

CBC TRANS CANADA
THEATRE 10:30

SCRIPT ADAPTED BY: George Whalley

“THE TRAGEDY OF KING ARTHUR
AND SIR LAUNCELOT” PART V –
“THE DOLOROUS DEATH AND DEPARTING
OUT OF THIS WORLD”
CBL/CBC: TBA

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PRODUCTION: John Reeves

ANNOUNCER: Theatre 10.30... We present “The Tragedy of King Arthur and Sir Launcelot” by George Whalley, adapted in five parts from the works of Sir Thomas Malory. Part Five: “The Dolorous Death and Departing out of this World.”

MUSIC #1: *PRELUDE (NO BG)*

MALORY: Now leave we the queen in Amesbury, a nun in white clothes and black – and there she was abbess and ruler, as by right she would be – and now turn we from her and speak we of Sir Launcelot du Lake, that when he heard in his country that Sir Mordred was crowned king in England and made war against King Arthur, his own father, and would stop him landing in his own land (also it was told him how Sir Mordred had laid a siege about the Tower of London, because the queen would not wed him), then was Sir Launcelot wroth out of measure and said to his kinsmen –

LAUNCELOT: Alas! that double traitor Sir Mordred, now me repenteth that ever he escaped my hands, for much shame hath he done unto my lord Arthur. For I feel by this sorrowful letter that Sir Gawain sent me, on whose soul Jesu have mercy, that my lord Arthur is full hard beset. Alas, that ever I should live to hear of that most noble king that made me knight thus to be overset with his subject in his own realm! And this sorrowful letter that my lord

Sir Gawain hath sent me before his death, praying me to see his tomb, surely his sorrowful words shall never go from my heart. For he was a full noble knight as ever was born. And in an unlucky hour was I born that ever I should have that misfortune to slay first Sir Gawain, Sir Gaherys the good knight, and mine own friend Sir Gareth that was a full noble knight. Now, alas, I may say that I am unlucky that ever I should do thus. And yet, alas, I may never have the chance to slay that traitor, Sir Mordred.

BORS: Now leave your complaints, and first revenge you of the death of Sir Gawain, on whose soul Jesu have mercy. And it will be well done that ye see his tomb, and secondly that ye revenge my lord Arthur and my lady queen Guenevere.

LAUNCELOT: I thank you, Sir Bors, for ever ye will my honour.

MALORY: Then they made them ready in all haste that might be, with ships and galleys, with him and his host to pass into England. And so at the last he came to Dover, and there he landed with seven kings, and the number was terrible to behold.

Then Sir Launcelot asked of men of Dover where was the king become. And anon the people told him how he was slain and Sir Mordred too, with an hundred thousand that died upon a day; and how Sir Mordred gave King Arthur the first battle there at his landing, and there was Sir Gawain slain. And how upon the next day Sir Mordred fought with the king on Barham Down, and there the king put Sir Mordred to the wars.

LAUNCELOT: Alas, this is the heaviest tidings that ever came to my heart. Now, fair sirs, show me the tomb of Sir Gawain.

MUSIC #2: *BG FROM (X) BELOW TO (Y)*

MALORY:

And anon he was brought into the castle of Dover, and so they showed him the tomb. Then Sir Launcelot kneeled down by the tomb and wept, and prayed heartily for his soul. (X) And that night he commanded that a dole be given, and all that would from the town or from the country they had as much flesh and fish and wine and ale, and to every man and woman he dealt twelve pence, come whoso would. Thus with his own hand dealt he this money, in a mourning gown; and ever he wept bitterly and prayed the people to pray for the soul of Sir Gawain.

And on the morn all the priests and clerks that might be gotten in the country and in the town were there, and sang masses of Requiem. And there Sir Launcelot made offering, and he offered an hundred pound, and then the seven kings offered, and every one of them offered forty pound. Also there was a thousand knights, and every one of them offered a pound; and the offering went on from the morn to night.

