ABSTRACT

The Repetition, Variation, and Parataxis of Episode Types
in Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*

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Malory scholars have debated for years over the structure of the *Morte d'Arthur*, from arguments over its narrative unity to the ways in which editors attempt to divide it into readable sections. By and large, because the task of structural analysis is overwhelming, they focus on smaller portions of the work by noting the existence of a series of thematic patterns and choosing one to discuss in detail. Bonnie Wheeler's 1993 essay "Romance and Parataxis and Malory" departs from this focus on thematic patterns by concentrating instead on the rhetorical pattern of paratactic episodes that structure Malory's work (110). In this case, parataxis refers to Malory's tendency to place episodes in the *Morte d'Arthur* side by side in no particular order or hierarchy. This absence of narrative hierarchy poses a problem for structural critics, whose goal is to

identify that very hierarchy: how does one identify the narrative hierarchy in a text which purportedly has none?

One answer lies in the rhetorical strategy of *dilatatio* – the multiplication and variation of a text's structural elements. Malory's use of *dilatatio* links his paratactic episodes through the "conjunction" of their repeated and shared narrative structures. In addition, the purpose of *dilatatio* is to heighten the rhetorical effect of a text, and Malory's use of it highlights major thematic patterns throughout his work.

In this dissertation, I explore five cases of *dilatatio* in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* which are linked paratacticly by their narrative structures, and I examine their respective rhetorical effects. Identifying the repeated narrative structures within the *Morte* allows the reader to attempt an answer to the question of how to perform structural analysis on a work that resists hierarchical structure. In addition, my dissertation offers a novel way of reading episodes in Malory's text as a combination of separate rhetorical and thematic patterns while still arguing for the unity of the work. It presents Malory's work as a contradictory text whose ambiguity compels readers to decide for themselves which values to espouse and which ones to eschew.

Repetition, Variation, and Parataxis of Episode Types
in Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*

by

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king arthur


old stone and oak and oaths taken

in blood the way blood really

used to mean something, a holy

horizon reflected by a misty lake

reflecting off of chainmail

and days away from stopping

this island kingdom must be kept

in gods name

—khg

the spontaneous prose store

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Bonnie Wheeler's 1993 essay "Romance and Parataxis and Malory"

observes that Malory uses the rhetorical strategy of parataxis not only on the

usual level of the sentence, but also on the level of the episode (114): one episode

follows another without any indication that there is a causal relationship

between them or that one episode is more important than another, and

interpretation is left to the audience. Wheeler observes that the subsequent

ambiguity results in "paradox which offers explanation only through

multiplication" (110). It is this idea of explanation through multiplication that

serves as the foundation for my own study of Malory's work. Following

Wheeler's example, I combine structural criticism with rhetorical analysis to

show how Malory uses both parataxis and the rhetorical strategy of *dilatatio* – the

repetition and variation of structural elements – to produce sequences of

repeated paratactic episodes that share narrative structures. I argue that readers

can treat these sequences of episodes as their own structural unit in the narrative,

and that by treating them as structural units, and observing the repetition and

variation within their narrative structures, readers can attempt an answer to the

question of how to perform structural analysis on a work that resists hierarchical

structure. In addition, my dissertation offers a novel way of reading episodes in Malory's text as a combination of separate rhetorical and thematic patterns while still arguing for the unity of the work. It presents Malory's work as a contradictory text whose ambiguity compels readers to decide for themselves which values to espouse and which ones to eschew.

*Structural Theory*

In his essay "Introduction to the Structuralist Analysis of Narratives," Roland Barthes claims that the purpose of structural analysis is "to distinguish several levels or instances of description and to place these instances within a hierarchical (integrationary) perspective" (86). He goes on to describe the levels that exist within narrative structures. In his discussion of the smallest level, which he labels "functions" after Vladimir Propp's designation, he identifies distributional functions as units which are linked to other units so that their combination forms a sequence of units (92). For example, one sequence of units might be: 1) a knight encounters another knight, 2) the two knights draw swords and fight, 3) one of the knights is wounded. These actions are linked to each other in sequence and also form a whole unit of completed action. In addition, each of these actions is essential to the overall narrative. If the storyteller were to omit one of these steps, the narrative would be incomplete. The encounter is crucial to the combat (the knights would not fight if they did not encounter one

another), which is in turn necessary for the wounding. In his own work, Barthes concentrates on short narrative sequences such as buying a drink at a bar or answering a telephone. He does, however, allow that narrative sequences can combine to form a larger narrative sequence so that each narrative sequence then "constitutes a new unit, ready to function as a simple term in another, more extensive sequence" (102), although he does not label these larger sequences. For ease of reference, in this study, I call these larger sequences "episodes."

Tzvetan Todorov, in his study *The Poetics of Prose*, calls the relationships between these narrative sequences the "grammar" of the narrative, and he attempts to identify the "syntax" of a narrative by performing a task similar to Barthes': he wants to identify the smallest component part of narrative and then study how the parts are assembled. Todorov labels the smallest narrative structure a "predicate," (roughly equivalent to Barthes' "functions") and a series of related predicates is a "proposition" (219). He further claims that these narrative structures cannot be studied except "in relation to the level hierarchically above it" (219). Todorov's goal in this effort is to "discover the structures and conventions of literary discourse which enable them to have the meanings they do" (8).

In the words of Evelyn Birge Vitz, Todorov's theory also attempts to "account, in part, for the satisfactions provided by the literary text" (151). In

other words, Todorov's theory equates structure with aesthetics, which he relates

to the reader's ability to recognize patterns within the text. He states that "the

task of reading begins by comparison, by the discovery of resemblance"

(Todorov 241). In the course of reading, readers begin to recognize narrative

patterns – based on their previous readings of other similar texts, or as I argue in

Malory's case, on patterns that are repeated within the same text – which set

their expectations for the narrative trajectory. Satisfaction is achieved when the

pattern is completed and narrative expectations are fulfilled.

Todorov's quest for aesthetic understanding is also undertaken by Hans

Robert Jauss, who postulates that recognition of genre conventions sets reader

expectations:

> Even where a verbal creation negates or surpasses all expectations,
> it still presupposes preliminary information and a trajectory of
> expectations [*Erwartungsrichtung*] against which to register the
> originality and novelty…To this extent, every work belongs to a
> genre – whereby I mean neither more nor less than that for each
> work a preconstituted horizon of expectations must be ready at
> hand…to orient the reader's (public's) understanding and to enable
> a qualifying reception. (79)

For Jauss, aesthetics is intertwined with readers' past experience with similar

texts and with genre convention, although he agrees with Italian philosopher

Benedetto Croce's assessment that "every true work of art has violated an

established genre" (78). Slavishness to genre conventions destroys aesthetic

principles just as completely as defying them altogether. At the same time,

however, Jauss claims that genre is impossible to define, as are the conventions which comprise them (76-109).

Modern scholars have taken issue with both Jauss and Todorov. K. S. Whetter claims that genre can and should be defined in order to achieve a better understanding and enjoyment of medieval texts (*Understanding Genre* 18). He notes in particular that the genre of Malory's work is notoriously hard to pin down because of Malory's tendency to blend genres (100). For another example, as Vitz has observed in her study of the *lais* of Marie de France, Todorov's theories assume familiarity with narrative:

> Todorov is trying to identify the basic structures of texts, structures that not only make all *récits* profoundly similar, but which provide (these structures) for the reader the experience of recognition – of the conformity of a text to some internal pattern or model…It is probably safe to assume that all narrative works – at least those whose purpose is primarily to delight, and not to inform or teach – do give us, at least at some point in our experience of them, and at least to some degree – this experience of intelligibility. They fit themselves into a grid that we have ready in our mind. (151)

Part of her criticism of Todorov's theory is that many texts – including the *lais* – are not intelligible until after they have been read. Todorov assumes that during the process of reading, readers will recognize a narrative pattern, and set their expectations according to their past experiences with that narrative pattern, but what if the narrative does not follow the expected pattern?

Vitz points out that Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which Todorov uses as his sample text, "operates within a single and consistent moral framework" in which causality and result are well-defined and predictable (162). The *lais*, however, are not governed by a single perception of morality; in one *lai*, for example, adultery is completely justified, while in another it is harshly condemned. I argue that the same variance of perception exists in the *Morte*. The actions of a knight in one episode are praised, and similar actions in another episode are condemned. Further, because of the paratactic principles at work, there are few, if any, causal links between events, and one episode is not explicitly privileged over another. As Wheeler succinctly puts it, "Syntax alone acts to enforce a code of indeterminacy" (111). Instead of prescribing a moral, Malory instead uses *dilatatio*: he repeats episode types, with variation within those episode types, and he leaves the act of interpretation to his audience.

Vitz's assertion that, due to their narrative unpredictability, some texts are only intelligible after they have been read (and sometimes, she admits, not even then), is echoed by several other scholars. Carol Fewster takes a position in between Todorov and Vitz when she claims that readers' recognition of narrative patterns during the process of reading "are an evocation of prior expectations of narrative structures, learned from earlier narratives – however, evoked expectations as to structure need not be fulfilled" (20). Like Todorov, Fewster

claims that readers begin to recognize patterns during the course of reading, and their past experience with similar narratives sets their expectations. Like Vitz, however, she also acknowledges that texts can surprise, and narrative patterns are not always followed. This element of surprise, however, does not ruin the aesthetic of the text, but rather enhances its artistry (20).[1] Wheeler claims that readers of Malory "first experience the text as random and undirected, and some make private attempts to close textual gaps retrospectively" (113).

Barthes, however, criticizes the concept of retroactive comprehension. He claims that "plural" reading – reading that produces more than one set interpretation – involves "rereading," even when a reader is reading a text for the first time:

> [rereading] contests the claim which would have us believe that the first reading is a primary, native phenomenal reading which we will only, afterwards, have to 'explicate,' to intellectualize (as if there were a beginning of reading, as if everything were not already read: there is no *first* reading, even if the text is concerned to give us that illusion…) (*S/Z* 16)

He explains that a reader's past reading experiences make this initial rereading possible by bringing "a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost)" (10). Although readers may not remember where they have read similar texts, or even *that* they have ever read similar texts, they carry their past reading experiences with them into "new"

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[1] Jauss agrees with this assessment (78).

ones, and create "a plural text: the same and new" (16). In this concept, his view is not very different from Todorov's or from Jauss'.

He does differ, however, in his assessment of the structuralist goal. He decries Todorov's quest for a universal narrative structure as "a task as exhausting (ninety-nine percent perspiration, as the saying goes) as it is ultimately undesirable, for the text thereby loses its difference" (3). Barthes claims that the goal of literature is "to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (4). The very acts of reading and interpreting "rewrite" the text every time it is read and produce the "plural" text which Barthes asserts as the ideal.

*Malory and Structural Theory*

Malory's propensity for ambiguity coincides with Barthes' insistence on "plural" reading and the reader as producer of text. At the same time, the use of parataxis which creates this ambiguity also strips the text of its structural hierarchy. Barthes acknowledges that episodic narratives – a category into which the *Morte* fits quite well – function differently from modern novels in that there is little sequential relationship between the episodes ("Introduction to Structuralist Analysis" 104). Therefore, the link that connects the episodes to one another is often the presence of certain characters, or "actants" as Barthes calls them. Barthes, I think, meant certain specific named characters, like James Bond, for

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example, or Sherlock Holmes, whose names evoke a certain kind of story. The link between *Dr. No* and *Skyfall* is the presence of British superspy James Bond. Equally, the link between "A Study in Scarlet" and "His Last Bow" is the detective Sherlock Holmes. The presence of Bond or of Holmes suggests a certain atmosphere and generates a set of audience expectations based on the character rather than on the generic conventions which would normally govern the narrative structure (although these particular characters also evoke specific genre expectations).

This is certainly also the case in Malory's work. There are certain knights whose presence in an episode generate specific expectations: Lancelot is the proverbial knight in shining armor who represents the best the Round Table has to offer while the Orkney brothers (with the exception of Gareth) will most likely cause mischief and strife. There are many more episodes, however, which do not require the presence of a specific knight and seem to serve a different narrative function. In these cases, it matters very little which knight is the star of the episode. On the contrary, the episode itself is the important factor. These "generic" episodes are Arthurian in nature, evoking the name of Arthur and the zeitgeist of Arthurian literature. The actants in these episodes function more on the level of Vladimir Propp's *dramatis personae* in that they perform a task which is essential to the story. For example, in the quest in which damsels accompany

Marhaus, Uwaine, and Gawain on their adventures, it matters little which

knights participate in the quests (although it does contribute to Gawain's ignoble

characterization). The three knights could very well have been Sagramour le

Desirous, Dodinas le Sauvage, and Aggravaine rather than the three who appear

in the text.

It is admittedly in some cases the actants who determine which of these

generic episodes serve as what Barthes calls "cardinal functions" or "hinges in

the narrative" in Malory's Arthurian epic. For example, when Aggravaine and

Mordred trap Lancelot in the queen's room, it could be interpreted as a "hinge in

the narrative." The entrapment results in the queen's arrest and Lancelot's exile.

The queen's subsequent trial and execution cause Lancelot to rescue her and

accidentally kill Gawain's brother Gareth. Gawain's subsequent vengeance opens

the door for Mordred's treachery, which leads to Arthur's death (although both

Wheeler and Barthes would declare this causal interpretation of events as

produced by the reader, not by the text).[2] When Tristram commits adultery with

Isode, the effects of that adultery do not reach beyond the limits of their own

narrative episode (except to serve as narrative "code" which the reader can use

to interpret other narrative events). The *dilatatio* of the episode type not only

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[2] Wheeler claims that, in Malory's work, "hypotactic understanding, if achieved, is an imposition of the reader's preferences and choices" (113-114).

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serves to reinforce Malory's use of parataxis, but also to enhance the rhetorical effects of the repeated episodes.

An important point to make here is that the order in which episodes appear within the text does not matter as much as the relationships between the episodes. In Barthes' conception of "plural reading," he claims that there are "a thousand entrances" which can give readers access to the text (*S/Z* 12). Todorov also states that "the apparent order is not the only one, and our task will be to make evident *all* orders of the text and to specify their interrelations" (241). The essential factor in this analysis is the recognition of a repeated narrative pattern, not reading the episodes in order. The relationship between the episodes formed by their shared narrative elements exists apart from their chronology.

Another example of Malory's use of *dilatatio* comes with his use of the "Fair Unknown" episode type, which appears no fewer than five times throughout his work.[3] While these episodes are structurally similar, they all contain different actants performing the various functions and they do not follow the exact same narrative patterns. There is variation among them, and it is this variation which allows for an interpretation of their meaning. The idea that a man's birthright and his outward appearance may not reflect his inner worth is

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[3] For a detailed discussion of this episode type and its rhetorical effects in Malory, see Hanks, D. Thomas, Jr. "The Rhetoric of the Folk Fairy Tale in Sir Thomas Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth.*" *Arthuriana* 13.3 (Fall 2003): 52-67.

an important theme throughout the *Morte*, and the repetition of this episode-type

reinforces that lesson. Of course, the sense of discomfort that comes with

believing a mere commoner may achieve the same heights as a noble is always

alleviated by the end of the story as the Fair Unknown is revealed to have come

from noble stock, after all: Tor is King Pellinore's illegitimate son, Gareth is King

Lot's son, etc., etc. In no case does a commoner ever actually prove himself equal

to a knight. The opposite case, however, occurs several times as well. The Orkney

brothers, all noblemen and knights, do not all act nobly like their brother Gareth.

Aggravaine and Aglovale, sometimes Gawain and Gaheris, and especially

Mordred are often characterized as ignoble in spite of their noble lineage. This

variation among the episodes and actants allows Malory to investigate multiple

possibilities within the same scenario. Because the episodes are paratactic, the

outcomes of these variations are not placed within a narrative hierarchy, and the

resulting ambiguity forces readers to judge for themselves which outcome is the

best one.

In this study, I have chosen five episode types which are engaged in both

parataxis and *dilatatio*: the "Knight with Two Swords," the "Body in a Boat," the

"Deathbed Attendant," the "Seduction of Lancelot," and the "Wild Man."

Chapter Two discusses the three "Knight with Two Swords" episodes which

appear in the *Morte d'Arthur*. Using Helmut Nickel's analysis of the episode type,

I identify and examine the six narrative elements which bind the three Malorian episodes together. I also argue that the *dilatatio* of the episodes sets up a narrative progression that establishes Arthur's Round Table as an ideal, albeit flawed, chivalric community. Continuing with the idea of a narrative progression, Chapter Three argues that a paratactic series of four "Body in a Boat" episodes culminates in the iconic scene of Arthur's death. Furthermore, a blend of elements from the romance and hagiography genres within the episodes reinforces the importance of Christianity within the *Morte*. Chapter Four maintains the theme of Christian death by examining three deathbed scenes in the *Morte*. I use the fifteenth-century *ars moriendi* tradition and the ideals of Arthurian fellowship as the structural foundation for these episodes which demonstrate that Arthurian fellowship is important not only in times of celebration and revelry, but also in times of struggle and strife. In addition, the ability of the knights (and Merlin, in this case, as well) to perform well the duties of a deathbed attendant reflects the overall quality of their knightly fellowship. Chapter Five focuses on a series of six episodes in which women attempt – with varying degrees of success – to seduce Lancelot. Their seduction attempts follow the same basic structural pattern, with one exception, and I argue that this exception ought to be the event that breaks the narrative cycle. Lancelot, however, does not alter his own behavior, and this refusal to change reveals the

sinfulness of his love for Queen Guinevere. Finally, in Chapter Six, I consider the two "Wild Man" episodes involving Lancelot and Tristram. I claim that the two episodes serve as different answers to the question of competing loyalties. While the two knights value both knightly community and courtly love, they are each faced with situations which force them to choose between the two virtues and thereby break their chivalric oath. As a result of their shame, the knights escape courtly society by becoming wild men. When viewed through the lens of Bakhtinian Carnival, the parataxis and *dilatatio* of the "Wild Man" episodes tragically reveals that chivalric society can be an impossible place for a chivalric knight to live.

Reading Malory – or "rereading" Malory, as Barthes would say – through the lens of structural and post-structural criticism allows readers to find new connections between seemingly disconnected episodes. Malory's repetition of episode types encourages readers to recognize structural patterns and sets their expectations for the narrative trajectory, but his use of *dilatatio* disrupts those expectations. The text's paratactic structure does not privilege one narrative variation over another, and readers must determine which examples of chivalric behavior are admirable and which are not.

CHAPTER TWO

"Knight with Two Swords" Episodes

A portion of this chapter was published as: "Fashionable Beards and Beards as Fashion: Beard Coats in Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*." *Parergon* 31.1 (2014): 95-109

Another portion of this chapter was published as: "Two Swords are Better than One (But Only Sometimes): The Knight with Two Swords Motif in Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*." *Medieval Perspectives* 30 (2015): 31-45.

The "Knight with Two Swords" episode, which appears throughout medieval European literature, can be most easily identified by the presence of a knight who carries two swords simultaneously. This episode type appears at least three times in Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* in narratives involving Sir Balin, King Arthur, and Sir Galahad as the knights bearing two swords. While many scholars have discussed these characters individually, or even as pairs, they have not attempted a discussion of all three knights together.[1] The purpose of this chapter is to rectify this oversight and to discuss all three characters in relation to one another. Their mutual participation in the "Knight with Two Swords" episode type invites an examination of this kind, and demonstrates that they work together to form a narrative triad that contrasts Balin's knightly failure

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[1] Although Ralph Norris has examined all three in a single study, he emphasizes the independence of Balin's episode from Galahad's, and he claims that, in Malory's text, Balin functions as a precursor to Arthur rather than to Galahad (62).

against Arthur's admirable chivalric efforts and culminates in Galahad's spiritual

perfection.

In order to discuss how each of these Arthurian characters participates in

the "Knight with Two Swords" narrative, I first provide a brief summary of the

conventional elements involved in that kind of episode. In his article "About the

Knight with Two Swords and the Maiden Under the Tree," Helmut Nickel

identifies fifteen different motifs which appear in "Knight with Two Swords"

narratives. Any given "Knight with Two Swords" episode will contain a variety

of these motifs, in any combination and in any order. The three Malorian

episodes I examine each contain between eight and twelve of the motifs, placing

them firmly within this narrative tradition.[2] Only six of the motifs, however,

appear in all three episodes, and these six shared elements are the focus of my

study:

> 1. The hero is in exile or temporary disgrace
> 2. He acquires a second sword
> 3. One of the hero's swords will break
> 4. The hero has to fight his brother, his best friend, or one of his vassals
> 6. A king or knight is lamed or wounded 'in the thighs'
> 15. There is an episode about cutting off of beards or hair (Nickel 29-30)[3]

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[2] See Appendix A for a full list of Nickel's fifteen motifs and their appearances in the respective episodes involving Balin, Arthur, and Galahad.

[3] For ease of reference, I use the same numbers designated by Nickel in his article and paraphrase the descriptions included in his list.

Rather than present the elements individually, I instead present the entire episodes and then pinpoint the motifs in order to discuss their importance both in their respective episodes and in relation to one another. To this end, a note on narrative chronology is in order: while Arthur gains his second sword before Balin's episode begins, and therefore Arthur is technically the first Knight with Two Swords to appear in Malory's narrative, half of the other shared elements (fighting his vassal, the thigh wound, and the beard cutting) occur in the Arthur and Accolon episode, which occurs after the conclusion of the Balin episode. Because Balin's episode is completed before Arthur's, I treat Balin as the first Knight with Two Swords and Arthur as the second. Since the narrative progression begins with Balin, then moves to Arthur and ends with Galahad, I follow the same path.

*Balin*

Within Malory's text, Balin is identified explicitly as "The Knight with Two Swords," and his story contains twelve out of the fifteen elements that Helmut Nickel identifies. While Nickel provides a full synopsis, I truncate his summary here in order to focus on the six elements that Balin's story shares with the stories of Arthur and Galahad:

> At the beginning of 'The Tale of Sir Balin,' Balin is at King Arthur's court, but just released from imprisonment for slaying a kinsman of Arthur's [1]. A damsel arrives, belted…with a sword from which

only the best knight present could free her. The predestined one is
Balin, and in spite of dire warnings from the damsel he decides to
keep this sword [2] in addition to his own that had been returned to
him after his release from the dungeon. At this point the Lady of
the Lake appears and demands of the king that Balin's head be
given to her as a reward for her having presented Arthur with (the
second) Excalibur. Instead, Balin beheads the lady…and is
banished from the court [1]. During his travels as a knight errant
Balin comes back into the good graces of the court when he and his
brother Balan defeat and capture Arthur's enemy, King Riens, who
had demanded Arthur's beard for his cloak [15a]. Later, Balin
pursues Garlon, a knight who rides invisible…Balin kills Garlon,
breaks one of his swords [3], and smites the Dolorous Stroke, which
cripples the Grail King [6]…At last Balin comes to a ford held
under an 'ill custom' by a Red Knight…The Red knight is actually
Balin's brother, Balan...Balin's shield is damaged beyond usefulness
after all his adventures, and a friendly knight offers him his own
sturdy shield for the fight. Thus, neither Balin nor Balan are able to
recognize each other and fight to the death [4a]. (33-34)

When the cursed damsel comes to court, Balin seems like the least likely

candidate to be able to draw the sword from its scabbard. The damsel declares

that the successful knight "muste be a passynge good man of hys hondys and of

hys dedis, and withoute velony other trechory and withoute treson" (I: 62.134-

63.2).[4] Balin has just been released from prison for killing one of Arthur's

relatives. His innocence of the murder is never asserted, and his guilt is never

questioned, so it is a reasonable assumption that he actually committed the

crime. In other words, he demonstrates the first narrative motif since he is in

disgrace, and his exile from court is justified. In addition, the text mentions that

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[4] All page and line references from Malory come from Malory, Sir Thomas. *The Works of
Sir Thomas Malory*. Ed. Eugene Vinaver. Revised by P.J.C. Field. 3 Vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

he looks terrible: "he was poore and poorly arayde" (I: 63.5). Balin is no knight in shining armor, and his looks also imply that he will fail at his attempt to draw the sword. He insists on trying, however, and to everyone's surprise, he succeeds.

Balin's success at drawing the sword achieves the second motif and reveals that despite his past treasonous behavior and his haggard appearance he is a good, virtuous knight. In this way, it serves to expose Balin's positive knightly qualities. In his study of the 13th-century Arthurian romance *Meriadeuc, or Le chevalier a deus espees*, Paul Vincent Rockwell posits that in a "Knight with Two Swords" episode, a knight's first sword represents his physical and martial ability while the second sword takes on a more metaphorical significance. He traces the two swords motif to a passage in the Book of Luke in which Jesus commands his disciples that if they do not have swords, to sell their cloaks in order to buy one. The disciples respond to this command by saying, "Lord, look, here are two swords" (Luke 22: 38).[5] Rockwell notes that medieval theologians, from Origen to Pope Gelasius I, have interpreted these two swords as one representing the material world and the other the spiritual, one as representing the letter of the law and the other its spirit, or one as representing the Church and the other the State. He extends this interpretation into medieval literature

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[5] All quotations from the Bible are taken from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, New Revised Standard Version.

when he notes that the second sword in the "Knight with Two Swords" episode acts as a "revelatory talisman" which is "associated with the revelation of things which otherwise would remain unknown" (4). In *Le Chevalier a deus espees,* the sword can only be drawn by a knight resembling the sword's original owner. It therefore serves a revelatory function as it reveals and authenticates the qualities of the knight who is able to draw it. The sword in Balin's story functions in the same manner as the sword in *Le Chevalier a deus espees* by proving Balin's virtuous character, and therefore it serves as a revelatory talisman.

The third frequently occurring motif of the "Knight with Two Swords" episode, however, is that one of the swords breaks. My question, then, is what is the significance of one of the swords breaking? Or, not breaking, as the case may be? In Malory's version, Balin's sword breaks after he kills Garlon, the invisible serial killer who ravages the Arthurian countryside and who is also King Pellam's brother. A furious King Pellam attacks Balin in revenge, Balin blocks Pellam's blow, and Balin's sword breaks (I: 84.27-30). So, does the broken sword indicate that the qualities initially revealed by the sword no longer exist? Has Balin's worthiness somehow been compromised? Deborah Ellis argues that Balin's use of the cursed sword transforms him from a worthy knight into a traitor and fratricide: "His actions defy his motives, for by killing a traitor, he becomes tinged with treason, just as by using a sword intended for fratricide, he

becomes the killer of his brother" (69). While Balin may have started out as a worthy knight, proven by his ability to draw the sword, his subsequent use of the weapon brings about his downfall, just as the damsel predicts. The breaking of the sword, then, would indicate a loss of knightly virtue.

Kenneth Hodges, however, demonstrates that from the moment he draws it, Balin's second sword complicates the chivalric *ethos*:

> What makes Balin's sword so pernicious, however, is not that its wielders are simple villains doing the opposite of what Arthur's new chivalry declares to be right; chivalry thrives on villains…While villains can actually strengthen codes of behavior by reinforcing the difference between good and evil, Balin's sword is more destabilizing because it reveals latent contradictions in the prevailing chivalric standards, making it almost impossible to know what is truly good. (80-81)

Balin's drawing of the sword proves not only his own worthiness, but also the unworthiness of all of the other Arthurian knights who have tried to draw the sword and failed. In this way, it serves not just as a revelatory talisman for the virtues of Balin, but also for the lack of virtue of the other knights in Arthur's court. D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. has also suggested that the catastrophic results of Balin's dual sword wielding challenge prevailing assumptions about knightly virtue ("Malory's Anti-Knights" 97). As Kenneth Tucker notes, however, the entire tale calls into question the truth of the sword damsel's words and the sword's ability to identify a worthy knight (8). Both Merlin and the Lady of the Lake disparage the damsel's character and cause the reader to doubt whether she

is telling the truth about the stipulations for drawing the sword. The sword itself was forged for the purpose of treachery, therefore the knight who is able to draw it must also be tainted with treachery, despite the damsel's dubious claims that he will not be. The subsequent moral ambiguity caused by the sword reveals a crack in the chivalric code. The broken sword would, then, suggest a restoration of the chivalric *ethos*. The sword which has caused so much confusion and potential misinterpretation no longer functions, and the Round Table can return to its worship-winning ways.

After Balin's sword breaks, he runs away from Pellam's attack and enters a room containing a table upon which stands a spear. Balin grabs the spear, then turns around to defend himself, and he wounds King Pellam, fulfilling the sixth motif. As a result of this wound, the king is lamed and the castle collapses on top of them (I: 85.2-14). In addition, Pellam's kingdom and the surrounding realms are all reduced to wasteland, littered with the corpses of Pellam's subjects (I: 85.32-86.1). Because of the nearly apocalyptic consequences of Balin's spear-thrust, it is hereafter named "The Dolorous Stroke." At this point in the narrative, Malory does not specify that King Pellam is wounded in the thigh, but it is clear that he is afflicted with a wound which cannot be healed. This incident demonstrates the tragic disparity between Balin's good intentions and his incredibly poor judgment.

