed Elaine with jealousy and dislike. Thus, Elaine's suicide comes between Guenever and Lancelot more effectively than anything else Elaine has ever done.

Chapter 41

1. How does the tournament in this chapter show “the true tension at court?” How does it advance the plot?

The events during the tournament in this chapter remind the reader of the major problems at Camelot—problems that will ultimately tear the kingdom apart. First, Arthur’s actions in the tournament remind the reader of Arthur’s role in the love triangle. Despite the fact that Lancelot and Guenever are not currently sleeping together, Arthur shows his previously buried resentment and anger toward Lancelot. “Just for one moment of anger Arthur was the cuckold and Lancelot his betrayer,” the narrator explains. “Such is the apparent explanation—an unconscious recognition of their relationship.”

Secondly, the events during the tournament remind the reader of the simmering resentment that the Orkney faction feels toward Lancelot. Lancelot humiliates them during the tournament by unhorsing all of them (except Gareth). From this day on, the narrator explains, it is only a matter of time before the Orkney faction, led by Mordred and Agravaine, make their attempt on Lancelot’s life.

Although the narrator summarizes the events of the tournament quickly, it is clearly an important moment for Arthur’s country. The heavy foreshadowing in this chapter advances the plot and reminds readers of the dueling factions that will stand against Camelot to destroy it. “With such an undertow,” the narrator ominously observes, “there was evidently a storm to come.”

2. What does the image at the end of the chapter—of Lancelot putting on his armor and Arthur assisting him—reveal about both characters?

The image at the end of the chapter is striking because of the absolute unity it reveals between Arthur and Lancelot. Despite the fact that Arthur has uncharacteristically tried to hurt Lancelot in this chapter, and despite the fact that Lancelot has been living in sin with Guenever for many years, both men are absolutely united when they discover that Guenever is in danger.

This image reveals the love that both men feel toward Guenever. Even though it is this same love that will threaten to tear the kingdom apart in the near future, the love has nothing but a unifying effect in this image.

Additionally, this image emphasizes Lancelot as a man of action as compared to Arthur. It is Lancelot (Guenever’s lover) who is donning his armor hurriedly, rather than Arthur (Guenever’s husband). Of the two men, Lancelot is the one most inclined to act out of passion and excitement.

Chapter 42

1. Where is the irony in Guenever's response to Lancelot when he rescues her?

In this chapter, Guenever has finally accepted Lancelot's religious reasons for ending the affair. She has relinquished her anger and her obsessive possessiveness that has characterized her for many chapters. Guenever has finally become a serene and graceful character again. The irony here is that, now that Guenever has yielded, her affair with Lancelot can start again. "In truly yielding, she had won the battle by mistake," the narrator explains.

Chapter 43

1. How is this planned second trial by combat for Guenever's life less honorable than the first? What does it reveal about Lancelot's character?

The first time Lancelot fought for Guenever's life (in chapter 37), he was fully justified. She had been unjustly accused of poisoning a knight, something which she had absolutely no involvement in whatsoever. This time, however, Lancelot realizes he must engage in combat in order to defend the queen against an accusation that is almost true. Meliagrance accuses the queen of sleeping with one of the injured knights outside her chamber, when in fact she has been sleeping with Lancelot. Lancelot recognizes that he will fight for the queen over "this very doubtful quibble of words." He has a sense of shame over this, realizing that "he was to fight this man for saying what was practically true." Nonetheless, Lancelot agrees to fight without hesitation, revealing that his feelings of love for Guenever trump his sense of honesty and duty.

Chapter 44

1. How do Lancelot's actions toward Meliagrance during the trial by combat further develop his character?

Even during the trial by combat, when Lancelot is assured victory, he is still troubled by the fact that Meliagrance's accusation is essentially true. Although Guenever and the crowd call for Meliagrance's death, Lancelot does not kill him outright. Instead, Lancelot handicaps himself, proposing the idea that he will take off all the armor from the left side of his body and tie one hand behind his back.

Even when Lancelot is doing the thing he is best at—knightly combat—he is still racked with guilt and indecision. His sense of morality handicaps him, and he demonstrates this by handicapping himself literally. Earlier in the book, Lancelot's forays into knightly quests and duties proved to be an escape from his moral quandaries. Now, however, he cannot escape his shame even when he is actively engaged in a trial by combat for Guenever's life.

Chapter 45

1. What is the tone of this final chapter of book three? How does this tone help bring the book to a close?

The tone of this chapter is an odd mixture of joyfulness and melancholy. The tone is clearly joyful and optimistic as the narrator describes the evolution of King Arthur's reign and the state of the kingdom during this concluding chapter. It is especially joyful with the description of the state of the court directly after Lancelot performs his miracle. The knights dance and cheer, and old animosities are forgotten in the jubilation after the miracle.

However, this jubilant tone is tempered with a tense, melancholy tone at other points in the chapter. As the narrator outlines Lancelot's hesitation to attempt to perform the miracle, this tone is paramount. Lancelot believes absolutely that he will be unable to work a miracle because of his impurity. Lancelot believes, "Now the time had finally come to a head, when he was to be forced to face his doom."

These two contradictory (but complementary) tones help to bring the book to a close in several ways. The jubilant tone establishes Camelot as an idyllic place, highlighting Arthur's accomplishments in this book. The tone that the narrator employs toward Lancelot and his indecision reveal that Lancelot is as conflicted as ever, a character still torn between love and duty. These two contradictory tones reflect Lancelot's conflicting nature, effectively reminding the reader that the Ill-Made Knight (the title character of this book) has changed a great deal, but is nonetheless still haunted by his sense of morality.

2. What does Lancelot's response to his miracle reveal about his character?

Lancelot's response to his ability to perform the miracle is interesting. While everyone in the court dances and rejoices around him, Lancelot kneels in the center of the room, crying. It is important to note that Lancelot's tears are not tears of happiness or gratitude. Instead, he cries like "a child that had been beaten." The narrator notes that Lancelot is a "lonely and motionless figure" who knows a secret that the other knights do not. These descriptors do not paint a picture of a man crying with happiness. Rather, Lancelot is crying because of his deep sense of confusion and disappointment. He knows that he is impure in the eyes of his God; thus, the fact that his God allows him to perform a miracle cheapens the miracle itself. Additionally, Lancelot knows that in performing the miracle successfully, everyone in the court will continue to think of him as the best knight in the world. Lancelot feels shame over this moniker, as he knows that he is far from pure or sinless.

This response further develops the constant conflict inherent in Lancelot's character. Even when he is able to perform a miracle, he can take no pleasure or satisfaction from it because his sense of impurity outweighs all else.