And there Sir Launcelot lay two nights upon his tomb, in prayers and sorrowful weeping. (Y) Then, on the third day, Sir Launcelot called the kings, dukes, and earls, with the barons and all his noble knights, and said thus:

LAUNCELOT:

My fair lords, I thank you all of your coming into this country with me. But we are come too late, and that shall repent me while I live, but against death may no man rebel. But since it is so, I will myself ride and seek my lady, queen Guenevere. For as I hear say, she hath had great pain and much distress, and I hear say that she is fled into the West. And therefore ye all shall abide me here, and unless I come again within these fifteen days, take your ships and your fellowship and depart into your country, for I will do as I tell you.

BORS: My lord, Sir Launcelot, what think ye for to do, now for to ride in this realm? You know well ye shall find here few friends.

LAUNCELOT: Be as be may, keep you still here, for I will further on my journey, and no man nor child shall go with me.

MALORY: So it was no boot to argue, but he departed and rode westerly; and there he sought seven or eight days. And at the last he came to a nunnery, and anon queen Guenevere was aware of Sir Launcelot as she walked in the cloister. And anon as she saw him there, she swooned thrice, that all ladies and gentlewomen had work enough to hold the queen from the earth. So when she might speak she called her ladies and gentlewomen, and then she said thus:

GUENEVERE: Ye marvel, fair ladies, why I make this fare. Truly, it is for the sight of yonder knight that yonder standeth. Wherefore I pray you call him hither to me.

MALORY: Then Sir Launcelot was brought before her; and the queen said to all those ladies –

GUENEVERE: Through this same man and me hath all this war been wrought, and the death of the most noblest knights of the world; for through our love that we have loved together is my most noble lord slain. Therefore, Sir Launcelot, indeed I am set in such a plight to get my soul healed. And yet I trust, through God's grace and through His Passion of His wide wounds, that after my death I may have a sight of the blessed face of Christ Jesu, and on Doomsday to sit on His right side; for as sinful as ever I was, now are saints in heaven. And therefore, Sir Launcelot, I require thee and beseech thee heartily, for all the love that ever was betwixt us, that thou never see me no more face to face. And I command thee, on God's behalf,

that thou forsake my company. And to thy kingdom look thou turn again, and keep well thy realm from war and wrack, for as well as I have loved thee heretofore, mine heart will not serve now to see thee; for through thee and me is the flower of kings and knights destroyed. And therefore go thou to thy realm, and there take ye a wife, and live with her with joy and bliss. And I pray thee heartily to pray for me to the Everlasting Lord that I may amend my misliving.

LAUNCELOT: Now, my sweet madame, would ye that I should turn again unto my country and there to wed a lady? Nay, madame, that shall I never do, for I shall never be so false unto you of that I have promised. But the self same destiny that ye have taken you to, I will take me to, for the pleasure of Jesu, and ever for you I cast me specially to pray.

GUENEVERE: Ah, Sir Launcelot, if ye will do so and hold thy promise! But I may never believe you, but that ye will turn to the world again.

LAUNCELOT: Well, madame, ye say as it pleaseth you, but yet ye knew me never false of my promise. And God defend but that I should forsake the world as ye have done. For in the quest of the Sankgreall I had that time forsaken the vanities of the world, had not your love been. And if I had done so at that time with my heart, will, and thought, I had passed all the knights that ever were in the Sankgreall, except Sir Galahad, my son. And therefore, lady, since ye have taken you to perfection, I must needs take me to perfection, of right. For I take record of God, in you I have had mine earthly joy, and if I had found you now so disposed, I had cast me to have had you into mine own realm. But since I find you thus disposed, I ensure you faithfully, I will ever take me to penance and pray while my life lasteth, if that I may find any hermit, either grey or white, that will receive me. Wherefore, madame, I pray you kiss me, and never no more.

GUENEVERE: Nay, that shall I never do, but abstain you from such works.