This poor judgment continues to result in tragedy as Balin's story draws to a close. At the end of the episode, Balin must fight against his brother Balan in a duel which constitutes the fourth motif. Balan, disguised as a Red Knight, sees Balin's two swords and conjectures it could be his brother. Balin is bearing a different shield, however, so Balan fights him without asking his identity. For his part, Balin has been told by a damsel that the Red Knight is a knight of ill custom, so he does not question his opponent's identity, either. They fight, and Malory's description of the battle indicates that the object of this conflict is death: "And att that tyme ther was none of them both but they hadde eyther smyten other seven grete woundes, so that the lest of them myght have ben the dethe of the myghtyest gyaunt in this world" (I: 89.29-32). The stringent effort and effusive bloodshed prove too much for the two knights, and they both eventually collapse. As they lie dying, they reveal their identities to one another and both lament the circumstances which have led to their deaths.

While many scholars have tried to preserve Balin's virtue by claiming he is a victim of fate or merely unlucky,[6] Ralph Norris argues that Balin has only his own pride to blame. His initial decision to keep the cursed sword sets in motion a chain reaction which quickly snowballs out of control:

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[6] For good discussions of fate and determinism in the *Tale of Sir Balin*, see Brink 2-3, Corrie 276-277, and Mann, "Taking the Adventure," 77-78. For Balin as an anti-hero or anti-knight, see Hanks, "Malory's Anti-Knights," 96-98; A. Lynch 19-23; Whetter, "On Misunderstanding," 151-152; Jesmok, "Alas!", 27; and Richardson 63-67.

Because he retains the sword, it is in his hand, ready for use when the Lady of the Lake appears. Because he kills her and alienates Arthur, he is forced to kill Lanceor in self-defense and thus to watch helplessly as Lanceor's lover kills herself. Because he fails to save Lanceor's lover, he is now fated, according to Merlin, to strike the Dolorous Stroke…Each misfortune that Balin causes will follow logically and inexorably from the one preceding. (58)

This argument extends to the scene in which Balin fights Balan. Twice as he approaches the castle, Balin encounters crosses which warn him to turn back, but he refuses to heed the warnings. By accepting a strange shield, he removes his most important identifying marker, and Norris suggests this action which leads to Balin's death ends the chain reaction: "Balin's pride has at last delivered him into the castle of his enemies…Only now is the series of events begun by Balin's refusal to surrender the sword complete and the price of Balin's tragic error finally paid" (61).

*Arthur*

While Balin serves as a poor example and tragic end, Arthur presents an improvement in his "Knight with Two Swords" narrative. Helmut Nickel notes briefly among his other observations that "King Arthur himself had two swords (although not at the same time) named Excalibur, the sword in the stone and the sword given to him by the Lady of the Lake" (29). With this rather casual remark, he places Arthur within the category of "knights with two swords;" he seems hesitant, however, to fully incorporate Arthur in his scheme. That is

understandable since Arthur's narrative contains only eight of the fifteen common elements Nickel identifies – fewer than the other two episodes in the *Morte*. The elements it does contain, however, are important ones, and they form a strong enough thematic and structural link between the two other stories that it would not be prudent to discount them altogether.

Although Arthur does not become a Knight with Two Swords until he receives the second Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake, a brief discussion of his first sword (confusingly also named Excalibur) shows that Arthur's first sword is an improvement upon Balin's. Arthur receives his first sword when he draws it from the anvil in the churchyard when he is still a squire. As the writing on the stone says, "Whoso pulleth oute this swerd of this stone and anvyld is rightwys kynge borne of all Englond" (I: 12.34-36). When Arthur draws the sword from the stone, it reveals his destiny and birthright to be King of England. Although Excalibur is his first sword, it functions at first as a revelatory talisman. By the time Arthur is fighting against rebel kings, however, Excalibur has switched positions and now serves as a "second" sword. Malory reveals that Arthur wields two swords in a battle against King Lot: an ordinary sword which he uses to fight and which now serves as a traditional "first" sword, and Excalibur, which Merlin has warned him not to draw until the battle reaches its worst point (I: 19.3-5). When he does draw it, it is "so bryght in his enemyes eyen that it gaf

light lyke thirty torchys" (I: 19.20-21). Arthur proceeds to fight with the shining sword, demonstrating that it functions not only as a revelatory talisman as a traditional second sword should do, but it also fulfills its primary purpose as a weapon. The fact that Arthur begins his career with this extraordinary sword indicates his own remarkable status. His acquisition of the second Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake is equally extraordinary, with the famous disembodied arm holding the sword above the surface of the lake (I: 52.13-53.12).[7]

After Arthur's first sword breaks in a fight against King Pellinore [motif 3], Merlin takes him to the Lady of the Lake who grants him Excalibur [motif 2]. Arthur entrusts the new Excalibur and its scabbard to Morgan le Fay, who fabricates false copies and gives them to Arthur. After Arthur returns to court, a messenger from King Royns arrives and demands Arthur's beard as tribute [motif 15]. Arthur refuses, and Balin pursues then captures the traitorous King Royns. Later, Arthur falls asleep while hunting and wakes up in prison along with many other innocent knights [motif 1]. His captor is an infamous knight who is trying to usurp his brother's lands, and Arthur agrees to fight on the knight's behalf in order to free the other knights. The knight's brother cannot fight because he has been wounded in the thigh [motif 6], so Sir Accolon agrees

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[7] It is important to note here that although the second Excalibur is the third sword that Arthur obtains, the first Excalibur is broken, and Arthur no longer carries it, therefore he still only carries two swords. More importantly, it functions in the narrative as a "second" sword and revelatory talisman.

to fight instead. Arthur and Accolon fight one another [motif 4], and during the fight Arthur's sword breaks [motif 3]. He recovers Accolon's sword, which is in fact the real Excalibur, and he wins the fight.

The breaking of the first Excalibur fulfills the third motif of the "Knight with Two Swords" episode type. The motif is, in fact, doubly fulfilled because Arthur breaks two swords: the original Excalibur breaks in a battle against King Pellinore (I: 50.30), and after the second Excalibur is stolen by Morgan le Fay and replaced with a false Excalibur, the false sword breaks when Arthur fights Accolon (I: 143.29–32). Earlier I argued that the breaking of Balin's sword indicated the loss of Balin's virtue. This argument poses difficulties, however, when applied to Arthur. Kenneth Hodges has interpreted Arthur's swords, and especially their loss and retrieval, as symbolic of the different types of chivalry which appear throughout the *Morte*. He claims that the sword from the stone, which Arthur wields in the battles against the rebellious kings, represents a "might-makes-right" kind of chivalry (80). After the sword breaks and Arthur's kingship is established, "might-makes-right chivalry" is superseded by "blood-feud chivalry." Blood-feud chivalry is represented by both Balin's sword and the false Excalibur which Morgan uses in her attempt to kill Arthur. Hodges notes that blood-feud chivalry indicates a more fluid set of values which are open to interpretation based on context and motivation (80). For example, in the fight

between Arthur and Accolon, Arthur's motivation for fighting against a fellow

Round Table knight must be taken into account when his actions are evaluated.

At the same time, however, the whole Arthur and Accolon incident suggests that

"blood-feud" chivalry is not ideal. It is not until Arthur regains the true Excalibur

that true Round Table chivalry comes to the forefront (81). In this case, then, the

sword breaking does not signify a loss of worth on Arthur's part, but it signals a

change in the *ethos*. A new kind of chivalry requires a new kind of sword. Each

new sword represents a certain set of values, and as the swords are broken or

lost, those values are replaced by newer, better values represented by newer,

better swords.[8]

This progression of swords in Arthur's narrative mimics the overarching

progression formed by the three "Knight with Two Swords" episodes as each

faulty sword is replaced by a better sword, culminating in Excalibur. Another

micro-progression occurs in Arthur's narrative with the motif involving the

removal of a beard (15 in Nickel's list of structural motifs). Arthur's story

contains two separate references to the removal of his beard, and the threat of his

beard's being incorporated into a coat constructed of the beards of conquered

kings. The first threat occurs when King Royns demands Arthur's beard and

Balin responds by defeating and capturing him (I: 54.21-55.2, 74.9-31). The

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[8] See Appendix B for the importance of scabbards in Malory's "Knight with Two Swords"
episodes.

second occurs when Arthur defeats the Giant of St. Michael's Mount, who also

has a beard coat, and he takes the giant's coat as a trophy (I: 200.16-205.7). Just as

the "Knight with Two Swords" episodes in the *Morte* build upon each other to

set up a narrative progression, the beard coat episodes also form a smaller

progression within the story of Arthur's developing kingship.

Both beard coats appear at key moments in Arthur's reign during which

Arthur faces challenges to his kingship and his masculinity. Arthur's triumph

over the owners of the beard coats overcomes these challenges and defines him

as a capable leader and reinforces his masculinity. Malory uses these two stories

to mark Arthur's progression from a young and inexperienced king to a mature,

successful military leader and the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. One of

the keys to understanding this progression in Malory's narrative is an event early

in the text and in Arthur's kingship. At his coronation feast, Arthur attempts to

gain the neighboring kings' loyalty by sending gift-bearing messengers to them

(I: 17.17-21). The kings remain unimpressed: "But the kynges wold none receyve,

but rebuked the messagers shamefully and said they had no joye to receyve no

yeftes of a berdles boye that was come of lowe blood" (I: 17.21-24). The two

reasons the kings supply for their rejection of Arthur are his lack of nobility and

his youth. While Arthur's lack of a beard at his coronation obviously indicates

his youth, it also indicates his lack of experience. The kings' subsequent rebellion

proves their skepticism about Arthur's status as a military leader who is capable

of settling his country's civil unrest. If a beard serves as the outward sign of

masculinity, then Arthur's absent beard represents an absence of masculinity. He

is not just young; he is a "berdles boye," and therefore he is incapable of being an

effective man or leader. By the time Malory introduces the first beard coat,

several years have passed since Arthur's coronation, and he still has not achieved

complete subjugation of his enemies:

> So thys meanewhyle com a messyngere frome kynge Royns of
> Northe Walis, and kynge he was of all Irelonde and of Iles. And
> this was hys message, gretynge well kyng Arthure on thys maner
> of wyse, sayng that kynge Royns had discomfite and overcom
> eleven kyngis, and every of them dud hym omage. And that was
> thus to sey they gaff theire beardes clene flayne off, as much as was
> bearde; wherefore the messyngere com for kynge Arthures berde.
> For kynge Royns had purfilde a mantell with kynges berdis, and
> there lacked one place of the mantell; wherefore he sente for hys
> bearde, othir ellis he wolde entir into his londis and brenne and sle,
> and nevir leve tylle he hathe the hede and the bearde bothe.
>     'Well,' seyde Arthure, 'thou haste seyde thy message, the whych
> ys the moste orgulus and lewdiste message that evir man had
> isente unto a kynge. Also thou mayste se my bearde ys full yonge
> yet to make off a purphile.' (I: 54.21-55.2)

This passage directly addresses the kings' two objections to Arthur as their high

king at his coronation. First of all, Arthur now has facial hair. He has grown

physically into manhood, and he has the outward sign of a beard to prove it. He

is no longer a "berdless boye." Arthur has also discovered that he is the

legitimate son of King Uther. He therefore has a true claim to the throne and is

no longer of "lowe blood." In addition, he has squelched the initial rebellion of

the kings and proven himself a successful military leader. He has risen up in the

world, both in terms of his nobility and his prowess. The confirmation of his

royal blood and the threat he poses to his enemies earn him a place on the border

of King Royns' coat. It is no coincidence that Arthur's beard begins growing at

the same time that he establishes his legitimacy and his new kingdom. His beard

is the physical manifestation of his burgeoning prowess. Despite this budding

potential, Arthur has not yet reached full manhood when King Royns' messenger

arrives at court. He admits that his beard is "full yonge yet," and he still requires

help in bringing his rival king to heel. Arthur must rely on the knights under his

command to defeat Royns in his stead. In this case, Balin captures Royns and

brings him to Camelot to surrender to King Arthur after which the conflict

between the two kings ends (I: 74.9-31).

Malory's manipulation of his source for this event, the *Suite du Merlin*,

includes a possible change in King Royns's character. Malory gives Royns the

title King of North Wales, Ireland, and the Isles. As with the description of the

kings' rejection of Arthur at his coronation, different manuscripts of the *Suite*

give different titles for King Royns. One document, known as the Huth

manuscript, names him as the King of North Wales only (*Lancelot-Grail IV* 183).

The Cambridge manuscript calls him the king of the land of giants, Ireland, and

the Isles (Wilson 18). Most scholars agree that Malory's source was closest to the Cambridge manuscript.[9] Malory's inclusion of Ireland and the Isles in his description of Royns's kingdom supports this hypothesis. If his source also included the detail that Royns was also king of the land of giants, then Malory deliberately disassociated King Royns from that label in order to set up Arthur's approach to full manhood. The episode of the giant of St Michael's Mount occurs chronologically after the episode with King Royns, and it reduces Royns's status, which, in turn, increases the impact of Arthur's impending triumph. If Sir Balin were to defeat the king of the giants in battle, then that victory would diminish Arthur's subsequent defeat of the giant of St Michael's Mount. Because Royns is stripped of his gianthood, there is room in Arthur's development for even greater accomplishments.

If Royns had retained his status as king of the giants, it would have thematically linked the King Royns episode to the battle against the giant of St Michael's Mount. Since Malory's Royns is only king of North Wales, Ireland, and the Isles, there is nothing to link him with the giant of St Michael's Mount. Malory's omission of Royns's gianthood, therefore, leaves a thematic gap between these two episodes. The inclusion of the second beard coat in the episode with the giant of St Michael's Mount bridges this gap.

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[9] For a full discussion of this topic, see Wilson 13-18 and Passaro 49-50.

In Malory's version of the St Michael's Mount story, Arthur hears that a giant has kidnapped his cousin's wife (I: 198.5-199.5). He decides to rescue her, and as he approaches the mountain where the giant has taken refuge, he encounters an old woman who describes the giant's monstrous behaviour (I: 200.23-202.3). She also relates that

> he hath made hym a coote full of precious stonys, and the bordoures thereof is the berdis of fyftene kynges, and they were of the grettyst blood that dured on erthe. Othir farme had he none of fyftene realmys. This presente was sente hym to this laste Crystemasse, they sente hym in faythe for savyng of their peple. (I: 201.15-20)

Malory sticks very closely to his source material in this passage describing the giant. However, when the old woman reveals the giant's motivation for terrorizing the countryside, Malory alters the story. In the *Alliterative Morte*, Malory's primary source for this incident, the giant wants Arthur's beard for the border of his coat. In Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, the old woman tells the king that the giant wants Guinevere instead: "for he settys nought by the kynge nother by no man ellys. But and thou have brought Arthurs wyff, dame Gwenyvere, he woll be more blyther of hir than thou haddyste geffyn hym halfendele Fraunce" (I: 201.9-13). This change in the giant's motivation diminishes the importance of Arthur's beard, yet still emphasizes his masculine development.

As Dorsey Armstrong has convincingly argued, this shift in focus from Arthur's beard to Arthur's wife accentuates Arthur's masculinity (*Gender* 17). By

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getting married, Arthur has taken another step in the process of becoming a man.

The giant's threat against Guinevere, therefore, is a threat against Arthur's

manhood:

> Arthur's marriage to Guenevere is the founding relationship of the
> Arthurian community; with his marriage to her he receives the
> Round Table and the hundred knights who currently "comprise" it.
> More important, his marriage to Guenevere identifies him as
> heteronormative, a fit masculine figure to head a homosocial
> community of knights. (17)

In addition, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen observes that the juxtaposition of Arthur's

control over himself and his knights against the giant's monstrous qualities

demonstrates the horrors of unbridled masculinity (*Of Giants* 38). The giant rapes

women to death, while the Round Table knights swear to protect women and not

to rape them. The giant lives in isolation on a mountaintop and collects the

beards of other men while the Round Table knights live in community and form

a brotherhood. Significantly, Arthur not only kills the giant, but also castrates

him, further cementing the giant's loss of control and of masculine power (I:

203.5-7).

As both Armstrong and Cohen have noted, Arthur's victory over the giant

of St Michael's Mount acts as a prelude to his victory over the Emperor Lucius

and serves as the beginning of the golden age of Arthur's reign. Moreover, this

triumph also serves as the climax of his journey into adulthood. He no longer

requires the help of his knights in defeating his enemy; he kills the giant single-

handedly. His masculinity is also no longer in question because he protects his wife from the giant and preserves his marital status. In case the status of his beard is still in doubt, Arthur confiscates the giant's beard coat and therefore possesses not only his own beard, but also fifteen others. Cohen writes that "Arthur's dismemberment of the giant of Mont St Michel signals his political coming of age, his readiness to assume the heavy mantle of world-class heroism and be numbered among the Nine Worthies" (*Of Giants* 71). By slaying the giant of St Michael's Mount, Arthur definitively overcomes the challenges of the rival kings at his coronation and proves himself to be a more successful knight than Balin.

In addition to performing more impressive feats than Balin, Arthur's form of exile also serves as an improvement upon Balin's example. Balin was imprisoned for killing Arthur's relative, then expelled from court for killing the Lady of the Lake while she was under Arthur's protection. In both cases, Balin committed a crime; his imprisonment and exile were not undeserved or unjust. Arthur, on the other hand, falls victim to the evil Sir Damas, who falsely imprisons him and twenty other knights. Arthur is innocent of any wrongdoing, and his efforts to abolish the ill custom succeed, unlike Balin's efforts to apprehend Garlon.

In the same way, while Balin is responsible for the thigh wound in his episode, Arthur is blameless for the injury of Sir Outlake. King Pellam's wound occurs as Balin smites the Dolorous Stroke, an event which levels three kingdoms and kills many people. Balin himself inflicts the grievous wound. In Arthur's story, Sir Outlake cannot fight against Arthur because of a thigh wound he previously received (I: 141.17-20). Arthur did not participate in the violent act against the good knight, and therefore represents an improvement upon Balin.

Arthur is not completely free of fault, however, in his story. His decision to fight on behalf of Sir Damas goes against the clause in the Pentecostal Oath warning knights against fighting in a "wrongfull quarrel." In her discussion of the "wrongfull quarrel" present in the Arthur and Accolon section of the *Morte*, Carol Kaske agrees with Kenneth Hodges that Arthur's position is problematic (5). Knights of the Round Table are not supposed to fight one another, and Accolon is Arthur's vassal. By agreeing to fight Accolon on behalf of the villainous Sir Damas, Arthur has taken the wrong side. However, because he is fighting in an effort to survive and to free the other imprisoned knights, "Arthur here sees the necessity of taking arms in a wrongful quarrel and living to see another day - perhaps in the hope that he might ultimately undo the wrong that he has done" (5). Arthur does, in fact, undo that wrong after he has won the

battle by granting Sir Damas' lands to Sir Outlake who is their rightful owner (I: 147.13-18).

In this case, Arthur represents an improvement upon Balin in two ways: he is aware of the complexity of his moral position, and he fixes the damage he does by taking the "wrong" side in the fight. Balin thoughtlessly breaches the hospitality of his host by murdering the Lady of the Lake while she is under Arthur's protection. Then he proves that he has learned nothing from his subsequent punishment and exile when he murders Garlon while under the protection of King Pellam. Balin does not correct his reckless behavior or display an ability to prioritize values. Arthur, on the other hand, admits that his decision to fight on behalf of the evil Sir Damas is "harde." He considers his actions and their consequences before he commits to them, and he demonstrates an ability to prioritize: "Yet had I lever fyght with a knyght than to dey in preson. Wyth this…I may be delyverde and all thes presoners, I woll do the batayle" (I: 139.22-25). While Balin's rash actions lead to the destruction of three whole kingdoms, Arthur's carefully considered actions lead to the release of the prisoners and the restoration of Sir Outlake's lands to their rightful owner.

*Galahad*

While Balin serves as an example of what not to do, and Arthur demonstrates how to behave well, Galahad represents the knightly ideal; he is

the pinnacle of both earthly and spiritual chivalry. When he joins the Round Table community and fills the Siege Perilous, his presence both literally and figuratively completes the circle. Throughout his career, and especially within the story elements of the "Knight with Two Swords," Galahad serves as both an example of the best chivalric behavior and as a restorative force within the text.

Galahad comes to court after being raised in a convent [motif 1]. He obtains his first sword when he draws Balin's sword from the stone into which Merlin placed it. After embarking on the Grail Quest, Galahad receives his second sword when he encounters a mysterious ship within which he finds a sword which can only be pulled from its sheath by a knight surpassing all others. Galahad is able to pull the sword from its sheath [motif 2], and Percival's sister constructs a girdle made of her own hair so that Galahad may bear and use the sword [motif 15]. In the course of his adventures, Galahad repairs a broken sword [motif 3], heals King Pellam's thigh wound [motif 6], and injures Sir Gawain – his fellow Round Table knight and brother-in-arms – in combat [motif 4].

The first way Galahad demonstrates superiority over Balin and Arthur is in the form of his exile. While Balin committed the crimes he was punished for, and Arthur was unjustly imprisoned and forced to pick the wrong side in a quarrel, Galahad was raised away from court in a convent. Obviously, while the

convent is still a confining space, it is a step up from prison. In addition,

Galahad's first appearance occurs when Lancelot visits the convent and knights

him. At that time, Lancelot invites him to come to Camelot and join the Round

Table, but Galahad refuses. Unlike either Balin's or Arthur's imprisonments,

Galahad's exile is, at least in part, self-imposed.

Like Arthur, from the beginning of his knightly career Galahad wields an

extraordinary sword. Unlike Arthur's weapons, however, both of Galahad's

swords function on both levels as symbols of knighthood and as revelatory

talismans. When he arrives at Arthur's court, Galahad wears an empty scabbard

at his side. He has no sword, and the first sword he receives is literally the same

sword as Balin's sword. After Balin's death, Merlin places the sword in a stone to

be drawn by the "beste knyght of the worlde" (I: 91.22). In an echo of Arthur's

initial drawing of the sword from the stone, Galahad successfully draws it and it

proves Galahad's worth. Since he also receives it at the moment he joins the

Round Table community, it serves both as a symbol of his knighthood as a

traditional first sword would do and as a revelatory talisman attesting to his

status as "best knight of the world" as a traditional second sword would do.

Both Ellis and Hodges argue that the purpose of Balin's second sword is

treacherous. The cursed damsel had it forged so that she could kill her own

brother in order to take revenge against him for killing her lover. As Ellis states,

"The true curse of Balin's sword, as we gradually realize, is that it can only be used in some sort of betrayal" (68). As the wielder of this treacherous sword, Balin becomes tainted with treachery himself. It is significant, then, that Galahad's first sword is the same as Balin's sword. By placing it in the stone, Merlin changes its purpose; its function now is to demonstrate the positive qualities of the knight who can draw it. Galahad's ability to draw it effectively wipes the sword's slate clean. It has been redeemed from its treacherous origins and re-purposed to show Galahad's worthiness and restorative power.

Galahad obtains his second sword while on the Grail Quest. He discovers a mysterious ship, and within the ship he finds a sword, half pulled out of its sheath with writing that says the only knight who will grip it will be one who will "passe all othir" (II: 986.6). Galahad, in an echo of Balin's earlier removal of a sword from its sheath, is of course able to draw the sword, once again revealing his superiority to all other knights. In addition, shortly after obtaining the sword, he uses it to slay numerous knights of ill-custom (II: 996.24-998.9). So, the second sword is also effective at performing knightly activities such as slaying one's enemies, as well as being the traditional revelatory talisman.

As Hodges has discussed, a progression occurs in the narrative as Arthur breaks, loses, and regains his various swords which represent shifts in accepted chivalric values. Michelle R. Wright notes that this progression continues with

the swords of Galahad: "The first associates Galahad with the Arthurian court

and is given by Lancelot; the second establishes a celestial allegiance and appears

mysteriously in a floating stone near Arthur's court; and the third signals

Galahad's final spiritual perfection" (46). It is important for my argument to note

that Wright's categorization of the sword with which Galahad is knighted as his

"first sword" is not entirely accurate. Although Lancelot knights Galahad, he

neither gives him a sword in Malory's text nor in *La Queste del Saint Graal*, which

is the subject of Wright's article. It is, however, noteworthy that the sword which

he should have received at his knighting would have been an ordinary first

sword, symbolizing his knighthood and nothing else. Galahad does not receive

such a sword, however, and appears at Arthur's court wearing an empty

scabbard. Dorsey Armstrong has pointed out the problematic nature of

Galahad's hyper-spirituality and consistent rejection of traditional Arthurian

chivalric values, and her argument extends to his lack of a sword in this scene

("Christianity" 117-118). He at first refuses to join the Round Table, and when he

does appear, he does not possess the one thing that every knight ought to

possess: a sword. This rejection of earthly knighthood and an ordinary sword

establish him as a spiritual knight. The first sword that he bears, then, is

appropriately the extraordinary sword in the floating stone.

This sword becomes an important factor when Galahad wields it on the Grail Quest. Before Galahad obtains it, however, the other knights of the Round Table marvel at it, and Arthur commands Gawain to attempt to pull it out of the stone. Lancelot warns Gawain not to do it, but Gawain obeys Arthur. He fails, and Lancelot tells him that he is now doomed to be injured grievously by that very sword. This injury occurs during the Grail Quest when Gawain is attacked by Sir Galahad (II: 981.6-982.4).

As in the episodes with Balin and Arthur, Galahad encounters what seems to be a morally ambiguous situation as he engages in combat against Sir Gawain, a fellow Round Table knight. Once again, however, Galahad's experience of this motif proves different from the others. While on the Grail Quest, Galahad comes upon a castle which is under siege. He notices that the men inside the castle are good knights, but they are losing to their attackers. He decides to help them and begins attacking the knights outside the castle. It just so happens that Sir Gawain and Sir Ector are two of the knights attacking the castle. Without knowing who his victim is, Galahad smites Gawain and gives him a serious head injury. After he realizes the attacking knights are no longer attacking, Galahad rides off before anyone can identify him. Gawain, gravely injured, admits that his quest is over (II: 982.12-13).

The moral ambiguity of the potential "wrongfull quarrel" presented by

Galahad's attack on Sir Gawain since Round Table knights are not supposed to

fight one another (II: 546.26-28) is resolved by a careful examination of Gawain's

own Grail Quest experiences. Throughout the Grail Quest, Gawain has not been

able to find adventures. At one point, he decides to follow Sir Galahad, but a

monk tells him that Galahad "woll nat of youre felyship…for ye be wycked and

synfull, and he ys full blyssed" (II: 890.25-29). This assessment is confirmed by a

"good man" who contrasts Gawain's willingness to kill other knights with

Galahad's mercy: "For sertes, had ye nat bene so wycked as ye ar, never had the

seven brethirne be slayne by you and youre two felowys: for sir Galahad hymself

alone bete hem all seven the day toforne, but hys lyvyng ys such that he shall sle

no man lyghtly" (II: 892.2-6). Although previously in the *Morte*, killing evil

knights has not been condemned, and has even been encouraged, the spiritual

nature of the Grail Quest has changed the rules. In his study of the equivalent

event in Malory's source text, *La Queste del Saint Graal*, Corey Owen argues that

Gawain's hasty killing of these knights demonstrates a lack of patience and

unwillingness to repent (19). In contrast, "by simply defeating the sins, yet

allowing them to live, Galahad turns them toward reuniting with God" (19).

Gawain's killing of the evil knights, then, is condemned because it deprives the

evil knights of a chance for repentance and demonstrates his own spiritual shortcomings.

Even after repeated admonitions, Gawain steadfastly refuses to attend mass, go to confession, or perform any penance for his sins. Nacien the hermit rebukes his behavior and accuses Gawain of murder and faithlessness:

> for ye bene an untrew knyght and a grete murtherar…Hit ys longe tyme passed sith that ye were made knyght and never synnes servyd thou thy Maker, and now thou arte so olde a tre that in the ys neythir leeff, nor grasse, nor fruyte. Wherefore bethynke the that thou yelde to Oure Lorde the bare rynde , sith the fende hath the levis and the fruyte (II: 948.19-20, 949.4-9).

The imagery of the old leafless, barren tree is reminiscent of the biblical imagery of trees bearing fruit that appears throughout the Gospels. In particular, Matthew 7: 17-20 discusses the consequences of fruitlessness: "Every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits." Nacien's assessment of Gawain is that he is a bad tree bearing bad fruit. It is fitting, then, that Galahad cuts him down and forces him to forsake the quest. Another verse in the book of John addresses the positive nature of this kind of pruning: "He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit" (John 15: 2). Galahad has preserved the sanctity of the Grail Quest by eliminating a knight who cannot

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possibly achieve it. In addition, like he did with the seven evil brethren, Galahad has not killed Gawain, only injured him. Gawain, therefore, has the opportunity to change his ways and become a better knight. Galahad, therefore, despite his seemingly destructive action in wounding Sir Gawain, has in fact acted in a way that upholds the spirit of the Grail Quest.

