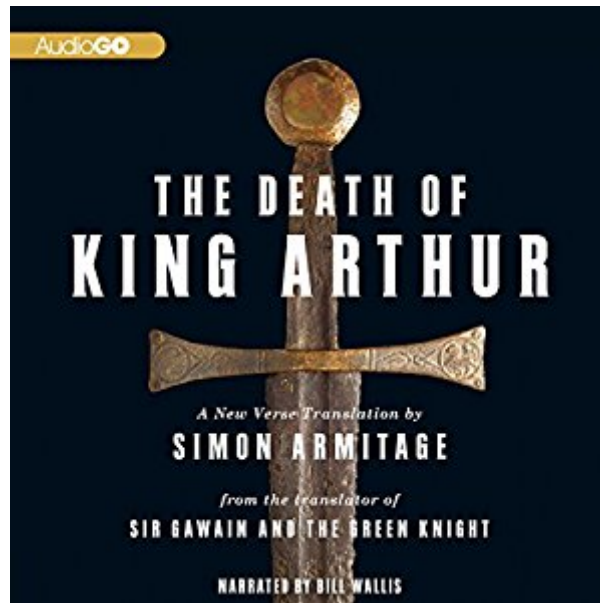




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# The Death Of King Arthur: A New Verse Translation



## Synopsis

First appearing around 1400, *The Alliterative Morte Arthur*, or *The Death of King Arthur*, is one of the most widely beloved and spectacularly alliterative poems ever penned in Middle English. Now, from the internationally acclaimed translator of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, comes this magisterial new presentation of the Arthurian tale, rendered in unflinching and gory detail. Following Arthur's bloody conquests across the cities and fields of Europe, all the way to his spectacular and even bloodier fall, this masterpiece features some of the most spellbinding and poignant passages in English poetry. Never before have the deaths of Arthur's loyal knights, his own final hours, and the subsequent burial been so poignantly evoked. Echoing the lyrical passion that so distinguished Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf*, Simon Armitage has produced a virtuosic new translation that promises to become both the literary event of the year and the definitive edition for generations to come.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 10 hours 18 minutes

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Version: Unabridged

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Language: English

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## Customer Reviews

Seriously a wonderful book! I loved how it was translated. And if you get the audio book from Audible, you'll love the narration as you read! It makes the book come to life!

I've seen different translations of the story of King Arthur and his noble knights, but this one is probably the one that is easiest to follow. Armitage takes this timeless tale and makes it accessible for a new generation of readers.

My husband is a fan of King Aurthur. As an English major he was really happy with this translation

and the page layout with translation on one side and the old language on the other.

The Middle English in this Norton edition generally matches the spelling of Larry Dean Benson's revised transcription for TEAMS Middle English Texts. This is Benson's revision of his own work published by Bobbs-Merrill for the Library of Literature series. User "T. W." has a quite thorough review of the TEAMS revised transcription on that product page. That review is relevant to this product for the shared transcription. My own comment is that Benson's revised transcription for TEAMS is sometimes needlessly or sometimes unhelpfully modernized and deviates from other common transcriptions. This Norton version of Benson's revised Middle English uses diacriticals for no obvious reason with no obvious justification. For instance, the modernized second word of the poem is "great". The common Middle English transcriptions have "grett". Benson's revision has "grete". The Norton version accompanying this Armitage work has "grǣfe" (note the tailed-E or E caudata). For another example, the modernized first word of the third line is "shield" (as a verb, as in "protect"). The common transcriptions have "schelde". Benson has "sheld". Norton has "shǣfe" (note the line over the 'e', known as a macron). This Middle English poem comes from a single source, the Thornton Manuscript. Regarding the first example, the word in the Thornton Manuscript is fairly clearly spelled with the "tt" ending. You can see this from the preview for the international, single-language edition of Armitage's translation published by Faber & Faber. That book contains, and the preview shows, an image of the first page of the poem from the Thornton Manuscript. And, I have also attached an image of a facsimile of the manuscript that may show this more clearly. Regarding the second example, why does Benson modernize this to "sheld" but not all the way to "shield"? And, why does Norton add a diacritical? Although the original Middle English in the Thornton Manuscript is certainly hard to read, the Norton diacriticals seem unjustified. The application of these diacriticals seems to be without accepted method or pattern. Benson's revision and modernization of his own transcription is seemingly for the benefit of a casual Middle English reader that may struggle with a more faithful reproduction of the original Middle English. But, any supposed benefit is undone by Norton decorating the text with such distracting, confusing, and pervasive diacriticals. That there are several scholarly critical editions of the *Alliterative Morte Athure* that do not make any use of these diacriticals confounds their use here, in a Simon Armitage translation meant for the casual or modern reader. The only thing that might make any sense at all would be that the diacriticals are meant as some kind of pronunciation guide. While an entirely phonetic transcription might be an interesting idea, I would think it would warrant a completely new work and not simply be Benson's revised transcription with an overlay of unfamiliar

