

The MORTE EARWIG
Where beginneth the First Fitte

Lady, be not wroth, tho'but I dare
With doggerel impinge the filthy air.
Though paltry prose pretends perchance to power
In screeds of Science, yet now is the howre
Of deeper draft, where finer meshes cling.
Know, I a mightier maze intend to sing:
This is no puny plot or 'prentic'd ditty
–For I would sing th'Erection of the City.*

*[Note 1

Utopia! thy walls are newly built.
Utopia! thou'rt garnisht to the hilt.
Utopia! thy streets are pav'd with guilt.
Thy dirty washing soapier, Utopia.

Follow this Highway, Trav'ler! Thou shalt see
A thicker chrome you ever thought could be.
Approach the City on this Carriageway:
These convoluting flyovers convey
Still faster, bigger wains, all fully laden
With goods afar in punier kingdoms traden.
Oh see how they approach from ev'ry side!
This, radios transistorised supplied
But erewhile to the North, and now returns
For forty score of twenty gallon churns
of Supertox Præcox, the golden chemickal
For feeding kids to make 'em academickal.
This, Porko Pills for Instant Sausage freights
To Crawley, where the eager housewife waits.
These, precast concrete beds for plastic grass
That leaves no stain upon the seated arse.
And crates of rubber puppy-dogs in this
Will lick the owners hand but will not piss
Upon the carpet. On these roads are carried
New "Fertil" tablets for the newly married,
Selfcooking meals and roses superscented,

Safe books on Sex for persons under-twentieth,
And creamy sodas pept with extra phizz.
O Trav'ler, view the booming businesses!
For there the mounting theme of Logres is.

Yet pause awhile: smelst thou the scented air ?
Effusion of the City! From the fair
Scillonian Isles great founts of perfume rear
Full twenty miles into the Atmosfere:
And wafted o'er the Breadth of this dear Mould
By South-West winds climactickly controul'd.

But yet approach within the City Gates:
A chromium tram at ev'ry corner waits
To ferry you unto your best Desire.
What would your aw'd eyes see ? We shall not tire
Your gaze with such unnecessary flatteries
As here for instance are the bullock Batteries—
(Synthetic liquid feed goes in this hole
And shit and piss from these: and then we roll
The fattened animal into this Slicer,
And lo! the prepackt flesh - what could be nicer ?
We tan the hides against the Citys shoeing
And breed them throatless to prevent them mooing.)
—No, we can show you finer sights than these:
The coffee parlours, where we at our ease
May sit and sip and hark the merry juke.
Or would you to the castle ? there to look
Upon the splendid tow'rs, the verdand Lawn,
The fragrant Grottoes which this place adorn.

The Second Page.

Sit we upon the herb, so closely shorn,
With green beyond the pow'r of Nature tinct.
Fear not the pricking Thistle, 'tis extinct.
Yea, sit we here where silver Thamias rushes:
Look not for fornication in the Bushes:

Our City's pure, my Friend; our Prince's Law
 Forbids the use of close or publick Whore
 Except to Citizens of Sway who're ury,
 As Ministers of Government or Clergy.
 —Ay, Friend, our Prince! Our Lord! the people's Pleasure!
 The Fount and Focus of our Homages! You're
 Dead lucky, my Friend, for I believe—
 Let me consult my score, I'd not deceive
 You—where's the morning's paper—here
 We are: yes, 'tis today he's to appear!
 Our Prince in Person, on the second Tues
 Day of each mon'th, doth generally choose
 To show himself upon the battlements
 To cheer the Loyal, calm the Malcontents
 (If any are - yet none of that) and then
 A minute after he goes in again.
 A gen'rous Prince! You'll see it in his face:
 Which (tho' a little crookt) betrays a Grace
 Surpassing, and the Crowd, and you, and I
 Will love him, as he holds us with his Eye!
 —But what's the Time?—Good Dog!* it's half past three— *[Note 2
 'Tis any moment now that you will see
 The pride of all our Nations Yeomanry!
 —And there he is! O fine young Prince! O Lord!
 By all our tendent Provinces ador'd!
 O gentle Sovrin, happy, royal Lad!
 O gracious, gallant, glorious GALAHAD.'

There endeth the first Fitte.

The Second Fitte.