Another way in which Galahad functions positively in this passage is that he fulfills a prophecy by injuring Gawain. Before Galahad came to court, the sword in the stone floated down to Camelot and Arthur commanded Gawain to pull it. Gawain tried and failed, and as result of his failure was condemned to be stricken by that same sword (II: 857.7-13). Galahad concludes this series of events when he uses the sword from the stone to strike Sir Gawain – a fact that Gawain readily acknowledges: "now ar the wondirs trew that was seyd of sir Launcelot, that the swerd which stake in the stone shulde gyff me such a buffette that I wold nat have hit for the beste castell in the worlde. And sothely now hit ys preved trew, for never ar had I such a stroke of mannys honde" (II: 982.6-10). Galahad continues in his role as a fulfiller of prophecy, then, by injuring Sir Gawain.

While Galahad has up to this point shared the same "Knight with Two Swords" motifs as Balin and Arthur, he does not experience one of them himself. In contrast to Balin and Arthur, neither of Galahad's swords breaks. If swords represent knightly worth and chivalric values, then Galahad's intact swords

represent his own untarnished reputation and unflappable chivalry. He is a static character; his story begins when he proves to be the best knight of the world, and that's how it ends. This consistency is reflected in his two intact swords.

Although neither of his own swords breaks, Galahad does come into contact with someone else's broken sword when he, Perceval, and Bors arrive at the Castle of Corbenic: "Than Elyazar, kynge Pelles sonne, brought tofore them the brokyn swerde wherewith Josephe was stryken thorow the thyghe" (II: 1027.15-17). Both Percival and Bors try and fail to repair it, and in typical fashion only Galahad succeeds. In this instance, Galahad serves a restorative function which contrasts with the destructive nature of the same motif in the stories of Balin and Arthur: while Balin and Arthur both break swords in their respective episodes, Galahad puts one back together. Not only that, but in that same evening, the restored sword manifests supernatural powers: "And a litill before evyn the swerde arose, grete and merevaylous, and was full of grete hete, that many men felle for drede. And anone alyghte a voyce amonge them and seyde, 'They that ought nat to sitte at the table of Oure Lorde Jesu Cryste, avoyde hens!'" (II: 1027.30-1028.2). At this moment, everyone leaves the room except for King Pelles, Pelles' son, Pelles' niece, and the three Grail knights who are the only ones worthy to sit at the Lord's table. Galahad, therefore, not only restores

the sword to its intended status as a weapon, but also creates a revelatory

talisman capable of identifying holy knights.

As with the other motifs, the thigh wound appears in Galahad's story in

an altered form. At the same moment that Galahad achieves the Grail, he is also

given blood from the spear that wounded the Maimed King. Christ tells him to

"take with you off thys bloode of thys speare for to anoynte the Maymed Kynge,

both his legges and hys body, and he shall have hys heale" (II: 1030.33-35).

Galahad follows these instructions, and the Maimed King is completely healed:

> And sir Galahad wente anone to the speare which lay uppon the
> table and towched the bloode with hys fyngirs, and cam aftir to the
> Maymed Kynge and anoynted his legges and hys body. And
> therewith he clothed hym anone, and sterte uppon hys feete oute of
> hys bedde as an hole man, and thanked God that He had heled
> hym. (II: 1031.8-13)

Again, in this instance, Galahad provides a contrast to Balin and Arthur. While

the thigh wounds in Balin and Arthur's story are inflicted through violence,

Galahad heals the King's thigh wound and proves his restorative powers yet

again.

This pattern of Galahad's "Knight with Two Swords" narrative displaying

restorative qualities while Balin and Arthur's respective stories display the same

motifs in a destructive way continues with the motif of the removal of a beard or

cutting of hair. In Balin's story, the beard removal element appears when King

Royns demands Arthur's beard for a coat he is making. Arthur refuses to give up

his beard, and Balin ends up capturing King Royns and ending the threat. In a separate incident, Arthur fights the giant of St. Michael's Mount who also has a beard coat, though the matter of Arthur's beard is only noted by allusion. In contrast, when Galahad discovers his second sword, Percival's sister cuts off her own hair and weaves it into a girdle for the sword. This act of humble self-sacrifice stands in stark contrast to the beard coats in the previous episodes. King Royns and the Giant of St Michael's Mount force kings they have conquered to forfeit their beards, and their beard coats serve as trophies of war. Percival's sister, on the other hand, willingly gives her hair to Galahad. The hair girdle completes the assembly of the second sword and restores it to wholeness and to functionality. Michelle Wright notes that "Having re-designed the sword through her craft…Percival's sister uses it to mark Galahad's total celestial allegiance" (51). This sword is also the one that Christ commands Galahad to take with him to the city of Sarras where he will receive a more complete experience of the Grail (II: 1030.29-33). Galahad wears the sword and its hair girdle not as grotesque war trophies, but as signs of his spiritual purity and obedience as he completes the Grail Quest.

Galahad's achievement of the Grail Quest signals the climax of the narrative progression set up by the three "Knight with Two Swords" episodes in the *Morte d'Arthur*: Balin's knightly failure is improved upon by Arthur's

admirable chivalric efforts which are in turn overshadowed by Galahad's

spiritual perfection. The rhetorical effect of this progression is to reinforce

Arthur's Round Table community as a kind of happy medium in which good

knights are rewarded with worship, but are not expected to achieve perfection.

CHAPTER THREE

"Now put me into that barge":
Hagiography, Romance, and the "Body in a Boat" Episode Type


The "body in a boat" episode type is fairly common in medieval literature,

and it appears within several genre traditions – romance, chronicle, hagiography,

and Breton lais, among others. The episode type itself is fairly self-explanatory: a

person's body – live or dead – is placed into a boat which then embarks on a

journey. Often, the boat is magical or supernatural in that it is of mysterious

origin and frequently moves without the benefit of a crew or sailing apparatus

(Cooper 106-107). Throughout Malory's work, several examples of this episode

type recur; this chapter will analyze four particular characters who serve as

bodies in boats in episodes that follow similar narrative patterns and represent a

blend of the romantic and hagiographic literary traditions: Galahad, Percival's

sister, Elaine of Astolat, and King Arthur.[1] While scholarly assessment of the

*Morte d'Arthur* has regularly supported the idea that Malory chose to omit many

of the Christian elements present in his source material because he was not

interested in Christian concerns or themes, recent scholarship has presented a

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[1] See Appendix C for a discussion of several minor "body in a boat" episodes that appear
in Malory's text.

serious challenge to this idea.[2] D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. in particular has claimed

that "the Christian theme is clearly evident throughout the *Morte*" ("All maner of

good love…" 10). In an extension of Hanks' argument, I claim in this chapter

that, due to the combination of romantic and religious traditions, the *dilatatio* of

the four "body in a boat" episodes reinforces the Christian themes of submission

to divine will and sacrificial death that pervade the *Morte d'Arthur*. Even in the

episodes which closely follow the romantic tradition, spiritual overtones persist

and result in a narrative that values Christian ideals.

　　To begin my study, I offer an explanation of the two "body in a boat"

traditions individually. Although the two traditions are similar, they are

different enough that they deserve separate treatment before my discussion of

their combined effects.

### *The Religious Tradition*

　　The religious tradition of the body in a boat is rooted in the biblical

accounts of Noah in the ark (Genesis 6-8), and the papyrus basket bearing the

baby Moses in the Nile River (Exodus 2:1-10), as well as the story of Jonah,

encased within the belly of a large fish (Cooper 119). These stories demonstrate

the hand of divine providence guiding water-borne vessels and delivering their

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[2] Eugene Vinaver was the first to spearhead this point of view. For a summary of his argument as well as supporting views, see Hanks, "All maner of good love…", 9-10.

occupants to safety. Influenced by these stories of faith and deliverance,

medieval monks, particularly in Ireland, began a tradition of sailing pilgrimages,

as can be seen in the historical life of the sixth-century Saint Columba, who along

with twelve companions sailed to the island of Iona where they founded a

monastery (Lacey 39).[3]

The hagiographies of several sailing saints include stories of the saints'

voyages between various mysterious islands and their encounters with strange

creatures. The most famous subject of these hagiographies is St. Brendan the

Navigator, a sixth century Irish abbot who along with seventeen other monks

undertook a seven-year voyage to find the Promised Land of the Saints. On the

journey, the group discovers the island of giant sheep, the Mouth of Hell, a

crystal column rising out of the ocean, and a variety of pious hermits and

infamous sinners (Judas Iscariot, being one notable example). At the end of the

voyage, the pilgrims are guided to heaven before they finally return home to

Ireland.[4]

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[3] Lacey includes two accounts of this trip: *Vita Columbae,* written c. 700 by Adomnán and the Annals of Ulster. Adomnán writes, "In the second year after the battle of Cúl Dreimne, the forty-second year of his age, Columba sailed away from Ireland to Britain wishing to be a pilgrim for Christ." The Annals of Ulster account reads, "*navigatio Coluim Chille ad Insolam Iae anno etatis sue xlii* [the voyage of Colum Cille to the island of Iona in the 42nd year of his age]" (39).

[4] There are several extant versions of St. Brendan's vita. The ones that have received the most scholarly attention are the Latin *Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis* and the Anglo-Norman *Voyage of St. Brendan* by Benedeit. See J. S. Mackley, *The Legend of St. Brendan*; Denis O'Donoghue, *Lives and Legends of St. Brendan the Voyager*; and John O'Meara, "The Voyage of Saint Brendan:

The purpose of these pilgrimages and of the subsequent founding of numerous monasteries on isolated and inhospitable northern islands was to emulate the wanderings of the early Christian ascetics in the Egyptian desert (Le Goff 51). The monks of the British Isles used the sea as a substitute for the difficult conditions and spiritual trials experienced by the desert fathers, and they hoped that their suffering would bring them closer to God. Although the boats in these narratives are not typically rudderless, there is at least one historical account that describes a small group of pilgrims sailing in a rudderless boat. The event is recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in the year 891:

> 7 þrie Scottas comon to Ælfrede cyninge on anum bate butan ælcum gereþrum of Hibernia, þonon hi hi bestælon, forþon þe hi woldon for Godes lufan on elþiodignesse beon, hi ne rohton hwær. Se bat wæs gewohrt of þriddan healfre hyde, þe hi on foron, 7 hi namon mid him þæt hi hæfdun to seofon nihtum mete, 7 þa comon hie ymb .vii. niht to londe on Cornwalum 7 foron þa sona Ælfrede cyninge.

> [And three Irishmen came to King Alfred in a rudderless boat from Ireland, whence they had stolen away because they wished for the love of God to be on pilgrimage, they cared not where. The boat in which they set out was made of two and a half hides, and they had taken with them food for seven nights. And after one week they came to land in Cornwall, and they immediately made for King Alfred.] (Sobecki 195).

Journey to the Promised Land." Mackley's study in particular discusses the combination of spiritual and romance narratives in the two variations.

This kind of devotional sailing reflected not only the participants' desire to follow the ascetic example of the desert fathers, but also to demonstrate their faith in and love for God by entrusting themselves entirely into his care, as Noah did and Moses' mother Jochebed did for her son in the Bible.

In their depictions of sea voyages, medieval poets such as the author of *The Seafarer* and the *Pearl* poet emphasized the perilous conditions of the sea. The Middle English poem *Cleanness*, which retells the story of Noah and the flood, describes in grim detail the horror of the flood's victims, the desperation of the earth's living creatures to escape the floodwaters, and the helplessness of Noah's family, who are safely enclosed in the ark, but without any means to guide the vessel:

> Withouten mast other myke other myry bawelyne,
> Kable other capstan to clyppe to her ankres,
> Hurrok, other hande-helme hasped on rother,
> Other any sweande to seche after haven
> But flote for the with the flyt of the felle wyndes;
> Whederwarde-so the water wafte, hit rebounde.
> Ofte hit roles on rounde and rered on ende;
> Nyf oure Lorde hade ben her lodesmon, hem had lumpen harde.
> (lines 417-424)

This theme of vulnerability and trust in God's providence also appears in a less explicitly religious context in the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Seafarer*, which describes the rigors and dangers of sea travel:

> how I have often suffered times of hardship in days of toil, how I have endured cruel anxiety at heart and experienced many anxious

lodging-places afloat, and the terrible surging of the waves. There the hazardous night-watch has often found me at the ship's prow when it is jostling along the cliffs. My feet were pinched by the cold, shackled by the frost in cold chains, whilst anxieties sighed hot about my heart. Hunger tore from within at the mind of one wearied by the ocean. (332)

At the same time, the poem encourages trust in the Lord's might despite earthly trials, and reminds the audience to "Let us consider where we may have a home, and then think how we may get there and how we may henceforth also strive so that we might arrive in everlasting blessedness, where there is life originating in the Lord's love, and hope, in the heavens" (335). S. A. J. Bradley observes that this poem participates in the well-known and well-established Augustinian metaphor of Christians on earth as strangers in a foreign land whose ultimate goal is to return to their heavenly home (330). This sentiment is also found in the voyage of St. Brendan, whose stated goal is to find Paradise, and whose vitae combine both romantic and traditionally hagiographic elements.

Unlike the Seafarer or St. Brendan, the character of Jonas in the Middle English poem *Patience* attempts to use a sea voyage to escape the will of God rather than submit himself to it. A re-telling of the biblical story of Jonah, *Patience* describes how Jonas disobeys God's command to go to the city of Nineveh, and he boards a ship to Tarsus instead. At sea, God causes a great storm which destroys the navigational equipment and steering mechanisms on the ship:

> The bur ber to hit baft, that braste alle her gere
> Then hurled on a hepe the helme and the sterne;
> Furst tomurte mony rop, and the mast after;
> The sayl swayed on the see (lines 148-151)

The sailors on the ship discover Jonas' part in causing the storm, and the disobedient man tells the sailors to throw him overboard. They do so, and the storm immediately ceases. In addition, the now-rudderless ship bearing the sailors is guided by "styffe stremes and streght" safely to shore (150). When the sailors arrive on land, they thank God for their safe return. Jonas, in the meantime, has been swallowed by a whale, in whose belly he rides in complete safety. Jonas' example is not one of willing submission to God's desire, but of forced submission, yet he still participates in the rudderless boat religious literary tradition. As Helen Cooper observes, "A whale may not appear much like a rudderless boat, but they do have a lot in common, most particularly in the helplessness of the person inside them to direct where they are going. Like the boats, too, the whale carries Jonah to the *right* place – the place chosen by God" (119). The poet relates that the whale is guided by God himself, "Thenne oure Fader to the fysch ferslych biddes / That he hym sput spakly upon spare drye" (337-338).

   The theme of forced exile by being cast adrift also occurs in medieval hagiography, and begins to appear frequently by the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Piccat 24). The most well-known of these exile narratives, the life of St.

Mary Magdalene, began circulating in Europe during the eleventh century

(Jansen 52). The best-known version of it appears in Jacobus de Voragine's

*Legenda Aurea*:

> omnes hi insimul et plures alii christiani navi ab infidelibus
> impositi et pelago sine aliquo gubernatore expositi, ut omnes
> scilicet submergerentur, divino tandem nutu Massiliam advenerunt
>
> [all these together, and many other Christians were set by the
> infidels into a ship, and abandoned in the sea without any
> helmsman, in order that they all certainly would be drowned, (but)
> at last by divine will they arrived in Marseilles]. (de Voragine, "De
> sancta Maria Magdelena," 409, translation mine)

Although Mary Magdalene and her followers do not willingly submit their lives

to God's care, their faithful perseverance under persecution is rewarded by the

divine preservation of their pilotless ship. Similar stories of thwarted

martyrdoms appear in numerous other saints' lives throughout the Middle Ages,

as well as in secular hagiographies such as Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*.

In addition, another variation of the rudderless boat episode began to

appear in hagiographic literature in which the corpse of a saint would be

miraculously translated to his or her burial place by boat. The best-known

example of this narrative is the translation of St. James the Great from the Holy

Land to Compostela, also found in the *Legenda Aurea*:

> Decollato autem Jacobo…discipuli ejus corpus nocte timore
> Judaeorum rapientes navi illud imposuerunt et sepulturam divinae

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prudentiae committentes navim sine regimine conscenderunt et angelo domini duce in Galiciam in regno Lupae applicuerunt.

[With James having been beheaded, however, the disciples carried his body away at night for fear of the Jews and set it into a ship, and committing its burial to divine providence, they embarked in the ship without steering, and led by an angel of the Lord, they landed in Galicia in the kingdom of Lupa]. (de Voragine, "de Sancto Jacobo Majore," 424, translation mine)

After its arrival in Spain, the body of St. James is credited with producing several miracles and is finally buried in Compostela.

*The Romance Tradition*

In addition to the religious tradition involving rudderless boats guided by divine providence, another rudderless boat tradition existed simultaneously. In many medieval romances a female fairy sends a rudderless boat to retrieve the hero and bring him to the fairy Otherworld (Larrington 36).[5] While there are many variations on the rudderless boat theme, there are several commonplace motifs which recur among them: the hero is wounded, the boat is luxuriously furnished and decorated, the hero is healed at his destination, and the hero returns home. Wounds occur, for example, in Marie de France's lai *Guigemar*, in which the hero is wounded by an arrow while hunting, and in the *Prose Tristan*, Tristan is poisoned in a duel. While the hero in *Partenopeus de Blois* is not

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[5] Carolyne Larrington identifies two kinds of fairy mistresses: the kind who comes to the mortal world to marry the hero, and the kind who brings the hero to the Otherworld. This study focuses on the latter type.

wounded, he has been wandering lost in a forest for several days when he finds

the ship, and both he and his horse are starving, cold, and weary.

Typically, there is a luxurious bed on the boat upon which the hero falls

asleep or loses consciousness, and/or the boat is sumptuously decorated with

elegant furnishings and tapestries. In both *Guigemar* and *Floriant and Florete*, the

ship itself is made from exotic ebony wood. The sumptuous tapestries in

Floriant's ship depict scenes from other famous romances and from the Garden

of Eden, while the beds in both *Guigemar* and the *Queste del Saint Graal* were

constructed by King Solomon himself with wood from Solomon's temple. The

lavishness of the boats and their exotic materials add to the romantic atmosphere

of the story and contribute to the perception that the hero has encountered a

foreign, perhaps otherworldly, vessel. The luxury also adds a sense of adventure

rather than trepidation, in contrast to the perilous boats associated with the

religious tradition.

During the journey, time passes in an unusual way, whether the hero

becomes unaware of the passage of time or the journey is supernaturally short or

long (Roland 80-81). After he arrives at his destination, if the hero was wounded,

he is healed by a woman with whom he falls in love, as occurs in *Guigemar* and

the *Prose Tristan*. If he was not wounded, he encounters a woman who becomes

his lover, as in *Partenopeus de Blois*. Finally, after his sojourn in the Otherworld,

the hero returns to his homeland (Cooper 136).

In her discussion of the rudderless boat episode type in medieval English

romance, Helen Cooper observes that the two kinds of rudderless boat – the

treacherous vessel of the religious tradition and the adventurous boat of romance

– have so many elements in common that "the two kinds of vessel cannot finally

be separated from each other" (128). Marie de France's lai *Eliduc* presents a good

example of this blend. As a lai, the narrative falls within the genre of courtly

romance, and its subject matter of love and chivalry conforms to generic romance

conventions. In the story, a married Breton nobleman named Eliduc is exiled to

Logres and takes a mistress. The two lovers board a ship to return to Brittany,

but a storm breaks the ship's rudder and the sail rips away from the mast. The

ship's other occupants – Eliduc's most trusted counselors – blame the presence of

Eliduc's mistress for the storm. She swoons and falls unconscious, but Eliduc

believes that she has died. He throws one of his men overboard, through sheer

navigational skill he is able to regain control of the rudderless boat, and he

guides the boat to harbor.

The storm at sea caused by one of the passengers' misconduct draws an

obvious parallel to the biblical story of Jonah, and the broken rudder and terror

described in the scene are reminiscent of the religious rudderless boat tradition.

Further, the mistress' unconscious body echoes the image of St. James' corpse

floating toward Spain. Here we see a traditional romantic form adopting

elements of the religious tradition.[6]

Cooper notes in particular that the supernatural vessels are often

associated with women. In the religious tradition, they are often helpless

martyrs, as in the case of Mary Magdalene or Chaucer's Custance, and Cooper

claims that women function best in this role because "God's power is made most

apparent by contrast with the weakness of the victim" (129). This argument

extends equally to a saint's corpse, regardless of its gender. A dead body is

powerless to control its surroundings, and God's power is revealed through its

safe arrival at its destination.

Cooper also observes that in romance, the opposite is true. Fairy

mistresses are often the commanders of magic vessels, and so they are placed in

positions of power (129). While this dynamic was well established in southern

European and French medieval literature, Cooper notes that "the Anglo-Norman

and English tradition of romance treated the motif of the magic ship devised by a

powerful woman with rather more caution" (130). She draws particularly upon

the boats that appear in Malory and in his sources to demonstrate the ways in

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[6] It is worth noting, however, that Eliduc's lack of powerlessness on board the boat (both his killing of the fellow sailor and his ability to control the boat) signals a divergence from both religious and romance traditions.

which English romances valued "plausibility" over fantasy, and it is toward

Malory I also turn next.

<div align="center">*Rudderless Boats in the* Morte d'Arthur</div>

Rudderless boats appear throughout Malory's text, from the magical boat

that transports Arthur to Sir Damas' prison in "The Tale of King Arthur" to the

boat that takes him to Avalon in the final tale. One particular type of rudderless

boat story which is repeated and varied is what I call the "body in a boat"

episode type. This episode type represents a blend of the romantic and religious

traditions that I have explained above and contain similar structural elements.

Even within Malory's text, however, the variations are not uniform. The episodes

borrow certain elements from romance, and some from the religious tradition,

but not necessarily the same elements. This union of the religious and romantic

traditions result in a narrative pattern in Malory's work which maintains

romantic narrative forms while also emphasizing the Christian ideals of

obedience and self-sacrifice.

*Galahad*

In the *Morte d'Arthur*, the series of "body in a boat" episodes involving Sir

Galahad on the Grail Quest best demonstrate the blending of the romantic and

hagiographic genres. Galahad endures four self-propelled boat journeys in the

course of the quest: the first journey, on which Percival's sister leads him; the second journey, which takes place on a boat built by Solomon's wife; the third journey, with his father Lancelot on board the boat which contains the body of Percival's sister; and the fourth journey, which takes him to Sarras at the end of the Grail Quest. The only boat in which Galahad himself serves as the "body" in the boat, however, is the last one, therefore I will be examining that one in detail as my exemplum of the blending of romantic and hagiographical narratives.

In the fourth boat episode, Galahad, Percival, and Bors find a ship which contains a bed, a silver table, and the Grail. The knights board the ship, and after a lengthy but indeterminate amount of time, Bors and Percival encourage Galahad to lie down in the bed and sleep. Galahad does so, and after another lengthy and indeterminate amount of time, he wakes up to find the boat has arrived in the city of Sarras (II: 1032.1-31).

Malory's source text, the *Queste del Saint Graal*, provides a detailed history of the ship which Malory truncates considerably in his own work. One of the details that remains, however, is that the ship was built by King Solomon's wife. Esther Quinn has noted that Solomon's wife fulfills the role of the traditional romantic fairy mistress in this episode (196). Solomon's wife demonstrates a supernatural prophetic ability when she predicts that the ship will be found by Percival's sister who will then lead Galahad to it, and she is responsible for the

construction and embarkation of the ship itself. Like the fairy mistresses in

*Partenopeus de Blois* and *Floriant and Florete*, Solomon's wife sends a rudderless

ship to the mortal hero of the story. At the same time, however, her connection to

the biblical character King Solomon firmly anchors her in Christian history. As

Quinn observes, the account of the boat's construction is loosely based on the

traditional rood-tree legend in which three seeds from the Garden of Eden are

planted and grow into one single tree (219). In the legend, the wood from the tree

is used first in the construction of Solomon's temple and later in the construction

of the cross on which Christ is crucified. Quinn argues that the author of the

*Queste* replaced the rood-tree legend's temple with the mysterious ship which

created a blend of the religious and romantic genres:

> once the association of Temple and ship was made, the Cistercian author proceeded to draw on an entirely different body of tradition. In the process of changing the Temple to a ship, he blended the sibyl who prophesies in the Temple with the fairy mistress who sends a ship to the hero; other elements are then added which have a parallel both in romance literature and religious allegory. The result is a fusion of romantic and religious traditions. (196)

This fusion of traditions is repeated in Malory's version of this episode and

Quinn's associations between the *Queste* and its sources also can apply to

Malory's text.

One of the "other elements" that shares the connections to both romance

and religious allegory is the bed in Solomon's boat upon which Galahad sleeps.

A similar bed appears in both *Guigemar* and *Partenopeus de Blois*, and Guigemar's bed, as Quinn notes, is also connected to King Solomon (196). As well as appearing in these romances, the bed participates in religious allegory as a symbol of the cross.[7] In both the *Queste* and the *Morte d'Arthur*, the bed has a kind of canopy made of three spindles which are carved from the tree under which Abel, the son of the biblical Adam and Eve, was murdered by his brother Cain. Quinn links this canopy of spindles to a romance tradition involving a canopied bed which appears in the romances of Alexandre de Paris, *Lanzelet*, and *Perlesvaus* (200-201). This observation strengthens her argument that the episode of Solomon's ship represents a blending of the religious and romantic traditions.

Unlike the beds bearing the lovers of the romances to their fairy mistresses, however, Galahad's bed takes him to Sarras and ultimately to the place of his death. By boarding the mysterious ship and lying in the bed, Galahad becomes a kind of Christ figure, and his sleep is a symbolic death:

> Of particular poignance is the empty bed, representing the cross which bore Jesus, surrendering himself for the love of mankind, the empty bed in which Galahad chastely reclines as a sign of the surrender of his will wholly for the love of Christ. When one remembers the erotic associations – the bed of the polygamous Solomon and the bed which brings the lover to his fairy mistress - one feels the poignance of Galahad's lonely surrender. (203-4)

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[7] For a discussion of the cross/bed connection in medieval allegory, see Pauphilet 151.

While the canopy of spindles above the bed represents simultaneously the fall of

mankind in the Garden of Eden and its future redemption by Christ on the cross,

Galahad within the bed represents both the epitome of the Arthurian ideal and

its inevitable end. By lying down in the bed, Galahad becomes a "body" in the

boat, and just as the ship itself serves as a conduit between the Old Testament era

and the Arthurian era as well as a bridge between religious allegory and

romantic tradition, the image of Galahad's inert body sailing in a rudderless boat

acts as a link between the other inert bodies in boats that appear in the *Morte*.

Most importantly, the image of Galahad's body in the boat sailing toward Sarras

foreshadows the image of Arthur's body in a boat sailing toward Avalon.

*Percival's Sister*

The closest analogue to Galahad's "body in a boat" episode is the episode

in which the dying sister of Percival orders that her dead body be placed in a

boat: "And whan I am dede, I requyre you that ye burye me nat in thys contrey,

but as sone as I am dede putte me in a boote at the nexte haven, and lat me go as

aventures woll lede me" (II: 1003.22-25). Percival arranges for his sister's dying

wishes to be met and writes a letter describing the circumstances of her death

which he places in her right hand. The boat itself is covered in black silk (II:

1004:10-11) and we later learn it has no sail or oars (II: 1011.11) After the boat has

been adrift for a time, Lancelot encounters and boards it. Inside he sees "a fayre

bed, and therein lyynge a jantillwoman dede, which was sir Percivalles sister" (II: 1011.21-22). Eventually, the ship makes its way to Sarras, where it arrives at the same moment as the ship bearing Galahad. The Grail Knights retrieve the body of Percival's sister and give her a noblewoman's burial (II: 1032.31-1033.18).

The boat bearing Percival's sister, like Galahad's boat, is undoubtedly borrowed from the romance tradition with its fair bed, its black silk canopy, and its journey to a foreign land. Percival's sister herself has also been equated with the traditional role of the fairy mistress: "Like typical fairy females, she appears out of nowhere, unannounced, and summons the man she has come to help. Her rudderless boat, driven by forces unseen and unexplained, goes where it must and when it must. It bears objects whose special properties are tied to the specific identity and destiny of the hero" (Traxler 267). At the same time, her story also borrows heavily from the religious tradition (271). Her martyrdom reflects several medieval martyr narratives,[8] and Donald Hoffman has even associated her with Christ himself ("Percival's Sister" 73). Therefore, her story, like Galahad's, represents a synthesis of the romantic and religious traditions. While Galahad's participation in the religious tradition takes the form of religious

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[8] Besides the connections to the legends of Mary Magdalen and St. James the Greater, which I have already summarized, the story also resembles the translation of the body of St. Juliana, whose corpse is placed in a boat which is driven to the shores of Campania in a storm.

allegory, however, Percival's sister more closely resembles a medieval saint, and her story is heavily influenced by medieval hagiography.