MALORY: And they departed; but there was never so hard an hearted man but he would have wept to see the grief that they made, for there was lamentation as they had been stung with spears, and many times they swooned. And the ladies bare the queen to her chamber.

And Sir Launcelot awoke, and went and took his horse, and rode all that day and all night in a forest, weeping. And at last he was aware of an hermitage and a chapel stood betwixt two cliffs, and then he heard a little bell ring to mass. And thither he rode and alighted, and tied his horse to the gate, and heard mass.

And he that sang mass was the Bishop of Canterbury. Both the Bishop and Sir Bedevere knew Sir Launcelot, and they spoke together after mass. But when Sir Bedevere had told his tale all whole, Sir Launcelot's heart almost broke for sorrow, and Sir Launcelot flung wide his arms, and said –

LAUNCELOT: Alas! Who may trust this world?

MALORY: And then he kneeled down on his knee and prayed the Bishop to shrieve him and assoil him; and then he besought the Bishop that he might be his brother. Then the Bishop granted this gladly, and there he put an habit upon Sir Launcelot. And there he served God day and night with prayers and fastings.

MUSIC #3: BRIDGE

MALORY: Thus the great host abode at Dover. And then Sir Lionel took fifteen lords with him and rode to London to seek Sir Launcelot; and there Sir Lionel was slain and many of his lords. Then Sir Bors de Ganys made the great

host for to go home again, and Sir Bors, Sir Hector de Maris, Sir Blamour, Sir Bleobaris, with more other of Sir Launcelot's kin, took on them to ride all England overthwart and endlong to seek Sir Launcelot.

So Sir Bors by fortune rode so long till he came to the same chapel where Sir Launcelot was. And so Sir Bors heard a little bell tolling that rang to mass, and there he alighted and heard mass. And when mass was done, the Bishop, Sir Launcelot, and Sir Bedevere came to Sir Bors, and when Sir Bors saw Sir Launcelot in that manner of clothing, then he prayed the Bishop that he might be in the same suit. And so there was an habit put upon him, and there he lived in prayers and fasting.

And within half a year there was come seven other noble knights, and they likewise abode there in silence. For when they say Sir Launcelot had taken him to such perfection they had no wish to depart but took such an habit as he had.

Thus they endured in great penance six years. And then Sir Launcelot took the habit of priesthood of the Bishop, and a twelvemonth he sang mass. And there was none of these other knights but they read in books and helped for to sing mass, and rang bells, and did lowly all manner of service. And so their horses went where they would, for they took no regard of no worldly riches; for when they saw Sir Launcelot endure such penance in prayers and fastings they took no force what pain they endured, for to see the noblest knight of the world take such abstinence that he waxed full lean.

And thus upon a night there came a vision to Sir Launcelot and charged him, in remission of his sins, to haste him unto Amesbury: and (said the vision) "When thou come there, thou shalt find queen Guenevere dead. And therefore take thy fellows with thee, and purvey them of an horse-

bier, and fetch thou the corpse of her, and bury her by her husband the noble King Arthur.”

So this vision came to Launcelot thrice in one night. Then Sir Launcelot rose up ere day and told the hermit –

BISHOP: It were well done that ye make you ready and that ye disobey not the vision.

MALORY: Then Sir Launcelot took his eight fellows with him, and on foot they went from Glastonbury to Amesbury, the which is little more than thirty mile, and thither they came within two days, for they were weak and feeble to go.

And when Sir Launcelot was come to Amesbury within the nunnery, queen Guenevere died but half an hour before. And the ladies told Sir Launcelot that queen Guenevere told them all ere she passed that Sir Launcelot had been priest near a twelve-month –

GUENEVERE: – and hither he cometh as fast as he may to fetch my corpse, and beside my lord king Arthur he shall bury me. (*PAUSE*) And I beseech Almighty God that I may never have power to see Sir Launcelot with my worldly eyes.