Guide me sweet Girl, which to bemoan the more—
 Or international or Civil War ?
 Must I run thwart the old poetic grain ?
 Which states (and must I state it once again ?
 Or must I spurn the tried Poetic Fadge ?) ec
 Statically that Civil War is tragick

While forrin wars are sometimes rather bad.
A civil war was it rais'd GALAHAD ?
Or forrin ? "Ah (the Reader) was it either?"
(Cries): yea, it was both, and yet was neither.
But to the motion: while domestick Strife
Is most unwholesome, causing loss of Life,
Burning of Crops, and deaths of gentle Cows,
And often springs without nor whys nor hows—
Tho' civil War is most atrocious Evil,
'Tis but a machination of the Devil,
Unpleasant, but in no way very odd.
But forrin quarrels are the work of God;
Who, when he's good, is not too bad, but can
When bad be horrid. Brief, there's many' a man
With strife quite naturally in his heart,
And hence flow poetry, and song, and Art
(My soul's at peace): but Friction between Men
Cries to the hills the cruelty of when-
He's-Horrid God. Within the fam'ly, strife
Is just another Dev'lish cut of Life,
But progress: that with neighbours neighbours brawl—
This is no work of Lucifer at all!

Arthur warred Rome, and God. *And Arthur got
Mordred upon his flesh, the wife of Lot,
The King of Orkney, Arthur's cuckold brother-
In-law. And one thing leads to another.

*[Note 4

The third page.

But Arthur's crime abroad, and this alone,
Fired Mordred, Arthur's one mistake at home.

Launcelot mused: he heard the Vespers Bell,
But he mused on. He saw where Gawain fell
The second time: he knew the wound hid own:*
Saw Mordred fall, and Arthur stand alone—
Then falter, fall— And so the Prolog's done,

*[Note 5

*[Note 6

And I have nearly reacht where I begun.

Launce listened listless to September speaking
And brother Thomases Lawnmower creaking,
The Cloister's combin'd Harvester at work
Chopping the pamper'd wheat behind the Kirk,
Last of the finest crop they'd ever had,
Begolden'd by the smile of Galahad.

"O gentle Son,* O smiling Prince, the one
Good piece of work I've even been and done:
The storm and sorrow of that evil day
Thy fragrant Reign has throughly washt away!"

*[Note 7

But oh what sad reply was this oppress'd him ?
What tragick whisper ? Gath'ring fear possess'd him:
An Earrwig from the Mantelpiece address'd him:

O Launce, where wast thou that unhappy day ?
Hark, man—my voice is feeble—faint I—say
Where wast thou when the web of all our fey
Fortunes split ? Ill fit such absence. Wit
You well that ev'ry one shall suffer yit
For thou wast thence: e'en now I suffer it,
And many of my kin have died the Death
That even now my vitals menaceth!
(He coughed a ghastly cough; and lo! his breath
Weft on the air as fog: yet faintly seen
Launce saw the vapour gleam a dirty green.)
O Knight, an horrid Death! An hadst thou been
Not from there, had good Arthur not lain pale
Upon the Sward. The power of the Grail
Knew Arthur: but that knowledge no avail
As lee to such as we, his gentle brothers:
For Arthur's wisdom gone, so to anothers
Sway the Grail inevitably crept.

The insect coughed again, and coughing wept
For Láuncelót, Lógres, and Earwigs all;

And Launcelot wept too, to see what pall
Of greenish, vap'rous breath hung like a Shroud
About the Insect: for approaching Death
Approacht a-pace; and with its dying breath
It lifted up its voice and cried aloud:
Consider, Launce, which was not on that sad
Grey day to hand: and where was GALAHAD ?

The second Fitte endeth. A note: on the eighth line from the bottom of the Page: the Author prefers the Pronunciation Loagriz: but those who would say Loars may read "for Logres", that the line scan: and haply better at that.

Here the Third Fitte.

Lady, one more, and then my song is ended.
Your help, now, from the Pit that I've descended.

Viscous in the Grail glistened the Prime Tox.
And Galahad beheld it, and he wox
Exultant, and the high harmonick Lore
Of Logres blaz'd across th'unwritten Score.