Even more directly, the translation of the body of Percival's sister and its burial in a foreign land finds a parallel example in the *Golden Legend*'s description of the translation of the body of St. James the Greater to Spain. James' disciples are imprisoned by a heathen king soon after they arrive, but an angel helps them escape from prison. They eventually bury James's body in the palace of Queen Lupa who converts to Christianity along with her people, and many subsequent miracles are attributed to the saint's relics.

Many elements of Percival's sister's story correspond to this hagiography. While the body of Percival's sister is not accompanied at first, she is eventually joined by Lancelot who lives on the boat for more than a month, during which time he is miraculously sustained with heavenly manna (II: 1011.16-30). Galahad eventually joins him, and they remain on the boat together for six months. The boat ends its journey in Sarras, which Malory describes as "in the partis of Babilonye" (II: 1036.5) and which, despite its association with the Grail, appears to be a pagan city. Soon after their arrival, the Grail Knights are, like James' disciples, imprisoned by a pagan king. After the king's death, Galahad becomes the king of Sarras, ensuring the conversion of the city to both Christianity and the Arthurian *ethos*. Percival, Percival's sister, and Galahad are eventually buried

together in the palace, just as St. James was eventually buried in the palace of Queen Lupa. Although Galahad's kingship secures the conversion of the kingdom, Armstrong and Hodges admit that "[Percival's sister's] voyage to Sarras is part of the Christianization of an old world…and her death not only completes the course of her worshipful life but also completes and redefines one strand of world history that ties Britain to the Near East" (110). In another parallel to the burial of St. James in Spain, which resulted in the conversion of the Galician people to Christianity, the burial of Percival's sister connects to the Christianization of Sarras and reinforces the hagiographical nature of her story. The image of the martyred body of Percival's sister in a boat proves such a powerful one, in fact, that Malory repeats it, although to different effect, in the episode featuring the death of Elaine of Astolat.

*Elaine of Astolat*

When Elaine of Astolat dies, Malory presents the reader with an identical image to the corpse of Percival's sister: a dead woman lying in a boat covered in black cloth and holding a letter in her right hand. Despite the visual similarities between the funeral boats of Percival's sister and Elaine of Astolat, however, the two women serve different thematic functions within the narrative. Unlike Percival's saintly sister, Elaine leaves nothing to chance or even divine providence. She assumes control of her own death and directs the path her

corpse will take as well as its burial. While the two scenes are tied together with the repetition of the "body in a boat" episode type, Elaine of Astolat's episode carries only the appearance and structure of hagiography, and omits its message of faithful endurance. While it retains hagiographical overtones through its resemblance to the episode with Percival's sister, Elaine's episode offers an example of earthly rather than heavenly attachment.

The differences between the two episodes demonstrate this diminished hagiographical theme. While Percival's sister drifts in a boat without physical guidance to the foreign, mythical land of Sarras, Elaine's boat is guided by a steersman from one English town to another (Guildford to Winchester) along the River Thames. G. R. Stewart claims that Malory's addition of these geographically specific details and the means of guiding the boat "transformed the voyage of a magical boat into an entirely realistic occurrence" (206). This injection of realism distances Elaine's episode from the romantic landscape navigated by Percival's sister and places Elaine's boat within the very real geographic space of medieval England. Unlike the episode with Percival's sister which fits into both the romance and hagiographical genres, it seems that Elaine's story, while it repeats the body in a boat image, does not fully belong in either category.

In addition, Elaine's use of a steersman, and her explicit instructions on how she would like her body to be dressed and how the boat should be decorated, are not just matters of practicality that bring a sense of realism to the text. Elaine's exertion of control over her own death – from her willful refusal of food and drink and her arguments with her confessor to her burial instructions and letter to Lancelot – negate the hagiographical theme of submission to divine will. Although Percival's sister also instructs the Grail knights to place her body in a boat, her instructions are accompanied by prophecies of where the boat will arrive and the burials of the Grail knights themselves: "And as sone as ye three com to the cite of Sarras, there to enchyeve the Holy Grayle, ye shall fynde me undir a towre aryved. And the[re] bury me in the spirituall palyse. For I shall telle you for trouthe, there sir Galahad shall be buryed, and ye bothe, in the same place" (II: 1003.25-29). Her words indicate that she has preternatural knowledge of the future and further denote her status as a saintly figure. She does not describe what the boat should look like, nor does she mention the letter that Percival writes to explain her identity to anyone who might find the boat. Just as Percival writes a letter for his sister, Elaine arranges for her own brother to write a letter, but Elaine tells him exactly what to write: "worde by worde lyke as she devised hit" (II: 1094.7-8). Then she gives detailed instructions on her transportation to Camelot:

> And whyle my body ys hote lat thys lettir be put in my ryght honde, and my honde bound faste to the letter untyll that I be colde. And lette me be put in a fayre bed with all the rychyste clothys that I have aboute me, and so lat my bed and all my rychyst clothis be ledde with m[e] in a charyat unto the nexte place where the Temmys ys; and there lette me be put within a barget, and but one man with me, such as ye truste, to stirre me thidir; and that my barget be coverde with blacke samyte over and over. And thus, fadir, I beseche you, lat hit be done. (II: 1094.9-1095.4)

In contrast to Percival's sister, Elaine does not demonstrate certainty about what will happen to her body or the boat. She even goes so far as to have the letter bound to her hand so that it cannot be lost. Instead of prophecies, Elaine's instructions are accompanied by pleas. She beseeches her father to carry out her wishes, and she must trust that he will follow her instructions.

These final pleas have yielded a wide variety of interpretations from scholars. Rebecca L. Reynolds reads the scene as a mild condemnation of Elaine's love for Lancelot (35), and Carolyn Hares-Stryker describes Elaine's behavior as "dangerous" and "manipulative" ("Lily Maids" 129). Sue Ellen Holbrook, however, claims that Malory "does not present Elaine in moral decline" (176), and James Noble notes that Elaine is a character whom Malory "seems to have taken some pains to treat sympathetically" (47). As Georgiana Donavin observes, the text itself yields at least three different interpretations of Elaine's character: "For the court, Elaine is innocent and pitiable; for the feminist reader, she is matured and admirable; for Lancelot, and eventually for Arthur and Guinevere,

the maid is overly emotional and erasable" (77). In other words, Elaine is a

difficult character to judge, and her status largely depends upon who is judging

her.

When considered through the lens of the "body in a boat" episode type,

Elaine follows the example set by Percival's sister in terms of structure and

appearance, but the Fair Maid does not follow her counterpart's spiritual

example of submission and sacrifice. The result is a portrait of an earthly woman

rather than a saintly one. This departure from the hagiographical themes of the

"body in a boat" episode type, however, does not mean that Elaine does not

retain a certain element of spirituality. In the words of Hares-Stryker, "we cannot

ignore the Christian literary tradition surrounding this image of Elaine as she

floats toward Camelot" ("Elaine of Astolat" 205). D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. has

argued that Elaine's deathbed protest that her love for Lancelot is both good and

godly "introduces the concept of Godliness combined with earthly love" as a

central theme to the latter portion of the *Morte* ("All maner of good love…" 15).

While she may pose a more earthly figure than Percival's sister, and while her

priest censures her for focusing too much on earthly love, Elaine – much like

Lancelot, who after failing the Grail Quest is hailed as a great earthly knight –

still represents a kind of earthly godliness.

In addition, Elizabeth Edwards notes the influence that the journey of

Percival's sister has on the reader's impression of Elaine's episode:

> [Elaine] emerges from the domestic to enter, in death, the semiotics
> of the supernatural, as she floats downstream in a barge, with a
> letter in her hand, exactly as Percival's sister had on the Grail quest,
> accompanied by 'a poure man' whose silent presence is an eery
> echo of earlier quest figures. Elaine, then, returns to the realm of
> otherness." ("The Place of Women" 53)

The *dilatatio* of the image of a letter-bearing female corpse in a boat swathed in

black silk inextricably links the two episodes together and, furthermore, links

them with subsequent body in a boat episodes which appear later in the *Morte*.

As Maria K. Greenwood suggests, "Only at the very end does the reader realize

that Elaine prefigured the fate of…all the main characters, who all in one way or

another, die for what they hold most dear" (170). As Malory's work nears its

close, the body in a boat images that have recurred throughout the text culminate

in one of the most famous scenes in all of British literature: the death of King

Arthur himself.

*King Arthur*

As Arthur lies dying of the mortal wound he receives in battle against

Mordred, a boat arrives to take him to Avalon:

> E]vyn faste by the banke hoved a lytyll barge wyth many fayre
> ladyes in hit, and amonge hem all was a quene, and all they had
> blak hoodis. And all they wepte and shryked whan they saw kynge
> Arthur.

'Now put me into that barge,' seyde the kynge.
And so he ded sofftely, and there resceyved hym three ladyes with grete mournyng. And so they sette hem downe, and in one of their lappis kyng Arthure layde hys hede. And then the quene seyde, 'A, my dere brothir! Why have ye taryed so longe frome me? Alas, thys wounde on youre hede hath caught over-much coulde!' And anone they rowed fromward the londe, and sir Bedyvere behylde all tho ladyes go frowarde hym. (III: 1240.14-27)

A few lines later, Malory reveals that one of the queens in the boat with Arthur is his half-sister, Morgan le Fay, whose very name associates her with fairy folklore and suggests her role as a traditional romance fairy mistress. The boat is also a romantic convention with its mysterious origin, and the isle of Avalon as its Otherworldly destination. Muriel Whitaker also notes the abundance of romance motifs in this scene: "the beautiful supernatural women, the westward voyage, the 'locus amoenus', the idea of healing, and the possibility of the hero's return to this world" (29).

As with the other boat episodes, however, Arthur's boat scene cannot be confined to mere romance tradition. As Meg Roland observes, nearly all of the magical boats in the *Morte d'Arthur* serve a dual purpose:

Malory's *Morte Darthur* is replete with this dual function of ships - the metaphysical and the historical. The two modalities converge in the iconic episode of Arthur's passing from this world: carried aboard the bark with the three women of Avalon, Arthur's sea-crossing drifts indeterminately between the realms of silk and armament, a melancholy mingling of romance out-of-time and linear chronicle time. (82)

Although Roland's primary concern is the melding of romance and chronicle in the text, her argument demonstrates the same possibility for other genres as well, including hagiography.

At first glance, Arthur's boat scene has little to do with the hagiographic tradition of the previous boat episodes, but as Lucy Allen Paton suggests,

> It is not beyond possibility, although we have no direct evidence on the subject, that the tradition of Arthur's voyage in a fairy boat to Avalon united the more readily with the report of his burial in Glastonbury through the influence of legends that told of the mysterious rudderless ships, which without a pilot transported the bodies of saints to their place of burial. (36, n.1)

I argue that the *dilatatio* of the "body in a boat" episodes provides one aspect of the evidence that Paton claims is absent. Arthur's prone body, surrounded by ladies in black hoods reminiscent of the black silk covering the funeral barges of Percival's sister and Elaine of Astolat, offers a visual parallel to the preceding boat episodes, and their hagiographical associations bleed into King Arthur's boat scene as well.

The mixture of romance and hagiography in the *Morte* allows for arguments like that of Hanks, who has claimed that Malory presents Arthur as a kind of Christ figure, whose uncertain death is accompanied by rumors of his imminent return ("All maner of good love…" 21). This portrait of Arthur as a Christ figure further connects him with the saintly Sir Galahad, whose own boat journey to Sarras I have already discussed.

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In addition, the interpretation of the phrase "chaunged hys lyff" (III: 1242.27) which Malory uses to describe Arthur's state of being after his departure in the boat also allows for a Christ-like interpretation of Arthur. While Whitaker connects the phrase to the idea of crossing to the Otherworld and implies that Arthur is still alive in Avalon (29), Alan J. Fletcher argues that the phrase is linked to medieval liturgy and leaves no doubt that Arthur is, in fact, dead (23). At the same time, however, he claims the phrase is complex and that "it expresses at once the king's mortality and his immortality, holding both in balance, and stressing neither one before the other" (23). This concept of simultaneous mortality and immortality echoes the Christian belief in the dual nature of Christ as both fully God and fully man.[9] This interpretation also goes well with Roland's assertion that "Arthur simultaneously succumbs to the ultimate marker of chronicle time – his mortality – and yet ever hovers on the verge of return. Arthur is both dead and ever returning" (82). Malory's assertion that Arthur was "had by the wyll of Oure Lorde Jesu into another place" (III: 1242.23-24) also emphasizes the Christian elements of the scene over the Otherworldly. Morgan le Fay did not take him, nor did the people rowing the boat to Avalon. Instead, as with the mysteriously guided boats of Galahad and Percival's sister, divine will brings Arthur to his final destination.

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[9] For a full explanation of this Christian doctrine, see Grudem 529-567.

The impact of Arthur's death on the remaining characters in the story also

reveals the text's Christian inclinations. Citing the king's death as motivation,

both Guinevere and Lancelot join monastic communities; once Lancelot becomes

a monk, his kinsmen follow him. Karen Cherewatuk convincingly argues that

Lancelot's death closely follows the pattern of a saint's life, which suggests that

he achieves redemption ("The Saint's Life" 70-73). After Lancelot's saintly death,

the other knights "al lyved in their cuntreyes as holy men" (III: 1260.3-4). A select

few – Bors, Ector, Blamour, and Bleoberis – go on Crusade to the Holy Land

where they "dyed upon a Good Fryday for Goddes sake" (III: 1260.15). The

formation of the knightly monastic community, and the transformation of

martial service to Arthur into martial service for God, shows the role of Arthur's

death in the conversion of the Round Table. Further, his role as emperor and the

baptism of Saracens such as Sir Priamus and Sir Palomides show that Arthur's

Christian influence spreads beyond the borders of England. Just as the body of

Percival's sister takes part in the conversion of Sarras, Arthur's body takes part in

the conversion of the Western world. As the *dilatatio* of the "body in a boat"

episodes suggest, hagiographical overtones carry over into the romantic scene of

Arthur's death, and this Christian influence extends to the end of the *Morte

d'Arthur* itself.

CHAPTER FOUR

Fellowship in Death: Deathbed Attendant Episodes

In the previous chapter, I discussed the series of "Body in a Boat" episodes

that recur within the *Morte d'Arthur*. This chapter expands upon the theme of

death, but focuses on the role of deathbed attendant rather than on the dying

individual. For this study, I will analyze the *dilatatio* of three of Malory's

deathbed scenes: the deaths of Uther Pendragon, Uwain les Avoutres, and

Gawain. These scenes are linked together by the presence of a deathbed

attendant at each bedside: Merlin, Gawain, and Arthur, respectively. To provide

a structural framework for these episodes, I use a historical source: the long

version of the fifteenth-century *ars moriendi*,[1] which in its fifth chapter describes

the need for a "felawe & trewe frende" to serve as a deathbed attendant and

delineates the attendant's duties (Atkinson 35). First, I give a brief explanation of

the *ars moriendi* tradition and the responsibilities of a deathbed attendant. I then

show how these duties complement the value of fellowship that appears so

prominently in the *Morte d'Arthur*. Next, I discuss the two less-than-exemplary

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[1] Nancy Lee Beaty's study traces the origins of the *ars moriendi* and the evolution of the two extant versions. She notes that the short version consists of a single chapter on the temptations faced by the dying person, while the long version contains six chapters, each addressing a different concern. See Beaty 2-3.

examples of Merlin and Gawain as deathbed attendants before concluding with Arthur's ideal example in that role. I argue that the action of helping a fellow knight to die honorably reflects the characteristic of fellowship which plays such an important role in determining which Malorian knights are most noble. Merlin displays his dual nature and his outsider status by acting not as a fellow, but as a political advisor at Uther's deathbed. Gawain's self-absorption at Uwain's deathbed speaks poorly of his fellowship, and Uwain is left to achieve a good death on his own. Arthur's actions as a deathbed attendant to Gawain ensure a noble death for the dying knight, and paint a portrait of Arthur both as king of the "fairest fellowship" in the world and as a faithful fellow in his own right.

*The Ars Moriendi*

The role of a deathbed attendant is described by various fifteenth-century manuals for dying, known as *ars moriendi*, or "the art of dying." The purpose of *ars moriendi* manuals was to give spiritual guidance to a dying person and to the people – both clergy and laity – attending to the dying person's needs.[2] The *ars moriendi* suggests that all dying people should have a trusted attendant at their bedside to help them to concentrate on spiritual matters. For example, the final

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[2] There is some scholarly disagreement on whether the intended audience was clergy or laity. Sister Mary Catharine O'Connor gives a summary of the various arguments, and suggests it was a helpful guide for both young, inexperienced priests and people who did not have access to a priest. See O'Connor 5-6.

chapter of William Caxton's 1490 edition of *The Arte & Crafte to Know Well to Dye*

suggests to a dying person that he or she designate:

> a felawe & trewe frende devoute and convenable, which in his laste
> end assyste hym truly, and that he comforte and corage hym in
> stedfastnesse of the fayth wyth goode pacyence and devocyon,
> wyth good confidence and perseveraunce, and that over hym saye
> all thyse sayd oroysons well ententyfly and devoutely whilys that
> he is in travayl of deth. (Atkinson 35)[3]

According to this text, the duty of a deathbed attendant is threefold:

1) to comfort the dying person both physically and spiritually
2) to reinforce the dying person's Christian faith, and
3) to pray for the dying person

The reliability of deathbed attendants depended upon how well they fulfilled

these prescribed duties, and therefore these three requirements serve as the

structural basis for my study of deathbed attendants in the *Morte d'Arthur*.

Further, the ability of the Malorian deathbed attendants to perform these duties

demonstrates in microcosm the quality of their fellowship throughout the text.

### *Fellowship in the* Morte d'Arthur

Fellowship is one of the most important concepts in the *Morte d'Arthur*.

Elizabeth Archibald has noted the frequency of Malory's use of the words

"fellow" and "fellowship," and that his own adaptation of the Arthurian material

includes significantly more instances of those words than his sources (312-313).

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[3] All subsequent quotations from the *ars moriendi* in this chapter are taken from this version.

Felicity Riddy explores the concept of Malorian fellowship by interpreting the

*Morte* as a study in unity and division, with the knightly fellowship of the Round

Table serving as the primary unit in the text (37), and Beverly Kennedy notes the

potential of fellowship as a heavy influence on knightly behavior: "the love

which binds knights together in fellowship may be as powerful in its effects as

the love of a knight for his lady" (203). Despite the popularity of the term

"fellowship," however, few scholars have attempted to settle on a definition.

Elizabeth Archibald observes that, of the eight senses given for "felyship" in the

*MED*, five of them are "well attested" in the *Morte*:

> 1) casual or temporary companionship
> 2) close or intimate companionship
> 4) the spirit that binds companions together – charity, amity,
> camaraderie
> 5) band of associates, followers, fighting men, crew
> 6) organized society, collegiate body, knightly order, monastic
> community (311-312)

Further, Mark Ricciardi has convincingly, although implicitly, argued for the

third sense: "relationship or behavior of boon companions – revelry" when he

observes that Arthur's exhortation that his knights celebrate together after his

killing of the giant of St Michael's Mount bolsters their fellowship (25). As

Archibald suggests, nearly every possible definition of "fellowship" is present in

the *Morte*, and several of them are very well represented. "Fellowship" and its

various meanings are obviously of great concern to Malory.

While many scholars have argued that fellowship serves as a primary

theme – perhaps *the* primary theme – of the *Morte d'Arthur*,[4] only a few scholars

have attempted to define the particular qualities of Malory's ideal of fellowship.

Archibald attributes the difficulty in defining the meaning of "fellowship" to the

existence of two different kinds of fellowship in the text: the temporary bond

between knights who pursue adventures together and then part ways, and the

permanent bond that exists between them as part of an established knightly

order (316). She also differentiates Arthur's experience of fellowship from that of

his knights:

> For the king, fellowship is always collective and public: it cannot be
> man to man, as it so often is for his knights, perhaps in part because
> he never goes out questing himself. For Arthur the concept of
> fellowship is not flexible, and it is not personal. But for his knights
> there is not only the public and communal fellowship of the Round
> Table, but also private and individual fellowship, based on
> camaraderie and admiration. (325)

Marc Ricciardi's study builds upon Archibald's observations by emphasizing

Arthur's role in leading and maintaining the fellowship between his knights. He

identifies three qualities of the Round Table fellowship: the knights celebrate

victories together (25), they fight together against common enemies (25-26), and

they follow a common leader (26-27). In contrast, Kevin Grimm focuses on the

relationships between individual knights, especially the qualities of

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[4] See Riddy 37, Lambert 56-65, Mann "Knightly Combat" 332, Mahoney 181, and Brewer 107.

"camaraderie and admiration" that Archibald identifies. Grimm compares the Round Table to historical orders of knighthood, whose common concerns included the proven noble lineage of its members; equality among its members, regardless of wealth or title; absolute loyalty to the brotherhood (which may be superseded by loyalty to the king); and the importance of family obligations, which served as the model for knightly bonds (77-78). Grimm notes that the Round Table fellowship prioritizes these concerns differently, however, than their historical counterparts: "In the world Malory creates, knightly fellowship becomes equal even to loyalty to one's lord and clearly transcends loyalty to one's family" (78). While Ricciardi names Arthur as the one who sets the ideal example of fellowship in the *Morte*, Grimm claims that Tristram and Lancelot – and particularly the bond between the two – embody Malory's ideal of fellowship (94). Neither scholar is wrong. In keeping with Archibald's discussion of the two types of fellowship, Arthur represents the ideal of "collective and public fellowship," and the mutual admiration between Tristram and Lancelot represents the "private and individual fellowship" that she identifies.

The latter form of fellowship takes precedence in the scenes which include deathbed attendants in Malory. In addition, Caxton's use of the phrase "felawe & trewe frende" corresponds with the ways that Malory uses the word "fellow" in the *Morte d'Arthur*, and the duties of the deathbed attendant described in the *ars*

*moriendi* coincide with the duties of an Arthurian knight toward another individual knight. The *ars moriendi*'s instructions for the deathbed attendant to "assyste hym truly" correspond to Arthur's proclamation that "ever hit ys…a worshypfull knyghtes dede to help and succoure another worshypfull knyght whan he seeth hym in daungere" (III: 1114.20-22). A knight is obliged to help another knight in trouble, and a knight is never in more trouble than when he is lying on his deathbed.

Likewise, the directive to "comforte and corage hym in stedfastnesse of the faith" is reflected by Malory's knights in the ways in which they express their Christian faith, such as in the conversion of Saracens such as Priamus and Palomides as well as the repeated swearing of oaths. The Round Table is a Christian fellowship, and the Christian faith is an essential part of its identity. Knights repeatedly swear by their faith in God and in their faith in knighthood as well as more simply with the oath "by my faith." These throwaway oaths evoke the ritualized oath the knights take every Pentecost and reinforce their commitment to their king and to chivalric values in addition to their Christian faith. By saying them aloud, the oath-makers also remind those who hear them of those commitments, and presumably their good example inspires the same commitment in others.[5]

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[5] On the infectiousness of good knightly behavior as a result of fellowship, see Grimm 87.

At the deathbed, encouraging faith is defined by the *ars moriendi* as doing

such things as making sure a priest is present, and if one is not, then the

attendant should perform the actions of the priest to the best of his or her ability

(Atkinson 31). Likewise, if the dying person has lost the ability to speak or

answer the priest's questions, then the attendant may answer instead (29). The

manual also suggests that the attendant hold a crucifix within the sight of the

dying person and sprinkle holy water over him or her so that the dying person

may remember Christ's suffering and resist temptation (30).

The third duty of the deathbed attendant, to "over hym saye all thyse sayd

oroysons well ententyfly and devoutely whilys that he is in travayl of deth,"

rarely occurs in the *Morte*. In general, Malory's knights pray frequently, but their

prayers are most often for themselves, as they try to resist temptation or

participate in mass prayers. On the few occasions when knights explicitly pray

for another living knight, the praying knight is one of the Grail Knights (Bors,

Percival, or Galahad), which is in keeping with their pious natures.[6] More

commonly, knights request prayers for their souls after their deaths, as Balin,

Gawain, Arthur, and Lancelot do. Malory himself, in his final explicit, exhorts his

readers to "praye for me whyle I am on lyve that God sende me good

delyveraunce. And whan I am deed, I praye you all praye for my soule" (III:

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[6] II: 1005.2-4, 1013.31-33, and 1036.27-32, for example.

1260.22-24). In the cases of his characters, Malory carefully describes the

fulfillment of their requests as their fellow knights offer prayers at the dead

knights' gravesides, and these graveside prayers replace the *ars moriendi*'s

bedside "orisons" in the *Morte* as a sign of fellowship.

Prayers for the soul had two purposes: to reduce the soul's punishments

in Purgatory and to preserve the memory of the dead person. Medieval church

doctrine held that unless a person died with a clean soul, his or her soul would

be consigned to Purgatory, which St. Augustine describes as a place of

temporary punishment after death, but which retains the hope of reaching

heaven: "But of those who suffer temporary punishments after death, all are not

doomed to those everlasting pains which are to follow that judgment; for to

some, as we have already said, what is not remitted in this world is remitted in

the next, that is, they are not punished with the eternal punishment of the world

to come" (708). To avoid lengthening the time spent in Purgatory, or worse,

suffering eternal damnation for their sins, dying people were encouraged to

make confession and to receive the Viaticum (Duffy 311). The official doctrine

that the prayers of the living on behalf of souls in Purgatory could shorten the

duration of their suffering was established in 1274 at the Council of Lyons (Boase

46-47), and played a large part in medieval funerary rites. By the later Middle

Ages, people with means commonly delegated sums of money in their wills for

priests to say masses for them after their deaths. Guilds and other membership

societies would also raise funds to provide masses for their dead members, and

they would often celebrate death anniversaries with a single, annual collective

service which included a procession, a meal, and masses celebrated for a large

group of deceased individuals (J. Lynch 300).

Despite the historical reality of these prayers, Malory's knights do not

mention Purgatory as a motivation for prayers for their souls; they are more

concerned with the preservation of a knight's name and reputation through

memorialization. In his discussion of tombs in Malory's work, Kenneth Tiller

observes that "Like most medieval tombs, they involve both characters and

readers in the memorial process through which the dead acquire significance to

the living" (38). Tiller argues that, through memorialization of the dead, Arthur

and his knights are able to rewrite history so that the historical narrative

conforms to their preferred chivalric code (39-41). In other words, the affirmation

of the chivalric deeds of the living depends upon the remembered chivalric

deeds of the dead. This dependence works both ways, as Duffy argues when he

describes the significance that the prayers of the living had for the dead:

> The dead needed to be remembered, for the dead were, like the
> poor, utterly dependent on the loving goodwill of others…For
> medieval people, as for us, to die meant to enter a great silence, and
> the fear of being forgotten in that silence was as real to them as to
> any of the generations that followed. But for them that silence was
> not absolute and could be breached. To find ways and means of

doing so was one of their central religious occupations. For what late medieval English men and women at the point of death seem most to have wanted was that their names should be kept constantly in the memory and thus in the prayers of the living. (328)

In the *Morte*, where reputation is of utmost importance, this fear of being forgotten is a true source of anxiety. In addition, the manner of a knight's death in Malory's text impacts how he is remembered. According to the *ars moriendi*, even if a person had led an exemplary life, if that person gave into temptation in the final moments before death, their eternal life was at risk – thus the necessity for bedside attendants to help the dying person focus on heavenly things and resist temptation.

This attitude bleeds into the world of the Round Table knights. Deaths are important in Malory's world and the means of a knight's death can affect his reputation. No matter how noble or worthy he was in life; if he dies shamefully, the manner of his death overshadows the memory of his valorous deeds. For example, both King Pellinore and Sir Lamorak are murdered by fellow knights. Their deaths are repeatedly lamented, and when they are subsequently mentioned, they are often associated with their means of death.[7] These laments serve both to villainize the murderers and to emphasize the tragedy of a shameful death. Neither Pellinore nor Lamorak can be remembered without

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[7] See II: 716.2-15, 810.8-17, 1048.24-26, III: 1149.32-35, for just a few examples.

recalling their unfortunate ends. Alternatively, if a knight leads a less-than-ideal

life and yet dies honorably, he is remembered well, as in the example of Sir

Gawain which I will discuss later in this chapter. One of the goals of a deathbed

attendant was to ensure that the dying person met the best possible end.

In short, the *ars moriendi*'s call for a "felawe & trewe frende" to help attend

at the deathbed falls well within the purview of the Malorian ideal of fellowship.

As Mark Lambert suggests, a knight's quality of fellowship presents a way in

which his knightliness can be measured (56-57), therefore a knight's success in

demonstrating his fellowship as a deathbed attendant is a good indicator of his

fellowship overall.