MALORY: And this, said all the ladies, was ever her prayer those two days till she was dead.

Then Sir Launcelot saw her face, but he wept not greatly, but sighed. And so he did all the observance of the service himself, both the service for the dead and on the morn he sang mass. And there was prepared an horse-bier, and so with an hundred torches ever burning about the corpse of the queen

Sir Launcelot with his eight fellows went ever beside the horse-bier, singing and reading many an holy orison, and frankincense upon the corpse incensed.

Thus Sir Launcelot and his eight fellows went on foot from Amesbury unto Glastonbury and when they were come to the chapel and the hermitage, there she had a service for the dead with great devotion. And on the morn the hermit that sometime was Bishop of Canterbury sang the mass of Requiem with great devotion, and Sir Launcelot was the first that gave offering, and then all his eight fellows. And then she was wrapped in cere-cloth of Rennes, from the top to the toe, in thirtyfold; and after she was put in a sheet of lead, and then in a coffin of marble.

And when she was put in the earth Sir Launcelot swooned, and lay long still, till the hermit came and awaked him, and said –

BISHOP: Ye be to blame, for ye displease God with such manner of sorrow-making.

LAUNCELOT: Truly, I trust I do not displease God, for He knoweth mine intent: for my sorrow was not, nor is not, for any rejoicing of sin, but my sorrow may never have end. For when I remember of her beauty and of her noblesse, that was both with her king and with her, so when I saw his corpse and her corpse so lie together, truly mine heart would not serve to sustain my care-worn body. Also when I remember me how by my fault and my haughtiness and my pride that they were both laid full low, that were peerless that ever was living of Christian people, this remembered of their kindness and mine unkindness sank so to mine heart that I might not sustain myself.

MUSIC #4: BRIDGE

MALORY: Then Sir Launcelot never after ate but little meat, nor drank, till he was dead, for then he sickened more and more and pined and wasted away. For the Bishop nor none of his fellows might not make him to eat and little he drank, that he was grown by a cubit shorter than he was, that the people could not know him. For evermore, day and night, he prayed, but sometime he slumbered a broken sleep. Ever he was lying prostrate on the tomb of King Arthur and Queen Guenevere, and there was no comfort that the Bishop, nor Sir Bors, nor none of his fellows could make him, it availed not.

So within six weeks after, Sir Launcelot fell sick and lay in his bed. And then he sent for the Bishop that there was hermit, and all his true fellows.

LAUNCELOT: (IN A DREARY VOICE) Sir Bishop, I pray you give to me all my rights that belongeth to a Christian man.

BISHOP: It shall not need you. It is but heaviness of your blood. Ye shall be well mended by the grace of God tomorrow.

LAUNCELOT: My fair lords, you know well my care-worn body will into the earth, I have warning more than now I will say. Therefore give me my rights.

MALORY: So when he was shriven and anointed and had all that a Christian man ought to have, he prayed the Bishop that his fellows might bear his body to Joyous Garde.

LAUNCELOT: Howbeit, me repenteth sore, but I made my vow sometime that in Joyous Garde I would be buried. And because of breaking my vow, I pray you all, lead me thither.

MALORY: Then there was weeping and wringing of hands among his fellows.

So at a season of the night they all went to their beds, for they all lay in one chamber. And so after midnight, against day, the Bishop that was hermit, as he lay in his bed asleep, he fell upon a great laughter. And therewith all the fellowship awoke and came to the Bishop and asked him what he ailed.

BISHOP: Ah, Jesu mercy! Why did ye awake me? I was never in all my life so merry and so well at ease.

BORS: Wherefore?

BISHOP: Truly, here was Sir Launcelot with me, with more angels than ever I saw men in one day. And I saw the angels heave up Sir Launcelot into heaven, and the gates of heaven opened against him.

BORS: It is but fantasy of dreams; for I doubt not Sir Launcelot aileth nothing but good.