symbols. I enjoyed Simon Armitage's translation of Sir Gawain, and I may read his version of the Death of King Arthur, but I will read it by checking it out at my local library or by trying to find and purchase the single-language edition from Faber & Faber that does not include Norton's Middle English. I will not buy this version for the issues I have found with the diacritical-laced Middle English. Not because I am an avid reader of Middle English, but because the product as a side-by-side, dual language book is simply inferior. This has nothing to do with the quality and artistry of Simon Armitage. Many sources for the Middle English are available in libraries and online at the Internet Archive, the Hathi Trust Digital Library, and Google Books: 1847, *Morte Arthure: The Alliterative Romance of the Death of King Arthur*, edited by James Orchard Halliwell, Google Book ID nas-AAAAYAAJ1865, *Morte Arthure*, edited by George Gresley Perry, Internet Archive ID mortearthure00perruoft1871, *Morte Arthure*, Perry's edition revised by Edmund Brock, Google Book ID K9UMAQAAMAAJ1900, *Morte Arthure*, edited by Mary Macleod Banks, Google Book ID DQtEAAAAYAAJ1915, *Morte Arthure*, edited by Erik Bjorkman, Internet Archive ID mortearthuremite00bjrk1967, *Morte Arthure*, edited by John Finlayson (extracts) 1976, *The Alliterative Morte Arthure: A Critical Edition*, edited by Valerie Krishna, ISBN 089102039X 1984, *Morte Arthure: A Critical Edition*, edited by Mary Hamel, ISBN 0824094298. For comparison, Benson's revised transcription is available online from the TEAMS Middle English Text website via the University of Rochester. Unfortunately, there is no preview of Norton's Middle English, but in fair use for the purpose of this review, I have uploaded an image of the first paragraph. And, the entire work should be readily available in most libraries for preview.

Among the many sources of the widely known story of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, is the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* (not to be confused with Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*). This particular source, whose authorship back around the year 1400 is lost, is a Middle English alliterative poem. In the Germanic languages poems were alliterative, in which the sound of the first syllable or words or phrases was repeated, rather than rhyming as is often the case in Romance languages. This particular poem tells the story of King Arthur at the height of his power, controlling most of north-western Europe, when an envoy of the Emperor of Rome comes demanding tribute and an affirmation of Arthur's fealty to the Emperor. At this insult, Arthur and his allies raise a mighty army and march off to conquer Rome, sparking a war that includes warriors from across the known world. But, unknown to Arthur, his nephew, Mordred, has seized control of England, and married Queen Guinevere. Retaking his own fair England will cost Arthur much...indeed, it will cost him everything. Overall, I found this to be a very interesting book. The

translator did an excellent job of bringing the poem into modern English, producing a poem that is both alliterative and yet easy to read. I find that very lengthy rhyming poems often begin to grate on my nerves, but the alliteration of this story is noticeable but never irritating or even too heavy. This poem does present a somewhat different Arthur - in this day and age, when we want to find the real Arthur in a small and backward part of Dark Ages Europe, the author of this book presents Arthur as a mighty emperor of world-wide importance. But in spite of that, this Arthur is also tragically flawed, bringing on a great war that benefits no one, least of all him. This is an excellent book, on that you really should read. I recommend it to anyone who thinks that they know King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, and wants to read one of the most interesting old sources.

This new verse translation of the Alliterative Mort d'Arthur is fabulous. The author takes care to reproduce as faithfully as possible the original alliterations. The goods: There is a name index in back. The work is a 'facing' translation so that the reader can check the original. The original is transcribed using Larry D. Benson's 1974 transcription. The reading is delightfully smooth. My only gripes: maps would be a great addition to this work for those unfamiliar (non-scholars) with the locations and 'roads' in post-roman Britain; perhaps a kindle version in the future might provide 'linked' foot/end notes with geographic locations, family tree references and a timeline. Otherwise, this edition is a great contribution for the non-initiated and Arthurian scholar alike.

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