*Merlin*

The first example of a Malorian deathbed attendant I discuss, however, is

not a knight. Merlin, who presides over the final hours of Arthur's father, Uther

Pendragon, acts in the role of a political advisor rather than as a "felawe."

Further, his personal background colors his actions and casts suspicion on his

motivations. Although Merlin is a good counselor and attempts to preserve the

line of succession at Uther's death, his actions do not adhere to the *ars moriendi*'s

exhortations to a deathbed attendant. Merlin's actions, while good for England

and for Arthur, demonstrate a poor sense of individual fellowship toward Uther.

As many scholars have already noted, Malory omits the story of Merlin's childhood and upbringing that appears in his source text.[8] The story was well known, however, and Riddy in particular has argued that both Malory and his audience would have known Merlin's origins (37). The *Suite du Merlin*, one of Malory's sources for this episode, casts Merlin as the son of a pious Christian woman who was raped and impregnated by the devil, and his supernatural powers derive from both parents (Libby 64). Merlin's mixed parentage has resulted in disparate interpretations of his character, despite Malory's omission of his backstory. While Thomas L. Wright focuses on the Christian side of Merlin and interprets Malory's version of him as "the agent through whom God's will and 'grace' are expressed" (23), Arthur Samuel Kimball describes him as "the half-formed trickster who miscreates the world" (29). Although Merlin claims to be the mouthpiece of God (I: 11.36-37), Richard Fehrenbacher observes that within the text, Merlin's words are not regarded as trustworthy by other characters and eventually even Malory himself must "abandon" Merlin as a legitimate source of information (12-13). Wendy Tibbetts Greene agrees with Fehrenbacher's assessment of Merlin's decline and further claims a wholly negative interpretation of his character: "At worst, Merlin is an evil designer deliberately miscreating Arthur's world; at best, he is an ambiguous character

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[8] See in particular T. Wright 23-27, Riddy 37, Radulescu 114, Fehrenbacher 6-10, Libby 64, and Hoffman, "Tragic Merlin," 15.

who simply fails to achieve his goals" (62). Donald Hoffman takes a more sympathetic view of Merlin as a tragic figure who is unable to prevent the fulfillment of his own prophecies: "Just as he himself is the product of his father's evil and his mother's good, he is the source of both the creation and the collapse of the kingdom" ("Tragic Merlin" 23).

Despite Merlin's troubling mix of divine and demonic supernatural qualities, Raluca Radulescu and Louis J. Boyle both argue that Merlin's political counsel is entirely trustworthy, and he acts unquestionably for the political good of England (Radulescu 115-119; Boyle 54-56). In addition, Bonnie Libby observes that Merlin possesses a kind of "pseudo-chivalry" as someone who is "outside the chivalric order, and yet he offers a constructive critique of the chivalry in Arthur's court" (66). These aspects of Merlin's contradictory character are the subject of this section. He acts consistently for the good of England, and though his actions are not always morally upright, they result in positive changes. While he is credited with "the preparation, establishment, and preservation of the Round Table" (Hoffman, "Tragic Merlin,"16), his actions do not demonstrate the qualities of fellowship that the members of the Round Table espouse. As I have already demonstrated, the exhortations of the *ars moriendi* for deathbed attendants correspond with qualities of fellowship valued by the Round Table, and Merlin's participation in Uther's death as a deathbed attendant shows that

he is more interested in the political stability of England than he is in acting as a "felawe" concerned with the dying king's spiritual health.

Two years after Arthur's birth, Uther falls deathly ill, and his enemies try to usurp the throne. Merlin intervenes, however, by forcing Uther to join his men on the battlefield: "'Sir,' said Merlyn, 'ye may not lye so as ye doo, for ye must to the feld, though ye ryde on an hors-lyttar. For ye shall never have the better of your enemyes but yf your persone be there, and thenne shall ye have the victory'" (I: 11.21-24). Merlin perhaps realizes that the king's imminent death is inevitable, and so he does what he can to ensure that Uther's line remains in power. Although the *ars moriendi* exhorts deathbed attendants to see to their dying friend's physical and spiritual comfort, the king's comfort is not Merlin's primary concern in this scene, and he organizes Uther's removal to the battlefield on a horse litter. This uncomfortable transport and Uther's subsequent lapse into his final illness demonstrate Merlin's prioritization of political concerns over personal ones.

As Merlin predicts, Uther's men win the battle, and they all return to London where Uther takes to his deathbed:

> And thenne he fyll passynge sore seke, so that thre dayes and thre nyghtes he was specheles; wherefore alle the barons made grete sorrow and asked Merlyn what counceill were best.
>  'There nys none other remedye,' said Merlyn, "but God wil have His wille. But loke ye al barons be bifore kynge Uther to-morne, and God and I shalle make hym to speke.'

    So on the morne alle the barons with Merlyn came tofore the
kyng. Thenne Merlyn said aloud unto kyng Uther,
    'Syre, shall your sone Arthur be kyng after your dayes of this
realme with all the appertenaunce?'
    Thenne Uther Pendragon torned hym and said in herynge of them
alle, 'I gyve hym Gods blissyng and myne, and byd hym pray for
my soule, and righteuously and worshipfully that he clayme the
croune upon forfeiture of my blessing,' and therewith he yelde up
the ghost. (I: 11.33-12.8)

This focus on political succession is appropriate and expected deathbed business.

Putting one's affairs in order before death was considered to be of vital

importance to medieval Christians as the *ars moriendi* and numerous written

wills attest (Duffy 322-323). As Wright observes, Malory deviates from his source

material in this scene by placing it in a public setting rather than a private one (T.

Wright 23). This change dramatically alters the implications of Uther's deathbed

scene by removing any doubt regarding Arthur's right to succession (Pochoda

78). The importance of a smooth and legitimate succession has been discussed at

length by both Terence McCarthy and Raluca Radulescu, and their arguments

support the necessity of Merlin's actions in Uther's death scene (McCarthy 13,

160; Radulescu 115-118).

In Malory's French source, the *Suite du Merlin*, the exchange of words

between Uther and Merlin is quiet and private: Merlin whispers in Uther's ear

and Uther replies in the dwindling voice of a sick and dying man (Radulescu

115). The barons do not overhear the conversation between Uther and Merlin,

therefore they do not know that Arthur is Uther's son nor do they hear Uther name a successor. Their squabbling over the throne, then, is the natural result of the absence of strong leadership, and they all want to fill the void that Uther's death leaves. In contrast, Malory's Merlin gathers the barons together, asks Uther aloud to confirm his successor, and Uther proclaims in an audible voice that Arthur is his son and heir. The fact that the barons witness this scene impacts the rest of the story. By bringing Uther's dying wishes into the public eye, Malory denies the English barons' their innocence through ignorance. His barons, fully aware of the line of succession, choose to ignore it, and through that treasonous choice Malory justifies Arthur's war against them.

Despite the positive motivation behind Merlin's insistence upon the legitimization of Arthur, his focus on the political situation distracts Uther from the business of "dying well." The *ars moriendi* specifies that the purpose of taking care of worldly concerns is to allow the dying person to redirect their focus onto spiritual things in their last hours: "And therfore whomsoeuer wyll well and surely deye, he ought to set symply, and all from hym alle outwarde thynges and temporell, and oughte alle to commytte to God fully, and if he soo doo in suffrynge pacyently the payne of deth, he satysfyeth for all his venyalle synnes" (Atkinson 25). Merlin's actions at Uther's deathbed, while they attempt to establish political stability, do not encourage Uther to shift his attention toward

eternity, or reinforce him in his Christian faith as the *ars moriendi* exhorts deathbed attendants to do.

Wright observes that, in this scene, "the distinction between Merlin and God is more tenuous" and calls him "the spokesman of God" (T. Wright 26). This claim along with Merlin's own assertion that "God and I shalle make hym to speke" certainly suggest Merlin is a divine mediator along the same vein as a prophet or priest. He does not, however, perform any priestly duties at Uther's deathbed, such as hearing Uther's confession of sins, administering the Viaticum, or even praying. Libby argues further that Merlin's dual spirituality casts suspicion upon him, even when his powers appear to have a divine origin: "Merlin's 'miracles' are ambiguous. Are they results of magical powers wrought by devilish craft, as the rumor goes, or are they truly Christian phenomena that reveal the will and power of God?" (65). Merlin claims to be the agent of God, but his demonic origins make it difficult to take his words at face value.

His demonic origins also recall a disturbing image from the illustrated *ars moriendi.* One of the *ars moriendi*'s sections describes a series of temptations that a dying person will endure on the deathbed. After the dying person's will has been heard, the manual warns that further attention to material concerns may tempt him or her into the sin of avarice: "The fyfthe temptacyon that most troubleth the seculers and worldly men is the ouer grete ocupacyon of outwarde thinges and

temporall, as towarde his wyf, his chyldren, & his frendes carnall, towarde his rychesses, or towarde other thynges whiche he hath mooste loued in his lyf" (25). In some versions of the *ars moriendi*, the descriptions of these temptations were accompanied by woodcuts depicting demons surrounding the deathbed and tempting the dying person (see Fig. 1). In an image showing the temptation to avarice, three animal-like demons surround the dying man's bed. A demon with goat horns points at an elderly man and woman, a woman with a small child, and a young woman with an uncovered head (presumably the dying man's family). Another demon with a fish-like comb on top of his head gestures toward a luxurious multi-level house with paned windows and a full wine cellar. The final demon with a rooster's head and a hairy tail also indicates the house as he stands next to a stable into which a man leads a horse. All three of these demons remind the dying man of what he is losing in death and tempt him to endanger his soul through greed. Although Merlin is clearly not a demon himself, the image of him standing over Uther's deathbed and the knowledge that his father was a devil recall this imagery from the *ars moriendi* and contribute to the perception that Merlin is not taking on a priestly or even a model deathbed attendant's role in this scene.

Figure 1. Meister, E. M. "Temptation Through Avarice." *Ars Moriendi*.
Ashmolean Museum. After ARTstor.

Finally, Uther requests that Arthur pray for his soul. As I have already discussed, in the *Morte d'Arthur*, prayers for a dead person's soul replace the prayers for the dying that the *ars moriendi* advises. Merlin, however, does not fulfill this request. Arthur does not discover the identity of his father until long after Uther's death, and even when he does, Malory does not record Arthur's praying for his soul. Neither does he record Merlin (or anyone else, for that matter) praying for Uther after he is dead. He does write that Uther was "enterid as longed to a kynge" (I: 12.9), and a sumptuous medieval burial certainly would have included a mass and prayers for the king's soul (J. Lynch 299). In comparison to other deaths in the *Morte*, however, Uther's death does not generate much comment. Gawain, for example, is given a lavish funeral by Lancelot:

> Than sir Launcelot kneled downe by the tumbe and wepte, and prayed hartly for hys soule.
> And that nyght he lete make a dole, [and] all that wolde com of the towne or of the country they had as much fleyssh and fysshe and wyne and ale, and every man and woman he dalt to twelve pence, com whoso wolde. Thus with hys owne honde dalte he thys money, in a mournyng gown; and ever he wepte hartely and prayed the people to pray for the soule of sir Gawayne.
> And on the morn all the prystes and clarkes that myght be gotyn in the contrey and in the town were there, and sange massis of Requiem. And there offird first sir Launcelot, and he offird an hundred pounde, and than the seven kynges offirde, and every of them offirde fourty pounde. Also there was a thousand knyghtes, and every of them offirde a pounde; and the offering dured fro the morne to nyght.

And there sir Launcelot lay two nyghtes uppon hys tumbe, in
prayers and in dolefull wepynge. (III: 1250.21-1251.7)

This passage has more to do with Lancelot's own fellowship than it does with

Gawain's; Malory paints a portrait of Lancelot as a true, grieving friend who

spares no expense to memorialize a fellow knight.[9] In the passage describing

Arthur's modest funeral, Bedivere demonstrates his own fellowship by claiming

he will spend the rest of his life in seclusion, praying for Arthur's soul (III:

1241.26-27). At Guinevere's funeral, Lancelot again displays his generous

fellowship by conducting mass and transporting her body with great pomp and

spectacle to lie beside Arthur in a joint grave (III: 1256.4-20). Finally, the group of

former knights who have been living in a monastic community with Lancelot

provide him with a lavish funeral that lasts two weeks. During this time,

Lancelot's body lies in state, and a multitude of prayers and songs are said in his

honor (III: 1258.20-1259.24). In contrast to these detailed accounts, Uther's funeral

barely registers as an event. Merlin certainly does not prove himself to be a

"felawe" in the ways that Lancelot and Bedivere do; instead of mourning Uther,

he moves immediately on to securing Arthur's succession by initiating the

miracle of the sword in the stone. Malory himself is obviously eager to leave

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[9] Karen Cherewatuk argues that Gawain's funeral is an "ideal" funeral in that Gawain's
own confession of sin leads Lancelot to repentance, and Lancelot's financing of the funeral mass
shows the healing of the rift between the two knights ("Christian Rituals" 84).

behind the prelude of Uther's life and death and move on to his main subject

matter: the life and death of Arthur.

*Gawain*

Another example of poor deathbed fellowship appears in "The Tale of the

Sankgreall." In this passage, Gawain and Ector search for a hermit to help them

interpret strange dreams that they have had. Gawain encounters a squire who

provides him with directions to the house of Nacien the Hermit, whom he

describes as "the holyeste man in thys contrey" (II: 943.29-30). On their way to

the hermit's abode, Gawain and Ector encounter Uwaine le Avoutres, but they

do not recognize him as a fellow knight of the Round Table. Gawain jousts with

him for sport and accidentally mortally wounds him (II: 943.31-944.14). Gawain

subsequently participates in Uwain's death scene and proves his poor fellowship

by being a distracting and self-absorbed deathbed attendant.

The *ars moriendi* places its emphasis on the dying person and the status of

his or her soul, and it stresses that the people attending at the death bed should

do the same: "euery persone, hauyng the loue & drede of God in hym silfe and

also the cure of soules, ought moche besili & diligently induce and admoneste

the seke persone constituted in peryll of body or of soule" (Atkinson 29).

Gawain, rather than concentrating on the state of Sir Uwain's soul and helping

him to prepare for his imminent death, repeatedly draws attention away from

Uwain and chooses to focus on his own misfortune. In the moments immediately

after the accidental wounding, Uwain, realizing that he is dying, requests that

Gawain take him to an abbey in order to receive communion before he dies:

> 'A, sir knyght!' he seyde, 'I am but dede! Therefore, for Goddys
> sake    and of youre jantilnes, lede me here unto an abbay, that I
> may resceyve my Creature.'
> 'Sir,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'I know no house of religion here nyghe.'
> 'Sir, sette me on an horse tofore you, and I shall teche you.'
> So sir Gawayne sette hym up in the sadyll, and he lepe up
> behynde hym to sustayne hym. And so they cam to the abbay, and
> there were well rescyved. And anone he was unarmed and
> resceyve hys Creature. (II: 944.18-27)

This passage paints Gawain in an especially thoughtless light as he is on his way

to see Nacien the Hermit, "the holiest man in the country," and he knows where

to find the hermit's dwelling. Although Malory does not mention the distance or

the difficulty of the journey, the placement of the scene in which Gawain obtains

directions to see a holy man immediately before the scene in which he needs to

find a house of religion makes the knight's claim of ignorance seem dubious. In

addition, he does not express concern over Uwain's spiritual or physical comfort;

Uwain must see to his own comfort, despite his mortal wound. In his fellow's

time of emergency, Gawain remains supremely unhelpful, although he does at

least help Uwain onto his horse.

Once the men reach their destination, Gawain continues to behave selfishly, bemoaning his own bad luck instead of encouraging Uwain in his Christian faith, as the *ars moriendi* directs:

> Than he prayde sir Gawayne to drawe oute the truncheon of the speare oute of hys body. Than sir Gawayne asked hym what he was.
> 'Sir,' he seyde, 'I am of kynge Arthurs courte, and was a felow of the Rounde Table, and we were sworne togydir. And now, sir Gawayne, thou hast slayne me. And my name is sir Uwayne le Avoutres, that somtyme was sone unto kynge Uryen, and I was in the queste of the Sankgreall. And now forgyff the God, for hit shall be ever rehersed that the tone sworne brother hath slayne the other.'
> 'Alas,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'that ever thys misadventure befelle me!' (II: 944.28-945.6)

In this passage, Gawain ignores Uwain's requests to remove the truncheon in favor of asking a self-interested question. His reaction to Uwain's admirable mercy and forgiveness is not gratitude or even regret that he has slain a fellow knight; it is self-pity. However, Gawain's behavior becomes even more reprehensible when we look at it through the dictates of the *ars moriendi*. Gawain focuses on himself rather than the dying Uwain, and his outspoken laments distract Uwain from the business of dying well as he spends his final moments consoling his killer: "'No force,' seyde sir Uwayne, 'sytthyn I shall dye this deth, of a much more worshipfuller mannes hande myght I nat dye" (II: 945.7-9). In a reversal of the traditional roles laid out in the *ars moriendi*, Uwain, who should concentrate on the condition of his own soul, bolstered by the spiritual support

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of his bedside attendants, instead offers forgiveness of Gawain's sins against him and comfort at Gawain's lamenting. Conversely, rather than helping Uwain to unburden his soul and prepare for death, Gawain adds to Uwain's burden with his own complaints.

Malory's manipulation of his French source for this death scene demonstrates his exaggeration of Gawain's behavior. The *Queste del Saint Graal* depicts Gawain in a more favorable light as he tends to Uwain. Uwain's revelation of his identity provokes a reaction of pity and horrified surprise from Gawain: "My God! What a tragedy is this! Yvain! How I grieve for you!" (*Lancelot-Grail* IV 49). Malory alters this expression of grief for a friend to an expression of unhappiness for himself as Gawain bemoans his own bad luck: "'Alas,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'that ever thys misadventure befelle *me*!'" (emphasis mine).

In addition, Malory's version of the selfish knight does not respond to Uwain's first request that he remove the truncheon; Uwain must repeat the request. The first time Uwain asks him to remove it, Gawain ignores him and asks him to identify himself. The *Queste* includes Gawain's demand for Uwain's identity, but it does not include Uwain's second appeal for Gawain to remove the truncheon. After the wounded knight reveals his identity, Gawain grants his request. Malory's addition of Uwain's second appeal strips Gawain of this small

kindness. The tableau Malory presents is darkly funny: Uwain, impaled on a truncheon, tries in vain to get Gawain's attention as the self-absorbed knight ignores Uwain and spirals into self-pity. This egocentrism also casts suspicion on Gawain's outward expression of grief: "Than began sir Gawayne to wepe, and also sir Ector" (II: 945.12-13). The *Queste* leaves little doubt that Gawain grieves for Uwain as he passes, but Malory's characterization of Gawain clouds the source of his emotion. Is he weeping for sorrow over Uwain's death, or is he continuing to bewail his own troubles? Malory never says, but based on Gawain's actions in this scene, the latter seems more likely.

Malory also never says whether Gawain fulfills Uwain's final request to be remembered: "But whan ye com to the courte recommaunde me unto my lorde Arthur, and to all them that be leffte on lyve. And for olde brothirhode thynke on me.'" (II: 945.9-11). This last request reflects Uwain's recognition of his dependence on the living to uphold his memory and reputation, and it also expresses his wish to be remembered. Gawain's characterization in this scene, however, does not lead a reader to assume that he will fulfill those wishes. To their credit, Gawain and Ector bury Uwain "as them ought to bury a kynges sonne and made hit wrytyn uppon hys tombe what was hys name and by whom he was slayne" (II: 945.16-18). Poor Uwain is not bereft of a memorial, and the tomb preserves his name for any and all who see it.

*Arthur: An Ideal Fellow*

In contrast to Gawain's poor performance, Arthur admirably plays the role of deathbed attendant to Gawain. First of all, he provides Gawain with physical and spiritual comfort. Malory writes that when Arthur hears that Gawain has been injured, he goes to his bedside (III: 1230.6-7). When Gawain asks for a pen and ink with which to write a letter, Arthur has them brought and then helps Gawain to sit up as he writes (III: 1231.1-6). Malory relates that Gawain is "shryven," meaning that he has confessed his sins and received absolution from them, so he has obviously been under the care of a priest (III: 1231.5-6), and after Gawain finishes his letter, Arthur "made sir Gawayne to resceyve hys sacrament" (III: 1232.13).

In this scene, Arthur faithfully attends to not only Gawain's demands, but the order in which the demands should be met. Arthur helps Gawain put his earthly affairs in order by writing to Lancelot, then redirects Gawain's attention toward Christ by having him receive the Viaticum, as the *ars moriendi* recommends. He also strengthens Gawain's Christian faith by "making" him take the sacrament. Gawain himself does not display any desire for the religious rite; it is Arthur's actions in this scene that encourage Gawain to concentrate on spiritual matters, as befits a good bedside attendant and a good "felawe." Karen Cherewatuk has noted that these details are original to Malory, and they indicate

the text's "embracing a series of Christian beliefs" by demonstrating authentic fifteenth-century Christian practice ("Christian Rituals" 88-89).

The one area in which Arthur falters is in not sending for Lancelot as Gawain requested. (III: 1232.13-15). Arthur regrets this decision after his final battle against Mordred and laments that he did not make peace with Lancelot (III: 1238.11-14). And, although Arthur does not explicitly pray for Gawain's soul, he buries the dead knight in Dover Castle, where Malory writes that anyone who goes there can still see his skull (III: 1232.18-19). Gawain, therefore, has a memorial and a physical remnant by which he is still remembered, and it is Arthur who makes that memorialization possible. In addition, Lancelot is subsequently able to visit Gawain's grave and provide a lavish funeral to honor his fallen friend. Through his careful attention at Gawain's deathbed and in his burial site, Arthur faithfully ensures that Gawain takes the necessary steps to achieve the best possible death, and thereby proves himself a "felawe & trewe frende."[10]

*Conclusion*

The ideal of fellowship is one of the key themes in Malory's work, and the best knights are judged by the quality of their fellowship. While Merlin

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[10] This intimate interaction between Arthur and Gawain is also a rare example of Arthur's displaying "private" fellowship rather than the "public" fellowship to which Archibald claims Arthur is limited.

demonstrates a different set of priorities and Gawain fails in his role as a deathbed attendant, Arthur models this ideal fellowship in his interactions at Gawain's deathbed. Arthur, as the head of the chivalric community, sets the standard for his knights to follow. In the next two chapters, I turn to the knight who best meets the standard set by Arthur and whose fellowship is the most sought after in the *Morte*: Lancelot.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Seduction of Lancelot

In the *Morte d'Arthur*, Lancelot becomes the object of many ladies' failed

seduction attempts. These attempts fail because the women act as sexual

aggressors and because, when they look at Lancelot, they objectify him through

their gazes. In this chapter, I discuss six episodes that share a similar narrative

structure involving Lancelot becoming the object of female sexual desire and of

the female gaze. Five events recur within these episodes, with minor variation:

1. A woman or group of women look at Lancelot and desire him, which
   results in his objectification and feminization.
2. Lancelot is tricked or imprisoned, usually by means of enchantment.
3. The woman or women proposition or tempt Lancelot in a way which will
   cause him to give up his knighthood and/or chastity.
4. Lancelot refuses the proposition.
5. Lancelot escapes from the trap or prison and is re-masculinized.

The six episodes I discuss in this chapter are the Four Queens and the Chapel

Perelus episodes from "A Noble Tale of Sir Lancelot du Lake," the three Elaine of

Corbin episodes from "The Book of Sir Tristram," and the Fair Maid of Astolat

episode from "The Book of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere." Janet Jesmok has

noted the structural similarity of these episodes, as has Catherine La Farge,

though Jesmok focuses primarily on the first two as vehicles for the

characterization of Lancelot, and La Farge notes them only in passing as part of her discussion of a different episode.[1] In this chapter I focus on showing Lancelot's discomfort at being the object of the female gaze and his wrongful rejection of both Elaine of Corbin and Elaine of Astolat in favor of his love "oute of mesure" for Guinevere (II: 897.16). Lancelot's inability to reciprocate affection for worthy and noble ladies reinforces one of the major themes in Malory's work – the sinful nature of Lancelot and Guinevere's relationship. The repetition and variation of this episode type present continuity between Lancelot episodes and build a narrative progression which escalates through the episodes and finally ends with the deaths of Lancelot and Guinevere in the final tale of the *Morte*.

On the surface, Malory paints a portrait of Sir Lancelot du Lake as a knight surpassing all others: the bravest, truest, and noblest knight of them all. Critics of Malory's work have questioned this characterization, however. In particular, Elizabeth Edwards has demonstrated Lancelot's insecurity about his own reputation, and Janet Jesmok has described Lancelot's "terror of a sexual aggressor who will entrap him and enforce him against his will" (30).[2] These two fears – loss of reputation and sexual objectification – determine how Lancelot relates to the various women he encounters in the six episodes I examine. The

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[1] See Jesmok, "A Knyght Wyveles," 317-319 and La Farge, "Lancelot," 184.

[2] See Edwards, "Genesis," 87-89 and Jesmok, "Comedic Preludes," 30.

initial element of the structure, the targeting, is accomplished through sight: women see Lancelot and want him. It is in this first step that the ultimate success or failure of the seduction attempt is determined. Lancelot demonstrates a high level of self-consciousness that makes him anxious when he is being observed, especially by women. This anxiety stems from the role reversal that takes place when Lancelot becomes the object of a woman's gaze rather than the one who is gazing.

The first person to articulate what is now called "gaze theory" was film theorist Laura Mulvey in her 1975 article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In that article, she identifies the gaze as an active force which acts upon the passive object of the gaze; furthermore she classifies the active gazer as male and the passive object as female (11-13). Since the publication of that article, several critics have refined Mulvey's theory, and in particular E. Ann Kaplan has suggested that the gaze is not itself male, but that the gazer takes the masculine active position while the object of the gaze is placed in the feminine passive position (319). Kathleen Coyne Kelly has, in turn, applied gaze theory to Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* and discussed the problematic occurrences of knights looking at one another – men becoming the objects of other men's gazes. She mentions that Lancelot becomes the object of a woman's gaze in what she describes as a "notable reversal," but she does not attempt to analyze the effects

of the woman taking up the masculine position (60). Dorsey Armstrong does, however, and concludes that in the case of a female gazer, the roles are reversed and the object (Lancelot, in this case) is feminized (*Gender* 98). She also notes, however, that tournaments, as events where woman gaze and men are gazed upon, complicate this theory (136).

This complication becomes apparent in the *Morte d'Arthur* where being the object of the female gaze is often an ennobling experience for a knight. For example, when sir Gareth falters in his fight with the Red Knight of the Red Lands, Lynet reminds him that her sister is watching them from inside the castle. This reminder bolsters Gareth's courage, and he is able to defeat his opponent (I: 324.11-26). Similarly, at the Tournament at Lonezep, Isode sees Tristram enter the field and laughs in delight. Palomides finds inspiration in her visual pleasure and jousts so well that he wins the day (II: 737.29-738.4). It is important to note, however, that in these instances Gareth and Palomides are prepared to be watched. They are armed; they are in a public space engaging in public activities. The ladies, meanwhile, are seated in a scaffold – as Guinevere is at the Tournament of Surluse – constructed for the very purpose of viewing and judging the knights as they fight. The knights know they are being watched and they act accordingly. In addition, Armstrong argues that the knights are able to support this kind of judgment because they are involved in a "spectacle" (*Gender*

136). Their bodies are defined as masculine by the accoutrements of knighthood: sword, shield, and armor. They are also engaging in the entirely masculine activity of physical combat. This "hypermasculine" performance offsets the feminizing effect of the gaze (89).

In situations in which a knight is not prepared to be gazed upon, however, being the object of a gaze presents a risk. It can serve to ennoble, but displaying public weakness or vulnerability can also lead to a loss of honor among the knightly community. Lancelot's self-consciousness in front of public gazes becomes evident after he is wounded at the Assumption Day joust. Despite his serious wound, Lancelot wins the day, but he is in so much pain that he excuses himself from the celebration and rides far enough away "that he was sure he myght nat be seyne" (II: 1073.30). Now that he is out of sight of the king, the other knights, and the ladies, he collapses, and lies on the ground for half an hour, nearly dead with the pain. This short scene demonstrates Lancelot's awareness of the gazes of others, and his reluctance to appear vulnerable suggests a high level of sensitivity as the object of those gazes. Lancelot does not want the court to see his suffering, even though his wound is quite serious, and it is difficult to imagine anyone would think less of him. If anything they would be doubly impressed to realize that he won the tournament in spite of the gaping wound in his side. The text is replete with knights who suffer from grievous

wounds and retain their honorable reputations. Lancelot, however, senses a danger inherent in being the object of the gaze. While it is the primary means of winning worship, it is also a way to lose worship, and Lancelot is hesitant to put his weakness on public display.