And he, a Virgin still at thirty-four,
The one such man that Logres ever had
To show, the holy Bastard Galahad,
The chief achievement of our chosen race
Achiev'd, the cherisht Grail, supremest Grace
Of Heav'n-sprung Science; Lifting to his lips
The lep'rous liquid, holy Relique, sips
He, smacks; then smiles a certain smile, and drains
The brew's dregs; and the Pow'r mounts to his Brains,
Taughtens his body, and his chest expands.
I am! he cries: I GALAHAD! His hands
Clench with the new-found Force; his crystal eyes
Blaze in the narrow Shrine.

—But then he shies
A little back, and eyes the Grail, because

Lo! how it stands brimful as ever was;
And then a growing joy—he drinks again
Deep draughts; he gulps the golden Brew a-main,
He goes and pours the liquid down the drain—
And crows as Triumph blisters in his Brain!
For still it wells up to the Brim again!
Vision of Empire! The Logresian Theme
Soared: oh feed from what translucent Stream
Pours from my Cup of Plenty; Fortune, grant
But this: an empty throne in Troynovant!

Galahad ruled in Logres. For beblist
At finding such a Knight as haply mist
The Last Assault, the people of Lud's Town
Ador'd; and to the Grail he added Crown.
Lord of the Grail: for only he was fit
To raise the City,* and encompass It.
And doubly fit, for both a Virgin he,
And learned in Organick Chymistry—
He spans the Tox: he plunbs the Primal Pow'r,
With chosen Scientists leagu'd, sets to explore
The great Potential. Let the hammers ring!
Let tunnel Mountains, bridge the Rivers! Sing
Ye pulsing Engines of what Harvesting!
Thou, Nature, art no Goddess to the King.

*[Note 1

A subtle Syncrotrope they first concox
By brilliant blending of the Primal Tox;
The formula a maze of Ciphery
A deal too cryptick for the Likes of me.
They cool it, glist'ning in a glass Retort,
Naming it *Supertox Ferox*, for short.
The feed it feelingly to Brussel Sprouts.
Confus'd profusion! See what cluster'd Clouts
Of sprouts cling proudly to the swollen Stalks!
Then the tomatoes: the contoxion baulks
Not, but swells and ripens where'er it walks.
And so they loosed the power upon the land.

And lost the rein. And see, on either hand,
What golden fields of wheat and barley stand!
Aid see the pigeons swarm to pick the grain!
The field-mice bloated with the bounty! Rain
Gold, ye Heavens, consecrate our Bliss!
For this the Golden Age of Logres is!

The Fifth Page

Galahad warm'd to's work. And Toxes spann'd
Of ev'ry Form and Force our happy Land.
One to kill flies: one Catter-pillars slays;
Some raze the weeds along the great Highways;
Some rabbits kill, that eat the City's lettuce,
Or smear the bolt-hole where the gin-trap set is;
Some spray the crannies where the Housewife scrabbles,
And scum the waters where the Eider dabbles.
And pigeons unintended die of Grain—
Yet they were pests, their loss the Cities gain.
And prove—show corpses if (then we'll believe)
You can—that Peregrines no longer cleave
The air: but what if so? For know, the whole
Creation shall, should need (for wanting Soul
What loss?) of us immortal Men dictate,
Perish to maintain our swelling state.
Man is Gods chosen creature, and the Rest,
Fish, Beetle, Fowl, the low, the mindless Beast,
And Weed and Flow'r and Tree and Fungoid vilde
Created but to serve him: know, the Wild
Must cede to Progress: this' Gods Word; and shocks
You? Disbelieve? Consider, who the Tox
Granted to Galahad? Or God, say you?
Or who? Came it bot with the Graïl? Who
But God, first leading Arthur on in Glory
To war with Rome, would grant him such Victóry
As Grief—then Galahad? And so, the City?
Praise we the Lord, who landed us this fitti
Ng Fortune: favour us now fainly free!

For God lives in the Tox; and so do we.

Yet murmur some: and now a deputation
Of Dairy-men affronts the scandal'd Nation:
“No more we put our Milchers out to Grass—
It tends to kill them off; or else (alas)
Their milk turns greenish and their Udders Canker.”
But this soft answer soon allays their anger:
“Give them instead this Toxolactic Feed
By prick Hypódermick: they only need
It once a week. It's quick, and cheap at that,
With but a slight decrease in Butterfat.”