BISHOP: It may well be. Go ye to his bed, and then shall ye learn the truth.

MALORY: So when Sir Bors and his fellows came to his bed they found him stark dead; and he lay as if he had smiled, and the sweetest savour was about him that ever they knew. Then was there weeping and wringing of hands, and the greatest grief they made that ever made men.

MUSIC #5: EST AND TO BG

MALORY: And on the morrow the Bishop did his mass of Requiem, and afterwards the Bishop and all the nine knights put Sir Launcelot in the same horse-bier that Queen Guenevere was laid in before that she was buried. And so

the Bishop and they all together went with the body of Sir Launcelot daily, till they came to Joyous Garde; and ever they had an hundred torches burning about him. And so within fifteen days they came to Joyous Garde. And there they laid his corpse in the body of the choir, and sang and read many psalms and prayers over him and about him. And ever his face was laid open and naked, that all folk might behold him; for such was the custom in those days that all men of honour should so lie with open face till that they were buried.

MUSIC #5:

TO END AND OUT

MALORY:

And right thus as they were at their service, there came Sir Hector de Maris that had seven year sought all England, Scotland and Wales, seeking his brother Sir Launcelot. And when Sir Hector heard such noise and light in the choir of Joyous Garde, he alighted and put his horse from him and came into the choir. And there he saw men sing and weep, and all they knew Sir Hector, but he knew not them.

Then went Sir Bors unto Sir Hector and told him how there lay his brother, Sir Launcelot, dead. And then Sir Hector threw his shield, sword and helm from him, and when he beheld Sir Launcelot's face he fell down in a swoon. And when he waked it were hard for any tongue to tell the sorrowful complaints that he made for his brother.

HECTOR:

Ah, Launcelot! Thou were head of all Christian knights. And now I dare say thou Sir Launcelot, there thou liest, that thou were never matched of earthly knight's hand.

And thou were the most courteous knight that ever bare shield.
And thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrode horse,

And thou were the truest lover, of all sinful men, that ever loved
woman,
And thou were the kindest man that ever struck with sword.
And thou were the goodliest person that ever came among press of
knights,
And thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall
among ladies,
And thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear
in the rest.

MALORY: Then there was weeping and grieving out of measure.

Thus they kept Sir Launcelot's corpse aloft fifteen days, and then they buried it with great devotion. And then at leisure they went all with the Bishop of Canterbury to his hermitage, and there they were together more than a month.

MUSIC #6: EST AND TO BG

MALORY: Then Sir Constantine that was Sir Cadore's son, of Cornwall, was chosen King of England, and he was a full noble knight, and worshipfully he ruled this realm. And then this King Constantine sent for the Bishop of Canterbury, for he heard say where he was. And so he was restored unto his bishopric and left that hermitage, and Sir Bedevere was there ever still hermit to his life's end.

Then Sir Bors de Ganys, and all the other eight knights, drew them to their countries. Howbeit King Constantine would have had them with him, but they would not abide in this realm. And there they all lived in their countries as holy men.

And some English books make mention that they went never out of England after the death of Sir Launcelot – but that was but bias of poets. For the French book maketh mention – and is authorised – that Sir Bors, Sir Hector, Sir Blamour, and Sir Bleoberis went into the Holy Land, where Jesu Christ was quick and dead. And as soon as they had settled their lands – for (the book sayeth) so Sir Launcelot commanded them for to do ere ever he passed out of this world – there these four knights did many battles upon the heathen, or Turks. And there they died upon a Good Friday for God’s sake.

MUSIC #6: UP AND OUT

MALORY: Here is the end of the whole book of King Arthur and of his noble knights of the Round Table, that when they were wholly together there was ever an hundred and forty. And I pray you all gentlemen and gentlewomen that read 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.

MUSIC #7: POSTLUDE

ANNOUNCER:

MUSIC #8: 15TH CENTURY INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC, TO END OF BROADCAST TIME