<p style="text-align:center;">*The Four Queens*</p>

Lancelot's fear of appearing vulnerable to others becomes reality in the Four Queens episode when four queens happen upon him at the beginning of "A Noble Tale of Sir Lancelot du Lake." His encounter with these queens establishes his status as an object of the gaze and of female sexual desire. As Lancelot lies sleeping under an apple tree, Morgan le Fay, the Queen of North Galys, the Queen of Estlonde, and the Queen of the Oute Iles ride past. The queens hear Lancelot's horse neighing and look to see who is there: "And anone as they loked on his face they knew well hit was sir Launcelot, and began to stryve for that knight, and every of hem seyde they wolde have hym to hir love" (I: 256.26-29). Morgan quickly devises a plan to trap Lancelot and to force him to choose among the four of them. She places a sleeping enchantment on him, and they transport him to her castle where they lock him in a cold room. All four queens visit him the next day and tell him that if he doesn't choose one of them as his lover, he will die in his prison. Lancelot chooses death. Luckily, King

Bagdemagus' daughter helps him escape, and Lancelot is free to pursue other adventures.

The first element of this episode is the objectification of Lancelot through the queens' gazes. Since the gaze is active and thus masculine, Lancelot automatically fulfills the passive feminine role in this scenario. In addition, although he is fully armed, Lancelot is not performing a masculinizing activity such as jousting nor is he prepared to be looked at or judged; on the contrary, he is asleep. Because of his passive position and his ignorance of them, the queens' illicit gazes do not serve to ennoble Lancelot, but they objectify him as he becomes their sexual target. Even though Lancelot is asleep, and therefore remains unaware of his own status as an object, the scene places readers in a position where they are sharing in the queens' gaze and in Lancelot's objectificaton: "the spectator or reader is inevitably implicated by means of voyeuristic engagement in the narrative representation" (Batt 211, n. 77). The result, as Dorsey Armstrong has observed, is Lancelot's feminization (*Gender* 98).

In addition, Lancelot's imprisonment forces him to stop his knightly activities. Morgan le Fay, Armstrong argues, poses a double hazard to Lancelot's masculinity, first by objectifying him through her gaze and second by denying him the opportunity to perform his masculinity; she uses magic to subdue him instead: "Morgan's appropriation of the masculine position is all the more

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threatening because rather than offering a masculine challenge (such as combat),

she operates by 'treson' and 'inchauntement'" (99). Marylynn Saul equates

Lancelot's enchantment and subsequent imprisonment with figurative

impotence: "He is totally in the power of these women, both because of their

magical powers and because the castle and servants belong to Morgan. In this

situation Launcelot has been symbolically stripped of his masculinity – trapped

in a cell with his armor taken away from him" (95). He has not only lost his

masculine power, but he is unable to recuperate it because he has been stripped

of his knightly tools and the opportunity for combat.

Even Lancelot's refusal of the queens' proposition – virtually the only

action he is able to achieve in this episode – produces a potentially negative

result for him. Jill Hebert interprets Lancelot's choice to reject the four queens

and die in prison as a failure of his loyalty to King Arthur. Hebert posits that

Lancelot is both physically trapped in prison and figuratively trapped between

his loyalty to Arthur and his loyalty to the ideal of courtly love:

> This test mirrors Lancelot's choice of Guinevere over Arthur; his
> refusal to choose one of the queens over her should remind him of
> his original failure to choose Arthur over the queen. Yet, in a
> broader sense, Lancelot is trapped between the two conflicting
> codes of chivalry and courtly love. Should he be true to his beloved
> and stay in prison forever, or betray her and be free to do knightly
> deeds? He chooses to be loyal to Guenevere, potentially forsaking
> his chivalric reputation and future fame for love. (83)

As Hebert suggests, in this impossible situation, Lancelot must break one of the codes to which he ascribes. Tellingly, Lancelot chooses to give up his knightly pursuits and proves himself disloyal to both Arthur and the Round Table community in favor of his relationship with Guinevere. The choice that Lancelot must make demonstrates the division in his loyalties and foreshadows the choice he will make in the final section of the *Morte d'Arthur*: he will again choose Guinevere over loyalty to his king, and the result of that choice will be a major contribution to the downfall of the Arthurian kingdom.

As Saul notes, Lancelot "recovers his potency" when the daughter of King Bagdemagus helps him escape the queens' prison (95). Her offer of release comes with an exchange: Lancelot must fight on behalf of her father in an upcoming tournament. The next morning, she brings Lancelot his arms and armor, and then aids in his escape. The restoration of Lancelot's knightly attire and the opportunity for knightly performance provide him with a means to recover his masculinity.

A curious incident occurs, however, while Lancelot is on his way to the tournament, which again calls his masculinity into question. Lancelot sees an empty pavilion beside the road and decides to unarm himself and sleep there for the night. The owner of the pavilion, a knight named Belleus, returns after Lancelot has fallen asleep and mistakes Lancelot for his female lover. He begins

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kissing Lancelot, who wakes up and reacts with violence. He immediately draws his sword and runs out of the pavilion followed by a surprised Belleus. After they exit the pavilion, Lancelot attacks Belleus and seriously wounds him (I: 259.20-260.2). This scene echoes the earlier incident with the four queens in which a sleeping Lancelot became a sexual target. The episode with Belleus again places Lancelot in a feminine position as the object of Belleus' sexual advances and proves that he has not fully recovered from the emasculating incident with the four queens. In her analysis of this scene, Kathleen Coyne Kelly explains that "the residue of [the episode of the four queens] leaks over into Lancelot's excessively violent treatment of Belleus" (60). Lancelot overcompensates for his threatened masculinity by attacking Belleus in a way that is not commensurate with Belleus' mistake. He does, however, fully recover from this series of emasculating events by winning the tournament for King Bagdemagus and by defeating the evil Sir Tarquin immediately afterward.

*The Chapel Perelus*

Only a few episodes later, Lancelot again becomes the target of female sexual desire when he encounters the sorceress Hallewes at the Chapel Perelus. Hallewes claims she has loved Lancelot for seven years, and she has built the Chapel Perelus in order to lure him to her so that she can kill him and preserve his body to use for her own sexual pleasure (I: 281.7-20). Although Malory does

not describe Hallewes' predatory gaze, she has unquestionably targeted him and set a trap for him. Once Lancelot has fallen into her trap, she begins her seduction attempt. First, she entreats him to leave behind the object of his quest, a sword, which he refuses to do. Then she asks him to kiss her, which he also refuses. As Molly Martin has observed, Hallewes' request for the sword is a challenge to his masculine identity, and his refusal to leave it allows him to continue in a masculine, knightly role: "Launcelot asserts his masculinity by refusing to relinquish his sword, a signifier of that gender identity for this community of knights, even in the apparent face of death. He will not be threatened (by a woman) into removing the trappings of his gender and knighthood" (70). Like the forced imprisonment of the four queens, acceptance of Hallewes' proposition would result in Lancelot's eschewing his knightly duty; without the sword, he would fail in his quest. Martin also notes the link between the sword and his relationship to Guinevere. Hallewes tells him that, if he had abandoned the sword, in addition to dying, he would never see Guinevere again (I: 281.1-2).

This connection to Guinevere also echoes the trap set by the four queens as it tests Lancelot's fidelity to his beloved – a test made even more explicit by Hallewes' request for a kiss. Beverly Kennedy argues that, in light of the common courtly practice of kissing in greeting, Lancelot's refusal to kiss

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Hallewes stems less from his fidelity to Guinevere than from his devotion to the virtue of chastity: "the refusal to even kiss the damsel suggests the excessive prudishness and zeal for virginity of a very young man" (115). This interpretation removes the problem of Lancelot's disloyalty to the king; his potential and probable adultery is replaced by virtuous self-control. Both Martin and Kennedy, however, treat Hallewes' proposition as though it were a temptation. Armstrong also compares Hallewes' attempted seduction to the seduction scene in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* in which Sir Gawain must resist the not-entirely-undesirable advances of Bertilak's wife (*Gender* 232, n. 81). These scholars have all ignored the fact that Hallewes' proposition is in no way tempting for Sir Lancelot. For temptation to occur, the one being tempted must, at least partly, desire that which is being offered. As Adam Bryant Marshall has discussed, the scene at the Chapel Perelus reads like a horror story, complete with sinister surroundings, bloody corpses, and demonic knights. The feeling of foreboding is compounded by the presence of the upside-down shields of other knights who have previously fallen into Hallewes' trap, and by the thirty demonic knights who are evidently under her power. It is also one of only two occurrences in the entire *Morte* when Lancelot is described as "afeared" (Marshall, *forthcoming*).[3] Lancelot's response to Hallewes is not a courtly refusal,

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[3] The other instance is during his imprisonment by the four queens (I: 258.21).

either. Rather than politely declining the kiss, Lancelot says, "Nay…that God me forbede" (I: 281.6). His invocation of God's name emphasizes the contrast to her ungodly nature, and when she reveals her nefarious plan, he prays, "Jesu preserve me frome your subtyle crauftys!" (I: 281.21-22). Her status as an evil sorceress places her well outside the realm of possibility as a potential lover for Lancelot. His refusal of her proposition reinforces his commitments to knighthood, chastity, and fidelity to his beloved, but not because he is intentionally choosing those values. Rather, he is intentionally rejecting Hallewes. By rejecting her, he is able to choose both Guinevere and loyalty to Arthur. Unlike his impossible choice in the episode with the four queens, this choice conveniently does not place the codes of chivalry and courtly love in opposition.

The most disturbing part of Hallewes' plan – to embalm Lancelot's body and caress it – would have made Lancelot's fears of objectification come true. Hallewes would not only have figuratively objectified and emasculated him, but she would have literally transformed him into an inanimate object. In Hallewes' hands, Lancelot's corpse would be stripped of its masculine identity and placed in an abject position, subjected to her control.[4] Lancelot's grim fate, however,

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[4] In her book *Powers of Horror,* Julia Kristeva states that "the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection" and that abjection is caused by that which

never comes to pass. The circumstances of Lancelot's escape have been the subject of much scholarly comment. Armstrong claims "he is just lucky" (104), and Catherine Batt credits his "chivalric instincts" (91), while Andrew Lynch cites narrative necessity: "The story's wish to demonstrate Lancelot's consummate knightly identity necessitates that the action he takes is right" (18). Whatever the reason – Malory does not give him an explicit motivation – Lancelot's refusal of the proposition functions as his escape route. Unlike in the episode with the four queens, in which Lancelot had to be rescued by a damsel, Lancelot's own actions (or inactions, in this case) result in his release from Hallewes' trap. This episode never truly emasculates Lancelot, despite all of his fears of objectification and feminization; it has been a mere "fantasy-threat" (Batt 91). Malory does not describe Hallewes' gaze, Lancelot does not lose the sword, he does not become the physical object of Hallewes' desire, and he manages to rescue himself, masculinity intact. Hallewes does not escape unscathed, however. Malory relates that "whan sir Launcelot was departed she toke suche sorow that she deyde within a fourtenyte" (I: 281.24-25). This event forms the basis of another narrative progression which appears within this series of episodes, and which I will discuss later in the section on Elaine of Astolat, who also dies of sorrow.

"disturbs identity, system, order" (4). All three of these qualities are threatened by the possibility of Hallewes' control over Lancelot's corpse.

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*Elaine of Corbin I*

The narrative structure of the former two episodes is repeated in four later episodes in which Lancelot again becomes the object of female desire. In these later episodes, however, the reasons for Lancelot's resistance to the various feminine wiles become complicated by his excessive devotion to Guinevere, a married woman. When Lancelot arrives in the city of Corbin, he is greeted by a host of people who beg him to help a lady in a tower who has been under a painful curse for five years.[5] Lancelot agrees to help and is able to heal the lady (II: 792.9-20).

Because of his healing of the cursed lady, Lancelot becomes the target of Elaine's father Pelles who wants him as a potential lover for his daughter. Pelles' motivation is colored by his knowledge of a prophecy that Lancelot will beget a son on his daughter who is destined to save his country and achieve the Holy Grail (II: 794.4-8). As in the episode at the Chapel Perelus, a gaze is not described, but Lancelot unquestionably becomes a target for Elaine's father: "And fayne wolde kynge Pelles have founde the meane that sir Launcelot sholde have ley by his doughter" (II: 794.2-5). With the help of the enchantress Brusen, Pelles tricks Lancelot into having sex with Elaine by convincing him that Elaine is Guinevere.

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[5] Catherine La Farge notes that, in Malory's source text, this episode occurs shortly after the episode with the Four Queens, and Malory separates the two of them ("Lancelot" 186).. The traces of their former "entrelacement" still remain in the fact that Morgan le Fay and the Queen of North Galys – two of the four queens in the previous episode – cast the curse on the lady in the tower.

Elaine, although not complicit in the entrapment, goes along with the temptation

portion of the plan, and willingly sleeps with Lancelot. It is important to note,

however, that Malory reveals that the reason Elaine goes along with the

deception is to fulfill the prophecy. At this point, she has no designs on Lancelot

and all she asks in return for her maidenhood is his "good wyll" (II: 796.24).

Lancelot, although enraged enough to draw his sword on Elaine and threaten to

behead Dame Brusen, forgives Elaine for her part in the scheme and recognizes

her virtue. Scholars have made much of the easy forgiveness offered by Lancelot

in this scene. Both Jerome Mandel and Yvette Kisor attribute Lancelot's quick

turnaround from rage to forgiveness to his sexual desire for Elaine (Mandel 248,

Kisor 60). In fact, Kisor argues that Lancelot is attracted to Elaine because of her

passivity (60). This conclusion fits well with the previous episodes with the four

queens and the Chapel Perelus in which aggressive women attempt to entrap

Lancelot, and he feels threatened by them. Lancelot is uncomfortable as the

object of sexual desire, so Elaine's innocence in the deception, and the absence of

any demands she might place on him make it easy for him to put aside his hard

feelings.

Because Elaine is not a sexual aggressor in this scene, the trouble does not

come from Lancelot's objectification. As Mandel points out, the motivations of

both Pelles and Elaine in the entrapment and seduction of Lancelot were moral

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ones: to fulfill the prophecy and ensure the conception of Galahad (250). This noble goal offsets the potential problem presented by the deception of Lancelot – he is not a mere studhorse; he is a divine tool, and "the honor involved is such that all stain is eradicated" (McCarthy 61). Elizabeth Sklar takes a skeptical view of this interpretation and states that it "concentrates on rationalizing the fairly nasty circumstances surrounding the begetting of Galahad" (69, n. 8). Her view is that, "However virtuous the end-product of Lancelot and Elaine's coupling, and however unwittingly Lancelot participates in the event, the fact remains that Lancelot is guilty of violating a virgin because of his adulterous love for the Queen, and of betraying his lady-love in the process" (62). Although Lancelot's masculinity is not placed in question here (he has proven his virility, after all, by conceiving a child), his chastity and fidelity to Guinevere are broken.

In order to cope with his own failing, Lancelot attempts to blame Dame Brusen who is a known enchantress and who was actively involved in the deception. As we have seen in previous episodes, Lancelot hates enchantments and enchantresses. The reason Lancelot gives for refusing the four queens, for example, is that "ye be false enchaunters" (I: 258.3). It is only natural, then, for him to assume he was enchanted as he has been (or has nearly been) twice before. However, although Malory mentions Brusen's status as "one of the grettyst enchaunters that was that tyme in the worlde" (II: 794.19-20), no

enchantment is mentioned in this scene. In fact, Malory explicitly states that

Lancelot is deceived"by dame Brusens wytte" (II: 794.21). She sends messengers

who claim to be from Queen Guinevere, then gets Lancelot drunk. The morning

after Lancelot and Elaine sleep together, Lancelot opens the window, and at that

moment "the enchauntemente was paste" (II: 795.21-22). The use of the word

"enchantment" in this scene, and in the many subsequent references to

Lancelot's one-night stand with Elaine, is unusual for Malory. All other

references to "enchantment" or "enchanters" in the *Morte* refer specifically to

magic use or sorcery. Both Middle English and early Modern English allows for

the word "enchant" to mean "to influence (a person or thing) irresistibly or

powerfully; to delude or beguile" ("enchaunten," v., MED; "enchant," v., OED).

Malory, however, amid many references to magical enchantments and

enchantresses, only uses it this way one other time in the *Morte*.[6] In addition, the

statement that "the enchauntement was paste" is the same language Malory uses

when Morgan's sleeping spell is lifted in the Four Queens episode: "Be that the

enchauntement was paste" (I: 257.6-7). It seems likely Lancelot – and perhaps

even Malory, to some degree – *wants* Brusen to have used magical enchantment.

It's a convenient excuse, and it's one that both Lancelot and Guinevere use when

they refer to this event in later episodes, but it's simply not the case. It is easier

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[6] The other instance is during the Grail Quest, when a damsel reveals to Percival that a
man he recently encountered "ys an inchaunter and a multiplier of wordis" (II: 917.1-2).

for Lancelot to blame enchantments, which we know frighten and threaten him, than to admit to his own moral failure. In the end, Lancelot's interpretation of events becomes the accepted one, and the status quo is restored for him.

*Elaine of Corbin II*

The second time Elaine seduces Lancelot does not turn out so well, however. When Elaine visits Camelot, she begins to pine after Lancelot. Lancelot, however, is ashamed at his past behavior and refuses to speak to her or even look at her. Elaine is upset and this time, her gaze comes into play: "But whan dame Elayne saw sir Launcelot wolde nat speke unto her she was so hevy she wente her harte wolde have to-braste" (II: 803.19-21). Elaine's sight of Lancelot and his aloof behavior cause her to turn to Dame Brusen – the same woman who successfully "enchanted" him in the previous episode. As before, Brusen does not use magical enchantment against Lancelot; she tricks him by pretending to be a messenger from Guinevere. Malory writes that she knows about Lancelot's plan to visit Guinevere's bed that night "by her crauftes" (II: 804.15). As with his use of "enchauntment," Malory almost exclusively uses "crauftes" in reference to magic use or sorcery.[7] For example, the sorceress Hallewes' machinations are described by Lancelot as "subtyle crauftys" (I: 281.22). In addition, Merlin,

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[7] The only other exception is in the Tale of Sir Gareth, when Malory explains that Gareth and Lynet were unable to keep their secret rendezvous a secret because they "had nat used suche craufftis toforne" (I: 333.6)

Morgan le Fay, and the Lady of the Lake are all referred to as having "crauftes" when they are using magic. However, while Brusen may have used magical "crauftes" to obtain information, she again does not employ a magical enchantment on Lancelot. As Mandel notes, "Lancelot's overwhelming and constant desire to sleep with Guenevere, not enchantment, leads him to Elaine's bed, where his expectations and assumptions deceive him" (251). As before, Lancelot believes he is with Guinevere, and the temptation proves too much for him.

The outcome, however, is quite different from that of the first episode. While the first time, Elaine's behavior could be excused, the second time she is a full participant. She sleeps with Lancelot out of lust, not duty. In addition, at the conception of Galahad, there were no witnesses beyond the three conspirators. Although Guinevere has heard about the affair and knows about the birth of Galahad, she was not an eyewitness. This time, Guinevere sees Lancelot in the hallway leaving Elaine's room clothed only in his shirt. It is one thing to know about a lover's infidelity, but it is quite another to see it, and Guinevere tells him to leave and forbids "that evermore thou com in my syght!" (II: 805.28-29).

The withdrawal of Guinevere's sight proves to be Lancelot's undoing. He swoons, then leaps out of the window and wanders the country as a madman for the next two years. This strong reaction to his own transgression comes as a

result of the realization of Lancelot's two greatest fears. His sexual objectification by Elaine and the means of his deception mirror the conception of Arthur at the beginning of the *Morte.* Lancelot takes Igraine's role as the feminine victim of sexual aggression, and he cannot maintain his knightly reputation if he is cast in the role of a woman. In addition, there is a witness to this loss, and most importantly, a female witness. Guinevere's gaze, which has been ennobling thus far, no longer serves that edifying purpose, and Lancelot can no longer function in Arthurian civilization. Molly Martin has connected Lancelot's particular performance of masculinity with Guinevere's sight in her analysis of the Chapel Perelus episode. Martin notes that Hallewes' revelation that if Lancelot had abandoned the sword, he would never have seen Guinevere again, draws three elements together: Lancelot's sword, his masculinity, and the sight of Guinevere. She argues that Lancelot's self-constructed masculine identity depends upon Guinevere's sight: "His masculinity (via the sword) becomes intertwined with the ability to see (and be seen by) the queen. This ability materializes not only as a desire, but a need for Lancelot and his production of masculinity" (70-71). After Guinevere discovers his infidelity, Lancelot is robbed of Guinevere's sight, and he loses the foundation upon which his identity is built. As a result, he cannot help but go mad.

*Elaine of Corbin III*

Lancelot recovers from his madness, though, with the help of the same woman who set the trap in the first place: Elaine of Corbin. After Lancelot wanders back into Corbin, he falls asleep by a well. When Elaine sees him, she recognizes him and sends her maidens away to ensure Lancelot's privacy. Dame Brusen casts a sleeping enchantment upon him, and Elaine and her father bring him into the Grail Chamber where he is healed. It is a testament to his concern for his own reputation that the first question he asks after "How cam I hydir?" is "how many be there that knowyth of my woodnes?" (II: 825.10). Elaine redeems herself by keeping Lancelot's madness a secret and explaining how it was her gaze which restored his identity to him: "And anone as I veryly behylde you [I knewe you]" (II: 825.5-6).

This third encounter breaks the narrative pattern which has plagued Lancelot throughout the seduction episodes of the *Morte,* and it assuages his fears of objectification and loss of reputation. Structurally, it is nearly identical to the episode of the four queens: Lancelot is asleep, a woman sees him and recognizes him, a sleeping enchantment is cast upon him, and he is removed to an enclosed space where the enchantment passes. However, unlike in the Four Queens episode, Elaine does not target him in this instance; instead she nurses him back to health. Her gaze does not objectify him; it reestablishes him as a

member of the chivalric community and offers an alternative construction of his masculine identity that is not based on the sight of Guinevere. This time, she does not have to trap him; he asks if he may stay in Corbin permanently (II: 825.30-33). When Lancelot finally decides to return to Arthur's court, Elaine does not tempt him to stay. Rather, she reaffirms his knightly reputation and sends him on his way (II: 832.7-18). Through Elaine's restorative gaze, Lancelot regains his chivalric identity both in the public sphere and in his own estimation.

Lancelot's relationship with Elaine of Corbin is the one he ought to have had. She counters the threats posed by the other women who have targeted him. While Hallewes demonstrates that physical love results in death, Lancelot's affair with Elaine of Corbin engenders life with the birth of Galahad. While on the Grail Quest, Lancelot learns that his love for Guinevere prevents him from achieving his goal, but Elaine provides direct access to that holy vessel. Malory indulges the idea of "What if?" in the scene just after Lancelot leaps from the window to become a madman. Elaine rebukes Guinevere for monopolizing Lancelot when she has a king of her own and states that Lancelot might have chosen her if not for Guinevere. Elaine recognizes that her own relationship with Lancelot ought to be a noble one, and an ennobling one for Lancelot, but his attachment to Guinevere has warped him: "he ys marred for ever, and that have you made" she accuses (II: 806.39-30). Elaine's criticism of the relationship

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between Lancelot and Guinevere emphasizes the lesson that Lancelot learns for himself as he goes on the Grail Quest: it is his adulterous love for the queen which prevents him from achieving his greatest potential and which ultimately results in his downfall. Although Malory's narrator assures the audience that Lancelot and Guinevere are true lovers, the episodes with Elaine of Corbin belie that statement. In addition, the very structure of the text shows that Elaine is an ideal match for Lancelot. As Sklar states,

> by healing Lancelot physically, mentally, and spiritually, nurturing him until such time as he is ready to resume his role at the center of Arthur's government, she crucially supports Lancelot in the penitential exercise that serves, unbeknownst to either of them, as preparation for his imminent spiritual quest. Above all, once she understands the consequences of her youthful sexual adventuring, Elaine of Corbyn – standing in eloquent contrast to Guenevere's increasingly hysterical possessiveness – becomes the exemplar of what human, heterosexual love should be, or could be if the world were less corrupt: faithful, loyal, self-sacrificing, and redemptive, willing to die if necessary, for the well-being of the other. (67-68)

In the end, her gaze does not objectify him or entrap him in the way that other female gazes do in the *Morte*. Rather, her view of him firmly places him in a knightly position and encourages others to do the same.

And yet, the relationship between Lancelot and Elaine still fails. It does not fail this third time, however, because of Elaine's gaze or her sexual aggression. It fails because, despite the fact that there is variance within the first three narrative elements in this episode – Elaine's non-objectifying gaze, the

absence of entrapment or enchantment, and the absence of any kind of

proposition on Elaine's part – Lancelot continues to uphold the narrative

structure in which he has participated four times already by refusing Elaine. I

have argued that Elaine makes no proposition to Lancelot, and technically he

cannot refuse an offer that has not been made. The situation, however, calls for

more action on Lancelot's part. Sklar, in particular, interprets Lancelot's decision

to leave Corbin and rejoin the Round Table as abandonment (62). Lancelot does

not need to rejoin the Round Table to perform knightly deeds; at Corbin, under

the pseudonym "Le Shyvalere Mafete" he begins jousting again and achieves

even greater martial success there than he did when he was a Round Table

knight: "And wyte you well there was never seyne in kynge Arthurs dayes one

knyght that ded so muche dedys of armes as sir Lancelot ded tho three dayes

togydyrs" (II: 827.25-28). His return to Arthur's court does, however, bring him

back into contact with Guinevere who, despite her earlier admonition that he

never return, welcomes him back with "grete chere" (II: 832.29). Lancelot's

constant and consistent return to the adulterous relationship with the queen

proves to be his biggest character flaw, even before the Grail Quest makes it

explicit. In this case, his choice recalls the episode with the four queens in which

he was forced to choose between Guinevere and his knightly duties. Even in this

ideal situation where Lancelot is not divided between loyalties, he still chooses

Guinevere. The poor choice he makes at this climactic moment determines the trajectory of the rest of his story in the *Morte d'Arthur* and sets the falling action of the narrative into motion.

<p style="text-align:center;">*The Fair Maid of Astolat*</p>

It is during this falling action that the Fair Maid of Astolat episode occurs. When Lancelot arrives in Astolat, the young Elaine is ecstatic to meet him, follows him around wherever he goes, and meets his every need. She requests for Lancelot to wear her sleeve at an upcoming joust, and he agrees to wear it in order to disguise himself (II: 1068.3-21). When Lancelot leaves Astolat, Elaine clumsily tries to tempt him with marriage and then desperately rescinds the offer in favor of being his paramour (II: 1089.12-24). Lancelot refuses both proposals, but takes her brother Lavayne with him as his squire. Shortly after their departure, Elaine dies of sorrow.

Here, again, Lancelot becomes a sexual target through a woman's gaze: "evir she behylde sir Launcelot wondirfully" (II: 1067.31-32). Elaine of Astolat, however, is very young and very innocent, and, unlike her predecessors, she does not seem to possess any semblance of guile. Both Georgiana Donavin and James Noble provide evidence of her lack of feminine wiles by citing the scene in which she innocently invites sir Gawain into her bedroom to see Lancelot's

shield (Donavin 74; Noble 48-49).[8] Elaine obviously does not understand the

implications of inviting a man alone into her bedroom, and the offering of her

sleeve to Lancelot is also not meant as entrapment: "Malory's Elaine

is…ingenuous of the practice of 'ensnaring men'" (Donavin 74). Carolyn Hares-

Stryker, however, notes that when Elaine offers her sleeve to Lancelot, she is

consciously attempting to elicit a pledge of love from him which he is unwilling

to fulfill ("Elaine of Astolat" 208-209). While she may not be using tricks and

traps to capture Lancelot, she is unquestionably trying to make a claim upon

him.

Elaine's desire to play a more significant role in Lancelot's life becomes

apparent again after he has been wounded at the tournament and is recovering

at a nearby hermitage. Elaine accuses her father and brother of taking improper

care of Lancelot, and Donavin suggests that "Elaine situates herself as Lancelot's

wife in this accusation to reveal her constant desire to help him" (72). Indeed,

Malory writes that "there was never chylde nother wyff mekar tyll fadir and

husbande than was thys fayre Maydyn of Astolat" (II: 1085.13-15). Elaine's

protective behavior toward Lancelot impresses Sir Bors, but Lancelot is

uncomfortable with Elaine's attentions, and at one point he voices his frustration

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[8] Gawain's presence is a recurring motif in this series of episodes: Hallewes mentions he has been to the Chapel Perelus, he also attempts to heal the cursed woman at Corbin before Lancelot arrives, and here he appears in Astolat as well.

with her constant presence at his side: "by no meany[s] I can nat put her fro me" (II: 1084.26-27). Bors' baffled response to Lancelot's rejection of Elaine serves as a touchstone in this scene: "Why sholde ye put her frome you?...For she ys a passyng fayre damesell, and well besayne and well taught. And God wolde, fayre cousin…that ye cowde love her" (II: 1084.28-31). Amid the powerful feelings of love on Elaine's part and exasperation on Lancelot's part, Bors acts as a voice of objectivity. Why should Lancelot put Elaine from him? She is beautiful, attentive, single, and a member of the noble class. In addition, James Noble argues that "Elaine [is] a woman prepared to subject herself completely to the needs and desires of her knight, lover, or husband. Such a woman is not the threat to knighthood that, from Malory's perspective, women in general tend to be because her primary concern is not her own welfare but her lover's" (50). Like Elaine of Corbin, Elaine of Astolat possesses a passivity that Lancelot ought to find appealing. However, when she proposes marriage, he rejects that offer as well as the subsequent offer to become his lover.