Yet toils the Prince for Profit of the Nation:
At last achieves, cementing our Salvation,,
The subtlest subtrope of the Prototox:
Unfaltering, his sensing skill unlocks
The final secret of Pandora's box:
Presents us with the Ultratox ATROX!

Launcelot took the letter, knew the hand.*
He rode to Almysbury through the silent land
As Percival another road had ridden
Once, through such a land.* But then unbidden
The fatal Question rested: until one
Should search it for himself: Launcelot's son.
He wept not greatly when he saw the Queen,
But sighed, Ah Gwyn, and had not our love been,
Then had your Lord been still, and had I not
Lain with your ghost, and so your Murd'rer got.
And then he kissed the cold white fingertips
(Noting the greenish flecking on the lips).

*[Note 8

*[Note 9

Explicit La Morte Earwig .

THE AUTHOR'S OWN GLOSS & COMMENTARY

Being a Selection of explanatory Notices essential to the proper enjoyment of the present Poem.

NOTE 1. The City. Not only refers to London, or Troynovant, but is used also in Charles William's sense or the Achiev'd Commonwealth or Ethickal Utopia - i.e. the Chromium Castle itself is an abstract condition of Toxopia.

NOTE 2. Good Dog. The whole poem, an exercise in the noble art form of Doggerel, is a Lay of the Lord Dog our Father, the true villain of the story: hence the invocation at the beginning of each Fit to the Lady his adversary. In order to avoid unnecessary Quaintness in the text his name has elsewhere been spelt backwards, to throw dust in the eyes of the Holv. See Note 4.

NOTE 3. Fadge. Some editions have "Tradg-", which although giving better sense mars the rhyme. Oxford dictionary gives: "Fadge, a Type, Run, Mode, Mood, Rut or Boghole. Anglo- Saxon feacg, Old Norse fagg, Germ. Pfadge, Frisian feadg From PIE root *pok- . Cf. Latin fucus, a shy intent.

NOTE 4. And God— together with, in company with God (=Dog). Cf. later: "Who /But God, first leading Arthur on in glory/ To war with Rome..." See Note 8. And see Addenda to Note 4, below. Please.

NOTE 5. After the death of Arthur, Launcelot bound himself to the Lord Dog, and became a monk.

NOTE 6. Gawain fell in the Last Battle, according to Malory, after having been hurt afresh on the wound that Launcelot had given him in France.

NOTE 7. O gentle Son. Galahad, the Achiever of the Grail, according to Malory, by reason of his Impeccable Virginity (in spite of his bastardy, which everyone conveniently overlooks), was Launcelot's son by

Elaine (see below).

NOTE 8. According to Malory, on Arthur's death Gwynever also took the veil at the nunnery of Almysbury. On her death Launcelot rode to Almysbury and saw to the burial of his lady, and never mumped crust after but pined away. Malory does not say what Gwynever died of. Launcelot "wept not greatly when he saw her visage, but sighed." (Malory). And Launcelot said to Gwynever, "For in the Quest of the Saint Grail I had at that time forsaken the vanities of this world, had not your love been". So the Winchester MS, but Caxton: "had not your Lord been".

Launcelot got Galahad on Elaine, by enchantment thinking Elaine was Gwynever - and so got Galahad, who finally killed the Queen with the Tox. Elaine was therefore Gwynevers' ghost.

Addenda to note 4. Arthur got Mordred upon his flesh. Mordred was Arthur's son by Morgause Queen of Orkney, Arthur's half-sister and so "his flesh". Lot of Orkney was father of Oawain and his crowd. But now I'm muddling the issue. (Pun)

Apologies for being so explicit but it's my way.

Outside now a very, very high wind, from the East. Its velocity is quite incredible. The sky which was dark and cloudy not long ago has cleared, and cloud-shanes in the south and over the glacier are wierd fingers. Shouldering shades in the skies of Broceliande are rumours in the flesh of Caucasia.

And so again to milk.

NOTE 9, which I overlooked. In Crestian de Troyes Percival rode through a waste land to the grail castle. There he saw the Grail, Dish, Lance and Sword, but failed to ask what they were, thus failing to heal the Fisher King and restore the Waste Land, waste because of the King's wound. Some see Christian myth in this, some Pagan ritual. Elliot saw poetry in it, and I see the Tox.