

## Plumes of Knighthood

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# **Plumes of Knighthood**

by [Dragonkeeper14](#)

## Summary

In which we consider how a certain little-known fact about Wild Geese might have influenced the ideals of the Round Table...

Said Jesse: 'Then again, greylag geese do fight single combats, males fighting over females. If T.H. White'd known that, he might've made Arthur learn a different lesson from his stay with the geese'.

'Not so different, Jess. It's true, as White makes Lyo-lyok say, geese don't fight en masse, flock against flock; only, as you say, in single combats, males fighting over females, just like heroes in the epics and romances. If White'd known that, he might've made Arthur notice it and say later to Merlin and Kay and all, when he has them planning the Code of Chivalry and the Order of the Round Table,

*"We should make it a rule that knights should fight only in single combat: one knight against another; each by himself, alone, with no armies of helpless footmen. That will help contain the slaughter. If they kill each other it'll be on their own skill, like heroes in legends, and no-one else will die in the fighting if we can help it. In principle they do that already, in the usual sporting kind of war, except in that they always have the footmen all around to get killed. What we are going to do is remove those auxiliaries and make the nobles do their own dirty work. But it won't be dirty work exactly, because we are going to make it honourable. We will make it the source of honour. There's no honour in killing a footman, let alone hundreds, because a knight is well-trained and better-equipped, so it's easy to kill them anyway. An armed knight could do it in his sleep. But a knight against a knight has to prove himself the better man at fighting, because they have virtually the same equipment and training. And to prove himself still further, he should send back the losers alive, and we shall make it a rule that no-one may break bread at any banquet or festival or gathering until someone's either done it, or else started out on a new adventure. I'll set the example myself; the knights'll keep to it better if they see their king keep to it first".*

*"Bring them back", Kay interjected, "not send them. If he sends them, how can we be sure they'll come? No man like to confess himself, especially humiliated".*

*"We can be sure", said the king, "because they'll be under oath to do it, and any who break that oath can be mocked and fleered at for the rest of their lives. No other knight will stoop so low as to fight them. They'll be left to the footmen, or their challenges ignored, and if they press their challenges anyway we shall bring the whole Order of Chivalry and crush them under the sheer weight of numbers, without the honour of letting them face a champion alone. Meanwhile those who do face a champion and lose will be brought back, or sent back, and it'll be a further mark of the champion's prowess if he can send them and expect them to go where he tells them (here at Caerleon, for example) and tell the truth and nothing but the truth when they arrive. It'll prove he was heroic enough to beat them in single combat, bind them to their word, and see them execute it. Like the Roman fasces, only without condemning them to death".*

*"It's a good plan", said Merlyn, "If you have good men enough to carry it out. And I think I can be confident enough about the future on this occasion to say you shall. Three fifties at a time should be enough; it's a sound traditional number in these parts, and those you're recruiting will find it easy to understand. But you're forgetting the ladies".*

*"The ladies?"*

*“Yes, the ladies. A lot of those false knights you are planning to humiliate are very cruel to ladies. A lot of great families and nearly all the smaller ones have to lock away their wives, sisters, and daughters when a stranger-knight comes along. What’re you going to do about that?”.*

*Arthur said, “I have an idea for that too. You yourself taught me, Merlyn, when ganders have single combats it is nearly always to win the love of a lady goose, but she also can still say No if she doesn't like the winner. We can make that the rule among our knights too: to fight in righteous quarrels only (that is, on behalf of a lady, or at a lady's behest), and never to take anything from the lady afterward, unless she's willing to give it. Does that make sense?”.*

*“It does to me”, said Kay, “but I don't think it'll make sense to the stranger-knights”.*

*“It might”, said the king, “if we make it a point of honour”.*

You get the idea, don't you?'

'Yeah, I get it. But Arthur staying with the geese was before the Round Table only in the later version; in the earlier and original, it was just before Camlann'.

'I know that. I was making things up according to the later version. If I were making it up according to the original, I'd have the older Arthur say to Merlyn, "It's just what I tried to do, with the Order of Chivalry". Does that clear things up?'

'Of course it does'.

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