In an argument that applies equally to both Elaines, Donavin claims that Lancelot's reluctance to accept Elaine of Astolat's offer comes from the discomfort he has felt from being in the passive and feminine position during his recovery period:

> His adamant refusal of Elaine seems motivated by a fear that she
> might claim the feminine within him, which his life dedicated to

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male bonding denies. Even Lancelot's affair with Guinevere, an unattainable woman who often requires him to demonstrate his masculine strength, distances him from knowledge of and relationship to the feminine. Since Elaine's efforts at healing place Lancelot in a weak and subjected position, he eschews the potentiality of his feminization as he rejects the woman who invokes it. (76)

The answer to Bors' question about why Lancelot doesn't want Elaine lies in Lancelot's own anxiety about being the object of the female gaze. Because Elaine is the gazer, and therefore the sexual aggressor, Lancelot is incapable of reciprocating her desire. He again chooses to leave and be reunited with both the Round Table community and with Guinevere.

As a result of her unreciprocated love, Elaine dies of sorrow. Her body is placed in a boat, and it floats down to Camelot. After her boat arrives, the court assembles around the shore, and Elaine's final letter to Lancelot is read aloud. In the letter, Elaine once again declares her love for Lancelot and asks him to pray for her. The court mourns her death and weeps openly in pity for her. When Lancelot hears the letter, however, he responds defensively and denies any responsibility for her death by saying, "she loved me oute of mesure" (II: 1097.12-13). When Guinevere reproaches him for not being kinder to her, Lancelot replies "I love nat to be constrayned to love, for love muste only aryse of the harte selff, and nat by none constraynte" (II: 1097.22-24). Arthur agrees,

and both he and eventually Guinevere both support Lancelot, who then fulfills

Elaine's final request by offering a mass-penny.

Lancelot's treatment of and reaction to Elaine's final letter has evoked

much scholarly attention. While several scholars have read Elaine's funeral scene

as a criticism of Elaine's unmeasured and misdirected love[9] (as Lancelot,

Guinevere, and Arthur all do), others have interpreted the scene as taking a more

sympathetic tone toward the dead young woman. Donavin, for example, detects

criticism of what she calls Lancelot, Guinevere, and Arthur's "self-centered"

response to Elaine's letter: "Malory implicitly criticizes their reception of her

message by contrasting it with the overwhelming sympathy of the entire court

and creating the potential alliance of the *Morte Darthur's* reader with Elaine" (78).

John Michael Walsh adds that Elaine's sweetness and resigned acceptance of

Lancelot's rejection is placed in stark contrast with Guinevere's anger and

jealousy when she learns about Lancelot's sojourn in Astolat with Elaine (148).

Although Lancelot has continually chosen Guinevere over his own reputation

and loyalty to Arthur throughout the *Morte*, Guinevere seems never to be

satisfied. This contrast between the two women enhances the audience's

sympathy for Elaine and highlights the cracks beginning to appear in Lancelot

and Guinevere's relationship: "Because the quality of Elaine's love surpasses that

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[9] See Hares-Stryker, "Lily Maids," 129, Reiss 163-165, and Reynolds 35-37.

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of Guinevere herself (at this point, resentful, suspicious and querulous), Elaine shows the real fault and sin in Guinevere and Launcelot's adultery – the spiritual dead-end their love has reached" (Greenwood 170).

Although Walsh claims that "Lancelot's defense of himself seems sound" (146), the knight's rejection of not one, but two suitable noblewomen in favor of his devotion to the queen calls into question the virtue of his love. In the opening lines of "The Poisoned Apple" episode, Lancelot's love for the queen is named as the cause of his failure on the Grail Quest: "for, as the booke seyth, had nat sir Launcelot bene in his prevy thoughtes and in hys myndis so sette inwardly to the queen as he was in semynge outewarde to God, there had no knyght passed hym in the queste of the Sankgreall" (II: 1045.12-16). In addition, Lancelot admits to the same excess of feeling that he accuses Elaine of Astolat of having toward him when he confesses that he loves the queen "unmesurably and oute of mesure longe" (II: 897.16). Seen in this light, Lancelot's forsaking of either Elaine of Corbin or Elaine of Astolat in favor of his devotion to Guinevere cannot be interpreted as a morally upright choice. His faithfulness to the queen is a dedication to sin, not chivalric virtue, and therefore does not serve as a valid excuse for rejecting other suitable ladies.

On the other hand, Lancelot's objection to constrained love is, as Walsh claims, "eminently reasonable" (146): one cannot force oneself or anyone else to

have feelings that simply do not exist. Arthur agrees with Lancelot and adds, "where [a knight] ys bonden, he lowsith hymselff" (II: 1097.27). Donavin concludes that this loss of self is at the heart of Lancelot's rejection of Elaine of Astolat: "It articulates again the masculine fear of losing 'hymselff' in the feminine Other" (78). Lancelot believes that if he were to engage in a real romantic relationship, he would have to sacrifice a large part of his identity as a knight; thus, his attachment to the romantically unavailable queen, although sinful, allows him to remain himself.

Edmund Reiss, however, observes the irony in Arthur's statement: "what [Arthur] does not say is that not only is love consequently lost, but so is the person. The irony is that Lancelot is beginning to be 'bonden' by Guinevere, who more and more jealously suspects and berates him, as she does when she thinks he loves the Fair Maid. Trust and faith are leaving the love" (165). In his zeal to avoid women who might ensnare and entrap him, Lancelot has rejected both Elaine of Corbin and Elaine of Astolat, neither of whom pose a threat to his knighthood, and who would, in fact, strengthen him in his chivalric role. In addition, he has "bound" himself in a relationship which is doomed to compromise the knightly community and eventually leads him to abandon his chivalric role altogether.

As La Farge has observed, Elaine of Astolat's attempts at seducing

Lancelot and her sorrowful death eerily parallel the episode with Hallewes at the

Chapel Perelus ("Lancelot" 195). Both women die of heartbreak after he rejects

them, and these deaths form another narrative progression in this series of

episodes that extends to the end of Lancelot's life. When Guinevere rejects him

after Arthur's death and joins a convent, Lancelot mimics her choice and

becomes a monk. Several of his kinsmen and other knights join him, and they

live together for some years in a monastic community. After Guinevere's death,

Lancelot begins to fade:

> Thenne syr Launcelot never after ete but lytel mete, nor dranke, tyl
> he was dede, for than he seekened more and more and dryed and
> dwyned awaye. For the Bysshop nor none of his felowes myght not
> make hym to ete and lytel he dranke, that he was waxen by a
> kybbet shorter than he was, that the peple coude not knowe hym.
> For evermore, day and nyght, he prayed, but somtyme he slombred
> a broken slepe. Ever he was lyeng grovelyng on the tombe of kyng
> Arthur and quene Guenever. (III: 1257.1-9)

Lancelot's symptoms strongly resemble Elaine of Astolat's expression of

lovesickess for him: "the Fayre Maydyn of Ascolat…made such sorow day and

nyght that she never slepte, ete, nother dranke, and ever she made hir

complaynte unto sir Launcelot…[she] thus endured a ten dayes, that she fyebled

so that she muste nedis passe oute of thys worlde" (II: 1092.9-13). The similarities

suggest that Lancelot's love for Guinevere mirrors Elaine's love "oute of mesure"

for Lancelot, and the result is the same. Karen Cherewatuk interprets Lancelot's

refusal to eat and sleep as a turn toward religious asceticism inspired by his guilt

and grief. She carefully concedes, however, that "Malory's magnificent use of

ambiguity forces each reader to decide whether his dedication is to Guenevere,

God, or both. The text makes clear, however, that the queen's death prompts

Launcelot's preparation, as repentant ascetic, for new life in death" (70). It is not

until after Guinevere is dead that Lancelot finally repents of the sin which has

plagued him throughout the *Morte.*

Lancelot's unwillingness to abandon his love for Guinevere, and the

problematic nature of that love, is called into question again immediately

following Elaine of Astolat's death, when he encounters a huntress in the woods.

Lancelot is staying with a hermit in the woods in order to rest and prepare

himself for a jousting tournament in which he will be wearing the queen's favor

for the first time. He falls asleep next to a well, and a hind who is being pursued

by a huntress also stops at the well. The huntress tries to shoot the hind, but

misses and her arrow pierces Lancelot's buttock (III: 1103.31-1104.29). The

wound incapacitates Lancelot for some while, and Malory mentions that it is

especially grave "for hit was on such a place that he myght nat sytte in no sadyll"

(III: 1106.2-3).

In the same way that Kelly argued that Lancelot's feminization at the

hands of the four queens bled into the near-homosexual encounter with Belleus,

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Lancelot's recurring troubles with women bleed into the episode with the huntress. He is once again in a vulnerable position – asleep – as he was at the beginning of the four queens episode. Although Malory does not state that the huntress intends to shoot Lancelot (and, in fact, she claims she does not see him), Maud Burnett McInerney argues that her words are perhaps not to be taken at face value (248). If this interpretation is upheld, then Lancelot is targeted by the huntress, and further feminized – even dehumanized – by becoming an object of the hunt.

Even if the huntress is telling the truth, and she had no intention of shooting Lancelot, the result of the incident is that Lancelot is badly wounded, and he can no longer ride. He has once again lost the opportunity to demonstrate his knightly prowess. If he cannot ride a horse, he cannot participate in the tournament, and he cannot continue to win worship or reinstate his masculine identity. As La Farge observes, "For Malory, as for Caxton, to be unhorsed is to be unknighted; to be unknighted is to be unmanned" ("Hand of the Huntress" 265). Lancelot's situation is a recurrence of the helplessness he experienced as a captive of the four queens. McInerney also points out that, unlike the episode involving Belleus which was resolved through the drawing of weapons and potential knightly combat, Lancelot cannot in this case restore his masculine identity through a show of arms because the huntress is a woman (253). Not only

can he not engage in public knightly pursuits, but he cannot even defend himself against the individual who has harmed him without losing further worship.

Unlike the other women in the text who have feminized Lancelot, the huntress expresses no sexual interest in him. This absence of sexual aggression does not, however, diminish her threat to Lancelot's masculine identity. Both La Farge and McInerney compare her to Diana: a Roman goddess who poses a hazard to men by engaging in the traditionally masculine activity of hunting and by refusing to receive men into her company. McInerney also interprets her role as "an agent of punishment" who castigates Lancelot for his sins, particularly for his adultery with Guinevere (250). The huntress' gender compounds the humiliation that Lancelot undergoes, and serves to feminize him even further.

Although this episode is followed by accounts of Lancelot's successes at the Great Tournament and at the Healing of Sir Urry, the huntress episode detracts from these victories. Both La Farge and McInerney discuss the huntress episode's placement within the narrative as affecting the interpretations of other episodes that both precede and follow it. McInerney notes its placement immediately before the Great Tournament and the Healing of Sir Urry, and she argues that the shadow of the huntress incident hangs over both of these subsequent events and weakens their impact as both martial and moral victories (253). La Farge notes that the huntress episode occurs immediately after the

death of Elaine of Astolat, and she argues that the repetition of plot elements

from that episode – wearing a woman's favor into combat, being wounded,

losing consciousness, retelling the story, and pointing at the wound (not in that

order, however) – in the episode of the Great Tournament demonstrate

Lancelot's attempt to right his past wrongs. She claims that Lancelot, often to his

own detriment, is compelled to repeat these events in an "attempt to master"

them (273). Lancelot himself even seems to recognize explicitly the pattern of

emasculation that has emerged in his own narrative as he laments, "A, mercy

Jesu!...I may calle myself the moste unhappy man that lyvyth, for ever whan I

wolde have faynyst worship there befallyth me ever som unhappy thynge" (III:

1106.4-7).

La Farge's claims that Lancelot is compelled to repeat the pattern of

wounding that appears in these two episodes applies to my own analysis of the

series of episodes in which he repeatedly rejects women who attempt to seduce

him, in favor of remaining faithful to his adulterous love for Guinevere. These

episodes reveal the problems caused by his unease at being the object of female

sexual desire, his inability to reciprocate the ennobling love of worthy

noblewomen due to his fear of feminization, and the tragedy of his sinful love for

Guinevere which is only resolved with the lovers' deaths.

CHAPTER SIX

There and Back Again: A Malorian Wild Man's Tale

In the previous chapter, I discussed the conundrum that Lancelot faces as

his chivalric duty and his devotion to courtly love repeatedly come into conflict

with one another. When faced with this impossible decision, Lancelot invariably

chooses his devotion to courtly love over his chivalric duty. This chapter extends

that argument by placing Lancelot side by side with Sir Tristram, a knight who

presents the alternate scenario: when faced with this same conflict of values,

Tristram consistently chooses chivalric duty over courtly love. The tension that

stems from the two knights' being forced to choose between their chivalric ideals

results in their participation in parallel episodes in which they separate from

civilization and become wild men of the forest. These "Wild Man" episodes

function as a Bakhtinian carnival and allow Tristram and Lancelot to escape the

rigid confines of chivalric society and experience a temporary change in their

place in the social order. Their experiences follow the traditional medieval "Wild

Man" episode type and culminate in the knights' reintegration into courtly

society. This reintegration, however, does not signal a resolution of the conflict,

and both Tristram and Lancelot must face the tragic consequences of their earlier

choices. The carnivalesque "Wild Man" episodes in Malory, while they affirm the

world order, ultimately demonstrate that the world order itself is broken and

reveal the tragedy at the heart of the Round Table community.

Lancelot is well-known as the best knight of Arthur's Round Table, both

by Malory scholars and by Malory's text itself;[1] many scholars have also noted

Tristram's resemblance to Lancelot and the narrative parallels between their

many adventures.[2] These similarities are not original to Malory as he borrowed

his material from French sources. As Renee L. Curtis has observed, the *Prose

Tristan* relies heavily on the *Prose Lancelot*, therefore similarities between the two

works should be expected (13). Since Malory borrows from both of these texts, it

is not surprising that these similarities also appear in his work. While Donald

Schueler agrees that Lancelot and Tristram "should be considered correlative"

(53), he also asserts that "the whole point of Malory's comparison is that all the

qualities which the two men have in common are less important than the one

matter in which they differ – that is, their importance to Arthur's *comitatus*" (55).

Schueler argues that Tristram is a free agent since he does not belong to the

Round Table for the majority of the tale. He is, in fact, reluctant to join and is

practically conscripted into membership by Arthur (61-62). Schueler claims that

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[1] With the exception of Sir Galahad, the perfect spiritual knight. Even after Sir Galahad arrives, however, Lancelot is still acknowledged as the best "sinful" knight.

[2] See in particular Hanks "Malory's 'Book of Sir Tristram,'" 25-27, Pastoor 63-67, and MacBain 59-65.

this free agency allows him to avoid the conflict between chivalric duty and

courtly love which Lancelot repeatedly faces (58-59). Maureen Fries, although

she rejects Schueler's conclusion, concurs that "Malory depicts Tristram's career

as contradictory to the Arthurian oath" (607). She paints a picture of Tristram as

a "counter-hero" who serves as "a symbol of the decay of the Arthurian world

from its own ideals" (613). While D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. agrees that *The Book of Sir*

*Tristram* marks the beginning of the decline of Arthur's kingdom, his assessment

of Sir Tristram contrasts starkly with that of Fries as he suggests that Tristram,

far from being a symbol of chivalric decay, is "Malory's chosen agent of

gentility" ("Malory's 'Book of Sir Tristram'" 17). Kevin Grimm also presents

Tristram as the gentlest of knights and argues that Tristram's "jantylness" is

infectious. Sir Lamerok so admires him that he begins emulating Tristram's

gentility, and it subsequently spreads to other knights as well (86-87). In

addition, Nancy H. Owen and Lewis J. Owen claim "that Tristram himself is

meant to epitomize the glory of Arthurian chivalric life in full flower seems

obvious" (13).

Incorporating ideas from all of these sources, this study explores the idea

that both Tristram and Lancelot represent both the best and worst of Arthurian

society. They go from paragons of gentility to complete outcasts and back again.

Their participation in the structurally identical carnivalesque Wild Man episodes

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provides a critique of Arthurian society which is never fully resolved. Below, I

first discuss the traditional medieval "Wild Man" episode with a particular focus

on the version featuring a nobleman-turned-wild-man. I also provide a brief

analysis of Bakhtin's theory of carnival as it applies to the "Wild Man" episode.

Next, I delve into the two "Wild Man" episodes in Malory's work and

demonstrate how they fit into the traditional medieval "Wild Man" episode type,

and function as Bakhtinian carnival. In conclusion, I will make a few

observations concerning the paradox that the "Wild Man" episode presents.

*The Medieval "Wild Man" Episode*

The episode of the wild man appears frequently in medieval literature and

art. Richard Bernheimer notes that there are many variations of the wild man –

sometimes he is covered in dark hair, walks on all fours, carries a giant club, and

is matted with grass and leaves. Sometimes he is hairless, walks upright, and

even has a wife and children. Some wild men are completely sane while some

have lost their faculties of reason and wander aimlessly like wild beasts.[3] Despite

this spectrum of possibilities, however, they are very easy to identify. The wild

man always lives apart from civilized society in some kind of wilderness. One

popular early medieval story was the "taming of the wild man" in which a wild

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[3] The information I have given here is a truncated version of the first two chapters of
Bernheimer's book.

man is captured by hunters and brought into society where he is taught the

virtues of civilization. In these stories, the wild man is a natural being, born and

raised in the forest without contact with the outside world. The particular

episode type I will be discussing in this study, however, involves the opposite

story: a civilized man who is driven insane, withdraws from society, and

becomes a wild man.

Although the nobleman-turned-wild-man story takes on many variations,

the bare bones of the episode's structure as it appears in medieval romance are as

follows:[4]

1. A knight suffers some form of trauma, usually caused by a woman.
2. The knight becomes mad and runs off into the forest where he lives as a wild man for a period of time.
3. During this time, his contact with other people is marked by unknightly behavior and/or violence.
4. Eventually, he falls asleep – usually under a tree or by a well – where he is discovered – usually by a noblewoman, but he is unrecognizable.
5. He is brought back to civilization where he is given new clothes.
6. His true identity is revealed, and his status as an active knight is restored.

Considering that this story – or some variation of it – is ubiquitous in medieval

romance, it must have held an especial appeal for its medieval audience.[5] What

does the wild man represent that he is so intriguing a creature? As with so many

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[4] This list is compiled from several different sources. See Doob 73 and 138, Menard 434-436 and 443-458, Flieger 98-99, Stock 23-26, Bernheimer 14-20, and Maurice 140-146.

[5] Notable examples include Sir Orfeo and Yvain.

questions about medieval literature, there is more than one answer. Bernheimer

gives a rather psychoanalytic interpretation of the wild man as repressed desire:

"the need to give external expression and symbolically valid form to the

impulses of reckless physical self-assertion which are hidden in all of us, but are

normally kept under control" (3). In the early Middle Ages, as demonstrated by

the ever-popular "taming the wild man" story, the wild man represented a form

of chaos, a destructive force that threatened to tear down the carefully

constructed walls of civilization. However, Lorraine Stock has noted that around

the mid-thirteenth century, the perception of the wild man had begun to shift

from a representation of the fear of the loss of civilization to a celebration of

"cultural primitivism." The wild man became the "noble savage" – someone

whose proximity to nature allowed him to escape "civilization's corrupting

influence" and imbued him with positive qualities (22). William Wixom

summarizes this shift eloquently when he describes the wild man as "the hairy,

primitive, woodland creature who at first embodied all that medieval man hoped

he was not, then, as the old order declined, became the object of his envy" (vii).

Malory's wild men function in both ways: the forest offers the knights a place of

much-needed escape from the pressures and obligations of courtly life, but at the

same time, despite their initial rejection of civilization, both wild men return to

court and resume their former identities, reaffirming the social order.

*Bakhtinian Carnival and the "Wild Man" Episode*

In his famous study *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin introduces the concept of carnival: "As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal" (686). The medieval "Wild Man" episode, with its conversion of civilized knights into primitive men and their subsequent rejoining of the social order, fits firmly into this definition. Bakhtin's view of the carnivalesque, however, was a positive one, in that he believed that this temporary escape from the social order was necessary in order to maintain that very order: "In the development of class society such a conception of the world can only be expressed in unofficial culture. There is no place for it in the culture of the ruling classes…for official culture is founded on the principle of an immovable and unchanging hierarchy in which the higher and lower never merge" (690). In her analysis of Bakhtin's theory, Lisa R. Perfetti observes that carnivalesque episodes in medieval literature "reinforce conservative ideology while simultaneously providing a safe vent for the anxiety this ideology could engender" (38-9). In contrast, however, Michael Andre Bernstein notes the "distinctly melancholic undertone" that pervades the carnivalesque, hinting at a

"negative and bitter strand at the core" (17). This negative strand lends the

Malorian "Wild Man" tales their sense of tragedy: although the Wild Man

episodes permit Tristram and Lancelot to escape temporarily the tension created

by the conflicting ideals of chivalric duty and courtly love, they do not provide –

as Bakhtin admits –a permanent escape. Their carnivalesque transformations into

wild men have not altered the established social order, and they must return to

the very same situations which caused the need for their escape in the first place.

And, indeed, both knights subsequently suffer tragic consequences due to their

continued inability to adhere to the contradictory chivalric code which governs

their actions.

*Malory's "Wild Man" Episodes*

*Motif 1: Trauma*

In the particular "Wild Man" episode that appears in Malory – that in

which a knight becomes a wild man – there is a common cause for the

"madness" which consumes the two knights. The madness suffered by the

Malorian knights is a specific kind, labeled by Penelope Doob as "grief-

madness," which was believed by medieval scholars to be caused by an excess of

melancholic humors (30). This excess of melancholy is in turn caused by a loss,

"most often…when a beloved person has died or been untrue" (30). For example

in *Sir Orfeo*, the cause of Orfeo's madness is the kidnapping of his wife by fairies, for Chretien de Troyes' Yvain it is his rejection by his lover Laudine, and Bernheimer notes that in the courtly literature of the later Middle Ages, love madness was "the fashionable reason for becoming a wild man" (14). Malory, ever the fashionable writer, employs love madness twice as the cause of knights' transformation into wild men.

Sir Tristram is the first of the two knights to go mad. After discovering a series of letters exchanged between his lover Isode and his brother-in-law, Sir Keyhydyus, Tristram believes Isode has been unfaithful to him and attacks Sir Keyhydyus. Knowing that his actions have endangered him, Tristram leaves the castle and lives in a nearby forest (II: 493.20-494.35). While Tristram's attack on Sir Keyhydyus is a result of his jealousy, his escape into the forest is caused by shame at his own unchivalrous behavior and by a fear of reprisal: "sir Trystram drad hym leste he were discoverde unto the kyng" (II: 494.19-20). He realizes his misdeed, and runs away in order to avoid punishment and the court's vengeance.

In the parallel episode, Lancelot's madness begins after he has been tricked for the second time into sleeping with Elaine of Corbin. Guinevere finds Lancelot leaving Elaine's room dressed only in his shirt, and commands him to leave her sight forever. At first, Lancelot faints dead away, then regains

consciousness, leaps through the window, and runs off into the woods where he

lives for two years (II: 804.29-806.8). The primary cause of Lancelot's madness,

then, is also shame, not jealousy or fear. He has broken his vow of courtly love by

being unfaithful – albeit unintentionally – to Guinevere, and his "remarkably

fragile" psyche cannot bear it (Plummer 46). Lancelot's extreme reaction to the

incident reflects his prioritization of courtly love over chivalric deeds. Molly

Martin has observed that Lancelot is dependent upon Guinevere's gaze for his

masculine identity (70). This dependence compels Lancelot to choose courtly

love over loyalty to Arthur, since his knightly success hinges upon his ability to

have Guinevere gaze upon him. Maureen Fries has also noted that Lancelot's

faithfulness to Guinevere leads him to martial success: "Each resistance by

Lancelot to temptation is followed by an increasingly important victory in arms"

(608). His banishment by Guinevere, then, compounds his own shame over

sleeping with Elaine, and he escapes the situation by running into the forest.

    For both knights, the true trauma that they experience is their inability to

keep their chivalric oath. The conflict of values they experience means that they

must fail at either their chivalric duty or their devotion to courtly love. These two

traumatic incidents set up the framework for reading the two tales together.

Tristram, the embodiment of chivalry, acts unchivalrously while Lancelot, the

greatest and truest lover, acts unfaithfully. The solution to this conflict (albeit

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only a temporary one) is to abandon chivalric life altogether, eschew the social

hierarchy, and become carnivalesque wild men.

*Motif 2: Becoming Mad*

In her study on the literary conventions of madness, Penelope Doob

comments that in nobleman-turned-wild-man stories which she labels "Unholy

Wild Man" stories, the onset of madness is sudden rather than gradual (82, 84,

86). A knight does not contemplate the virtues of living in the wilderness and

then after much thought and preparation move there. On the contrary, the knight

in question snaps. One moment he is fully sane, participating in the chivalric

community in an appropriate manner, and the next he is a wild man, running off

into the woods. Tristram's decline, however, does not strictly follow the

conventional pattern; he has a more gradual three-stage decline.

In the first stage, Tristram leaves the castle and lives in a nearby forest, but

he does not withdraw completely from civilization. As he leaves the castle, he

sends his squire for his horse and armor, and "knyghtly he rode forth oute of the

castell" (II: 494.26). Tristram is in complete control of himself at this point. He

encounters Sir Gingalyn at the city gate, and the two of them engage in a

skirmish. When Mark asks Gingalyn about the fight, Gingalyn claims "I wote nat

what knight hit was, but well I wote hy syeth and makith grete dole" (II: 495.6-7).

Obviously, something is troubling Tristram, but he displays no signs of madness

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at this point in the narrative. Tristram then encounters Sir Fergus in the

neighboring forest, and at this meeting Tristram begins to display signs of deep

distress as he swoons and moans for three days and nights (II: 495.10-12).

Tristram, however, has not lost interest in the court, and he sends Fergus back to

gather news. At this point, Sir Fergus describes Tristram as "allmoste oute of hys

mynde" (II: 495.18). He is not yet a madman, but he is on his way.

After Fergus' departure, Tristram enters the second stage of decline in

which he sheds the outward signs of his knighthood by leaving his horse behind

and taking off his armor. He abides in a forest near a castle, and a damsel brings

him food and drink. The lady of the castle gives him a harp, and they play for

each other (II: 495.33-496.16). Tristram's abandonment of his knightly

accoutrements signifies a further separation from civilization and thus brings

him a step closer to becoming a wild man. His interaction with the lady of the

castle, however, punctuated with the courtly activity of harping, suggests that

his separation is still incomplete. While other literary wild men also play music –

Sir Orfeo being a primary example – it is important to note that they play for an

audience of wild animals. Tristram's audience is a human woman, which

reinforces his own humanity when he becomes the audience for her harp-

playing. While Tristram is closer to other literary wild men in this second stage,

he still has not fully succumbed to madness. This second stage lasts a quarter of a

year before Tristram reaches the third stage when he completely withdraws from civilization and goes into the "wilderness" where he sheds his clothes and wanders naked like a veritable wild man of the forest.

Although Tristram's delayed descent into madness does not follow the traditional medieval pattern of instantaneous madness, it is important because it demonstrates his reluctance to abandon the chivalric way of life. He has not been cast away from court or commanded to leave (even if he knows that will be the consequence). Instead, he chooses to leave, and his dedication to chivalric duty prevents his instant transformation into a wild man.

In contrast, Lancelot's transformation is instantaneous and complete. He does not loiter around the neighboring castles or accept food from the locals as Tristram does. Instead, his behavior is marked by violence: he nearly breaks a dwarf's neck, and viciously attacks the knight who tries to stop him (II: 818.5-29). The contrast between this violent behavior and Tristram's peaceful harp playing highlights the knights' respective priorities. Tristram values chivalric duty above all else, and even as he descends into madness, he acts chivalrously. His gradual decline allows him to have his desired freedom from the conflict of chivalric values, yet it appears that going "allmoste oute of his mind" is not enough. He must experience the full inversion of his own social standing in order to experience the relief that the carnivalesque episode offers, and also to meet the

requirements of the "Wild Man" narrative. In the same way, Lancelot's violent

and unchivalrous behavior reflects his placement of chivalric duty and the

knightly community in second place. If he does not have Guinevere's gaze or the

ideal of courtly love as his guide, he has difficulty acting in a chivalrous manner

at all. He must find a way to reconstruct his masculine identity apart from the

feminine gaze, and in order to do that, he must first completely rid himself of his

former identity. His immediate transformation into a raving wild man

demonstrates this change.

*Motif 3: Unknightly Behavior*

      During their respective times of madness, both knights experience a

reversal in their social status. Tristram joins a group of shepherds who feed and

care for him, but who also physically abuse him. Malory mentions that the

herdsmen "beate hym with roddis…clypped hym with sherys and made hym

lyke a foole" (II: 496.22-24). Tristram endures this humiliation without protest

and allows himself to become subservient to the herdsmen. In contrast, Lancelot

encounters a knight named Sir Bliant who, despite Lancelot's erratic behavior

and ragged appearance, perceives his innate nobility. Sir Bliant shelters, clothes,

and feeds him, but his violent behavior convinces Bliant to chain him to a wall

for Lancelot's own safety and the safety of others. Despite the high quality of

care that Sir Bliant provides, Malory writes that "in [Lancelot's] wytte they

cowde nat brynge hym ageyn, nother to know hymselff" (II: 819.27-28). Unlike Tristram, who chooses to remain with the shepherds and play a subordinate role, Lancelot is not presented with a choice: he is chained to the wall. As Forrest Helvie observes, however, Lancelot certainly possesses the ability and strength to escape if he wishes, and "the fact that he remains in Sir Blyaunte's castle without protest does suggest this is not an unwelcome circumstance and possibly serves as a break from his duties and responsibilities in Arthur's court" (65-66). Lancelot's imprisonment in Bliant's castle frees him from his social standing as a knight and also from his conflicting loyalties. Helvie's argument supports the idea that Lancelot's madness serves a carnivalesque function.

Although neither Tristram nor Lancelot is treated as a noble knight by his caretaker, and both knights engage in unknightly behavior, neither of them completely loses his chivalric tendencies. For Tristram, these chivalric tendencies reinforce his dedication to knightly deeds. For Lancelot, they represent his attempt at reconstructing his knightly identity through chivalric deeds rather than through the feminine gaze no longer available to him. In particular, Tristram participates in two episodes which demonstrate how his innate nobility compels him to perform his chivalric duty despite his seeming reluctance to do so.

In the first episode, Sir Dagonet, King Arthur's fool, comes riding along with a group of knights, and they drink from a nearby well. While they are refreshing themselves, their horses run away. Sir Tristram approaches, dunks Dagonet and the other knights in the well, then runs off, recaptures the horses, restores them to their owners, and orders the knights to continue on their way (II: 496.25-36). Malory does not provide a motivation for Tristram's actions, although he does describe the herdsmen's laughter at the events. Tristram is certainly behaving in an unknightly way, and seemingly without reason, which is consistent with his characterization as a wild man. A Bakhtinian reading, however, reveals that Tristram is acting the fool rather than expressing true insanity. In his study on insanity in the Middle Ages, Stephen Harper makes a distinction between a madman and a person who is merely acting like a fool: a fool is someone with an occupation – he is paid to amuse his employer, while a madman acts without reason or self-awareness (14). Tristram's job seems to be to amuse the herdsmen in exchange for sustenance, making him a legitimate fool. In addition, the manner in which he carries out this amusement demonstrates a careful consideration of the situation. Tristram's choice of victim is a shrewd one: he plays a harmless prank directed at a knight who is also a fool and who therefore has little reputation to lose. Also, Tristram's rescue of the horses implies that he recognizes their importance in establishing a knightly identity.

He consciously chases after them and chivalrously returns them to their owners. This behavior hardly constitutes the "unconscious acts of insanity" that Harper would associate with a true madman. When Sir Dagonet reports the episode to king Mark, he recognizes Tristram's conscious intention to make the herdsmen laugh: "he demyd that the shyperdis had sente that foole to aray hem so bycause that they lawghed at them" (II: 498.10-12). He also calls Tristram a "foole" and makes a comparison to his own status as a fool: "And that foole and I, foole, mette togydir" (II: 498.26). Sir Dagonet, a fool himself, easily recognizes the trappings of foolishness and does not believe that Tristram is insane. This episode shows Tristram participating in a conscious carnivalesque episode: he exploits his position as a wild man and the herdsmen's fool in order to experience a reversal of his social standing that allows him to behave erratically and take on the appearance of madness, while still maintaining a spirit of chivalry.

At the beginning of the second episode in which Tristram displays his innate nobility, Tristram's transformation into a wild man has negative consequences on the kingdom. These consequences result directly from Tristram's absence from court and support the argument that he is a representative of the goodness that civilization has to offer. Believing that Tristram is dead, a giant named Tauleas, who has avoided Cornwall for seven

years for fear of Tristram, begins to venture out into the countryside (II: 499.32-38). He attacks a knight named Sir Dynaunte, and the herdsmen urge Tristram to stop the giant: "Helpe yonder knyght!" (II: 500.15) Tristram's initial response is an unenthusiastic, "Helpe ye hym" (II: 500.16). Shortly afterward, however, Tristram spies the knight's sword lying on the ground, grabs it, then cuts off the giant's head. He immediately runs away with the herdsmen and avoids any conversation with Sir Dynaunte. In this scene, Tristram is obviously reluctant to involve himself in the situation with the giant. His devotion to chivalry, however, means that he is unable to stop himself from killing the giant and shows that he has not abandoned his desire to perform chivalric deeds altogether.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes that, in medieval romance, giants represent "sexual perversity…anarchic violence, disregard for authority and its world-ordering hierarchies, and [a] gross, boundary-breaking appetite" (*Of Giants* 77). By destroying the giant, Tristram restores and affirms the world order to which he previously belonged, though he does not immediately re-join that order. In her study of Malory's source text, the *Prose Tristan*, Huguette Legros recognizes the function of giant-killing in Tristan's tale as well as Tristan's reluctance to reintegrate himself into courtly life: "Ainsi Tristan a vaincu celui qui représentait le monde sauvage et cette victoire apparaît comme un nouveau pas vers une

réintégration possible; Tristan fait figure de libérateur du pays…mais parce qu'il

n'est pas encore prêt à quitter le Marais, il refuse d'être soigné et de suivre le

chevalier qu'il a sauvé" ([Thus Tristan has vanquished that which represented

the savage world and this victory appears as a new step toward a possible

reintegration; Tristan is featured as the liberator of the country…but because he

is not yet ready to leave the Wilderness, he refuses to be cared for and to follow

the knight whom he has saved] 876). Legros' argument extends to Malory's text

as well: Tristram knows that if he resumes his position as a knight of the king's

court, the conflict between his loyalty to his king and his lover will also resume,

and he will have to face the consequences of his broken oath. Apparently

unready to face that reality, he continues his carnivalesque charade with the

herdsmen.

In a parallel episode, Lancelot rescues his caretaker/prison warden Sir

Bliant from an attack by the malevolent knights Sir Breuses Sans Pite and Sir

Bertelot. Lancelot breaks free of his irons in order to defend Bliant against them.

He of course wins, and when Bliant sees Lancelot's bloody wrists, his regret at

chaining him up convinces him to allow Lancelot to go free (II: 819.31-820.30).

Lancelot's defense of Sir Bliant demonstrates that, although he is a wild man, he

possesses an innate chivalry that defines his character, and, like Tristram,

Lancelot cannot simply stand by while injustices are occurring. In addition, he is

no longer hobbled by the clash of values between his love for Guinevere and his duty to Arthur. Freed from this conflict, he is able to perform his chivalric duty unencumbered.

While Tristram's giant-killing episode demonstrates his position as a defender of civilization, Lancelot's parallel boar-killing episode reflects his identity crisis. During his stay with Sir Bliant, Lancelot hears hounds chasing a boar and sees one of the hunters tie up his horse and leave his sword and spear nearby. Lancelot, unable to resist, takes the horse and the weapons and joins the hunt. The boar gores the horse, and while Lancelot is pinned under the horse's body, the boar wounds him deeply in the thigh. Lancelot becomes enraged and, despite the thigh wound, stands up and beheads the boar (II: 821.1-21). A hermit encounters the wounded Lancelot and tries to help him, but the frenzied knight attacks him. The hermit finds a cart and some men to help, and they bring Lancelot and the boar's corpse in the cart together to the hermitage. The hermit heals Lancelot's wound, but cannot "fynde hym his sustenaunce, and so he empeyred and wexed fyeble bothe of body and of hys wytte: for defaute of sustenaunce he waxed more wooder than he was aforetyme" (II: 822.15-18). This incident marks a relapse for Lancelot. He seems to recover under Sir Bliant's care, but after the boar hunt, he becomes even more of a wild man than ever before.

Both Cohen and Sarah Sheehan have observed the similarities in medieval

literature between the boar, the heroic warrior, and the giant (Cohen, *Of Giants*,

148; Sheehan 12-13). Giants are frequently described as having the heads of

boars, and knights are often likened to boars – a simile which Malory employs

many times.[6] These descriptions expose the transient and indefinite nature of

identity in medieval literature. Boars walk the fine line between chaos and order

by representing both the wilderness that must be conquered and the fierce might

of the best civilized warrior. Lancelot's killing of the boar, then, demonstrates his

struggle with his own identity. He is a chivalrous knight, but he is also a wild

man; he is a champion of courtly love, but he is also (inadvertently) an unfaithful

lover. Lancelot is described in flattering terms as a boar due to his extraordinary

deeds, but – just as he has been gored in the thigh by a real boar – he has also

been damaged by the constraints of the chivalric code. His thigh wound

symbolically represents his inability to perform his prescribed chivalric role

successfully (despite the appearance of success) and at the same time his

impotence to change his circumstances. His increased madness during his time

of recovery indicates an escalation of the carnivalesque nature of his "Wild Man"

episode. Although he has been in close proximity to the good knight Sir Bliant

and has continued to perform chivalric deeds by rescuing Bliant from evil

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[6] There are too many examples to list here, but Lancelot in particular is compared to a boar in II: 829.6-7 and 1057.20.

knights, he must escape further into his role as a wild man in order to experience fully the release that carnival promises and rebuild his identity.

After he heals from his thigh wound, Lancelot also becomes a fool like Tristram, but despite the structural similarity in the narrative, the two knights' situations are very different. Having wandered aimlessly for two years, Lancelot coincidentally drifts back into the city of Corbin where he is chased through the streets by the youths of the city. Lancelot retaliates violently by breaking the arms and legs of his attackers before he flees into the castle. The knights of the castle take pity on him and allow him to sleep in a pile of straw by the city gate (II: 822.19-823.2). Malory includes the detail that the knights refuse to come close to him to bring him food: "And so every day they wolde throw hym mete and set hym drynke, but there was but feaw that wolde brynge hym mete to hys hondys" (II: 823.2-4). Unlike sir Tristram, whose herdsmen caretakers feed him and groom him and do not seem to fear him in any way, Lancelot manifests a madness marked with violence. The scene in which Lancelot flees to the castle depicts him as dangerous, capable and willing to harm the people around him. Although Malory does not explicitly say that the knights are afraid of Lancelot, it seems a likely conclusion to draw: fools are predictable and controllable, and they respond to the commands of their employers. Although Lancelot is described as a "fool" in King Pelles' court, he is not treated as an amusing

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employee. He is treated with caution and at more than an arm's length as an unpredictable and potentially dangerous madman.

The period in which Lancelot lives at the Corbin city gate serves as the final step in his identity deconstruction. While he lived with Sir Bliant, the dwarf he encountered remarked on his resemblance to Lancelot, and Sir Bliant is impressed by his prowess (II: 819.1-9). At Corbin, however, he sheds all hint of noble appearance or behavior, and his carnivalesque social reversal is complete. For both Tristram and Lancelot, the next step is to begin the journey back to civilization.

*Motifs 4 and 5: Discovery, New Clothes, and Identification*

After Tristram saves Sir Dynaunte by beheading the giant, Sir Dynaunte returns to King Mark's court with the giant's head. Mark, intrigued by Dynaunt's account of the wild man who saved him, goes into the forest to investigate. He finds Tristram lying naked near a fountain, but does not recognize him, and he commands his men to bring the sleeping knight back to Tyntagil where he provides Tristram with food and new clothes. Isode, curious about the wild man, seeks him out, and finds him asleep by a well in the garden. She fails to recognize him, although she admits that he looks familiar. Upon hearing Isode admit she does not know him, Tristram weeps in sorrow. He is finally identified

by Isode's dog, which was a present to her from Tristram.[7] This emotional scene demonstrates the temporary nature of Tristram's carnivalesque adventure and the inability of the carnival to resolve the conflict of values that Tristram continues to experience. Almost as soon as he returns to court, Tristram is confronted by the conflict that required him to leave court in the first place: his inability to be both loyal to his king and faithful to his lover. His experience as a wild man has not truly changed the world order; it has only allowed him to escape from it for a short period of time. In addition, Isode's inability to recognize Tristram is a poor testament to her love for him, and it stands in stark contrast to Elaine of Corbin's immediate recognition of Lancelot in the parallel episode.

In that episode, the newly-knighted Sir Castor brings Lancelot inside the castle at Corbin and gives him a scarlet robe to wear. After donning the robe, Lancelot goes into the castle garden and falls asleep by a well where Elaine of Corbin finds him: "And whan that she behylde hym, anone she felle in remembraunce of hym and knew hym veryly for sir Launcelot" (II: 823.23-25). In Chapter Four, I argue that Elaine's sight restores Lancelot's knightly persona and offers a sinless alternative to the ennobling yet adulterous sight of Guinevere.

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[7] The dog had originally been a gift to Tristram from the princess of France, who had been infatuated with the knight. His re-gifting of the dog to Isode could be interpreted as another example of his secondary devotion to the ideal of courtly love.

Life at Corbin offers Lancelot something his carnivalesque wild-man experience could never provide: a permanent change in his circumstances – a resolution to the conflict which caused his madness and the opportunity to succeed apart from Guinevere's gaze. At Corbin, he no longer needs the carnival to escape; he can begin a new chivalric life in which his loyalties are not divided. His adoption of the identity of Le Shyvalere Mafete and his unprecedented martial achievements in this new role reveal that, freed from the hindrance of conflicting values, Lancelot is capable of reaching his full potential (II:827.25-28).

Yet, despite his victories at Corbin, Lancelot remains unsatisfied: "And every day onys, for ony myrthis that all the ladyes might make hym, he wolde onys every day loke towarde the realme of Logrys, where kynge Arthure and queen Gwenyver was, and than wolde he falle upon a wepyng as hys harte shulde to-braste" (II: 827.10-14). Although the tension between his duty to Arthur and his devotion to Guinevere has not dissipated, Lancelot yearns for his previous chivalric role. This longing for reinstatement reveals Lancelot's role as a supporter of the social hierarchy, and his loyalties to the king and queen cause him to seek full reintegration into his old way of life.

*Motif 6: Reintegration*

In her discussion of the wild-man convention in medieval romance, Doob points out that as with nearly all medieval disease, the cause of madness was not merely physiological or even psychological; it was believed to have a spiritual cause as well. Doob observes that literary madmen in particular "suffer from a particular sort of guilt by association…[their] symptoms…seem to be based primarily on accounts of biblical madmen – Saul, the demoniacs of the New Testament, Nebuchadnezzar – all of whom were thought to be notorious sinners in the throes of their punishment" (31). She observes that the nobleman-turned-wild-man returns to society only after he partially regains his wits, recognizes his sin, and confesses it (89-90). For Tristram and Lancelot, it is important to note that both knights' madness – although it falls into the category of love madness – also results from their own misbehavior. Tristram's attack on Sir Keyhydyus signals the breaking of his chivalric oath, and Tristram's involvement with Isode is an example of double adultery, since they are both married to other people. Lancelot's sins are his failure to be a faithful lover to Guinevere and his disloyalty to Arthur. Their sojourns in their respective wildernesses then function as penance for these sins just as the wanderings of Nebuchadnezzar and Saul do in their stories.

Tristram's experience as a wild man seems to be a kind of self-imposed

punishment for his broken chivalric oath: he does not want to be exiled from

court, so he leaves voluntarily. After Isode's dog recognizes him, however,

Tristram finally casts off his role as a madman, confesses his true identity, and

yields to King Mark's authority. When King Mark asks him to reveal his name,

Tristram replies rather defeatedly, "So God me helpe…my name ys sir

Trystrames de Lyones. Now do by me what ye lyst" (II: 502.30-31). Mark then

sentences him to be banished from Cornwall for ten years. Tristram never

expresses any regret or shame about his behavior, nor does he struggle to

become reintegrated into knightly fellowship. In fact, on his way to the boat

which is to take him away from Cornwall and into exile, he encounters Sir

Dinadan who immediately joins him on his journey as a brother-in-arms, and

Tristram's reintegration is complete. In Tristram's case, the carnivalesque

episode in which he participates successfully relieves the tension of his

conflicting values. After taking a brief break from the established social order

and allowing himself to recover from his guilt over his broken oath, Tristram

returns to court, ready to face his punishment and contribute once again to the

chivalric community. Although he has been exiled from the Cornish court,

Tristram sails to England where his adventures with Arthur's Round Table

knights truly begin. Marie-Luce Chênerie notes that "sur la terre arthurienne

qu'il a choisie pour son exil loin d'Yseut, il devient pour la première fois un authentique chevalier errant" ([in the Arthurian land that he has chosen for his exile far from Isode, he becomes for the first time an authentic knight errant] 53). Tristram's exile from King Mark's court separates him from Isode and affords him an extended respite from his divided loyalties without having to reenact his role as a wild man.

Lancelot, on the other hand, is profoundly ashamed by his period of madness. After he regains his wits, the second question he asks is "How many be there that knowyth of my woodnes?" (II: 825.10). He pleads with Elaine to keep his madness a secret, and he describes himself as "sore ashamed that I have be myssefortuned" (II: 825.15). Lancelot's shame indicates his madness was not a performance; it was beyond his control. In addition, his distress upon recovery reveals the failure of the carnivalesque experience to resolve the trauma of his broken oath. His subsequent assumption of the nom-de-plume "Le Shyvalere Mafete," or the "Knight Who Has Trespassed," demonstrates recognition and confession of his previous wrongdoing and functions as both continued penance and a secondary carnivalesque episode in which Lancelot continues his attempt to rebuild his knightly identity.

The attempt is successful, and his victories as "Le Shyvalere Mafete" draw the attention of Sir Ector and Sir Perceval who have been sent by Guinevere to

find him. After jousting against Perceval, Lancelot reveals his true identity, and the Round Table knights invite him to return to Camelot. After a mild protest, Lancelot eventually agrees to return to Arthur's court where the status quo is immediately restored, including the tension between his divided loyalties. Arthur mistakenly assumes that Lancelot's madness was the result of his love affair with Elaine of Corbin, and, unable to admit the true reason for his madness, Lancelot responds evasively: "yf I ded ony foly I have that I sought" (II: 833.1-2). Malory reveals the division that has occurred in Arthur's court between those who believe that Lancelot is in love with Elaine and those who know the truth about Lancelot and Guinevere: "But all sir Launcelottys kynnesmen knew for whom he wente oute of hys mynde" (II: 833.3-4). Upon Lancelot's return, the tension of divided loyalties is no longer confined to Lancelot's own psyche, but has now spread among the courtiers.

*A Tragic Paradox*

The knights' choices and the consequences of those choices present a paradox that emphasizes the impossible choice the two knights must make. Tristram chooses chivalric duty over courtly love. Legros notes that, in Tristan's Wild Man episode, "la chevalerie prime sur l'amour et la folie apparaît comme une épreuve purificative et régénératrice qui n'apprend pas au héros à mieux aimer, mais à privilégier la prouesse et l'aventure" ([chivalry prevails over love,

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and madness functions as a purificative and regenerative trial which does not teach the hero to love better, but to privilege prowess and adventure] (878). As a result, his tale ends with the completion of the Round Table fellowship and the long-awaited christening of Sir Palomides, but we later learn that Tristram dies ignobly at the hands of the treacherous King Mark. His privileging of the chivalric community results in personal loss. On the other hand, Lancelot chooses courtly love and at his death is hailed by his brother Ector as the greatest knight and truest lover (III: 1259.9-21). His personal reputation remains intact, but his privileging of courtly love contributes to the failure of the chivalric community and the dissolution of Arthur's Round Table. Here we have the "impossible choice" in macrocosm, and Malory's paratactic use of these two episodes demonstrates what Bonnie Wheeler calls "paradox which offers explanation only through multiplication" (110). Both choices are good: Tristram and Lancelot are the greatest knights living, and their respective loyalties gain them both worship. At the same time, however, there is no "good" choice here; either way, failure is imminent. The paratactic text does not privilege either story, thus the reader must determine which choice is the better one, or the lesser of two evils. Tristram and Lancelot serve as the means through which Malory presents the debate.

The "Wild Man" narrative is particularly effective at emphasizing the ambiguity of the knights' choices because it contains a paradox itself: the structure of the "nobleman turned wild-man" episode demonstrates the inability of a knight to continue living in the knightly community as he becomes a wild man, yet it always ends with the restoration of the knight into his rightful place within that community. A Bakhtinian reading of the multiplication and variation of the nobleman-turned-wild-man story in the *Morte d'Arthur* allows for both a critique and affirmation of the chivalric community. Both Tristram and Lancelot need to separate themselves for a period of time from that community due to their inability to keep their conflicting chivalric oaths. This need for withdrawal from courtly life demonstrates Bakhtin's concept of carnival, which upends the social hierarchy and provides a temporary respite from societal constraints. At the same time, however, the nobleman-turned-wild-man episode (and Bakhtinian carnival) always ends with the nobleman returning to the same social hierarchy which existed before the carnivalesque episode. In effect, nothing has truly changed, and the problems that caused the need for the carnival persist. Both Tristram and Lancelot fall victim to their divided loyalties, and their stories end tragically. The repetition and variation in Malory's use of the nobleman-turned-wild-man episode emphasizes the kind of paradox which renders Malory's text so problematic and yet so compelling. Reading these episodes

together reveals a complex view of the chivalric world which simultaneously

presents a society in which it can be impossible for knights to live but which they

are also uniquely suited to inhabit.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

In this study, I have examined five sets of paratactic episodes which

engage in the rhetorical technique of *dilatatio*. Each set of episodes features

different actants serving as the various *dramatis personae* and each contain

narrative elements which identify them as participants in a particular narrative

type. The repetition and variation of these episodes highlight major themes in *Le*

*Morte d'Arthur*: the worthiness of the knightly community, the value of knightly

fellowship, an emphasis on Christian ideals, the virtue of courtly love, and the

tensions that arise when loyalties are divided. The variation of the episodes also

allows Malory to provide different answers to recurring dilemmas. While one

knight chooses one path, a different knight chooses another, and Malory is able

to explore the consequences of both decisions. The paratactic nature of the

episodes refuses to privilege one result over another, and readers are left to

determine for themselves which choice was the more virtuous one, or perhaps

the lesser of two evils.

Finally, identifying the repeated narrative structures within Malory's

work allows the reader to attempt an answer to the question of how to perform

structural analysis on a work that often resists hierarchical structure. It offers a

view of the *Morte* which also transcends the current editorial tendency (begun by

Eugene Vinaver) to divide the text into eight separate tales. Because the repeated

narrative structures appear throughout the work, and are not confined to specific

tales or episodes, they provide a sense of structural unity to the often

overwhelmingly episodic nature of the text. While a complete structural analysis

of the *Morte d'Arthur* remains a daunting – and perhaps even impossible –

endeavor, approaching the text through the *dilatatio* of paratactic episodes serves

as the first step in achieving that goal.

APPENDICES

# "Knight with Two Swords" Episodes in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*[1]

| | | Balin | Arthur | Galahad |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **The hero is in exile or temporary disgrace** | **In prison for killing Arthur's relative (I: 62.33-36)** | **Magically transported to Sir Damas' prison (I: 138.15-17)** | **Raised away from court in a convent (II: 854.9-17)** |
| 2. | **He acquires a 2nd sword (usually involves a woman)** | **Draws sword from sheath worn by cursed damsel (I: 63.30-32)** | **Receives 2nd sword from Lady of the Lake (I: 52.13-53.12)** | **Percival's sister aids in discovery and restoration of 2nd sword (II: 985.19-995.31)** |
| 3. | **One of the hero's swords will break** | **Breaks in fight against King Pellam (I: 84.27-30)** | **Breaks in fight against King Pellinore (I: 50.30-31)** | **No, but he repairs someone else's broken sword (II: 1027.15-26)** |
| 4. | **The hero has to fight his brother, his best friend, or one of his vassals** | **Fights his brother, Balan (I: 89.13-90.10)** | **Fights Accolon, who is a Round Table knight and his vassal (I: 142.25-143.21))** | **Fights Gawain, a fellow Round Table knight (II: 981.24-28)** |
| 5. | The hero encounters a Red Knight, or is a Red Knight himself | Encounters Balan, who is a Red Knight (I: 89.7-9) | | Wears red armor; is referred to as a Red Knight (II: 859.7; 860.3; 916.12-28) |
| 6. | **A king or knight is lamed, wounded 'in the thighs'** | **Wounds King Pellam (I: 85.8-11)** | **Sir Outlake is wounded in the thighs and Accolon must take his place (I: 141.17-26)** | **Heals Maimed King's thigh wound; heals a crippled man (II: 1031.8-15; 1033.3-11)** |
| 7. | A fight is decided by putting out an enemy's eye or cutting off his hand | | Nyneve enchants Accolon's hand and causes him to drop sword (I: 144.19-28) | |
| 8. | There is an episode of fishing or of meeting a fisherman | | | 2nd sword is partially made of fish bone (II: 985.31-986.3) |
| 9. | There is a visit to the Grail Castle | Yes (I: 83.7-85.15) | | Yes (II: 1028.16-1029.11) |
| 10. | There appears a maiden sleeping under a tree, holding a sleeping or dead man's head in her lap | Encounters duke's daughter and her lover under a tree (I: 87.15-18) | | |
| 11. | The maiden is killed, in danger to be killed or raped, or begs to be killed to keep her from being raped | Sir Garnish of the Mount kills the maiden and her lover (I: 87.25-26) | | |
| 12. | There is a connection with the Near East, with Saracens, Hungarians, or Huns | | | The Saracen King Hurlaine once wielded 2nd sword (II: 986.22-987.21) |
| 13. | The hero has to ask a fateful question | | | |
| 14. | The hero encounters a lion or the image of a lion. | | | Encounters four lions in the Waste Forest (II: 998.29-32) |
| 15. | **There is an episode about cutting off of beards or hair, or 'searching' of hair for lice** | **Balin captures King Royns who demands Arthur's beard for his beard coat (I: 54.21-33; 74.9-31)** | **Arthur kills the Giant of St. Michael's Mount who collects beards on a beard coat (I: 201.6-204.21)** | **Percival's sister cuts off her hair and makes a girdle for 2nd sword (II: 995.1-6)** |

[1] List of story elements taken from Nickel, Helmut. "About the Knight with Two Swords and the Maiden under the Tree." *Arthuriana* 17.4 (Winter 2007): 29-48.

APPENDIX B

Scabbards

While Nickel includes fifteen elements in his compilation of motifs included in "Knight with Two Swords" episodes, Malory's "Knight with Two Swords" episodes share an additional element that does not appear on Nickel's list: a noteworthy scabbard. In their study of J. R. R. Tolkien's adaptation of medieval literary swords, K. S. Whetter and R. Andrew McDonald identify several properties of swords and sword-lore which designate their importance in Tolkien's text: "swords with names, swords with lineages, swords with magical properties, and swords that herald (as Aragorn's does) the closing of the Third Age" (5). Whetter and McDonald chiefly discuss Tolkien's appropriation of medieval literary sword traditions in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, but their analysis of the importance of swords in medieval literature proves helpful for my own analysis of the swords and scabbards in Malory's "Knight with Two Swords" episodes. Whetter and McDonald connect Tolkien's idea of the "northern mythological imagination" with the "names, descriptions, acquisition, characteristics and lore" of the various swords in his text (6). For the purposes of this addendum to my study on Malory's swords, I use this list to demonstrate the spectrum of significance suggested by the scabbards of Balin, Arthur, and

Galahad. The scabbards (and, in Galahad's case, the sword's other accessories)

follow a trajectory similar to that of the swords, with Balin's serving as the

humblest example, Arthur's as an intermediate example with extraordinary

properties, and Galahad's as a sword and scabbard that achieve mythical

proportions.

*Balin*

Balin's scabbard is brought to court by a damsel who claims that "Thys

swerde that I am gurte withall doth me grete sorrow and comberaunce, for I may

nat be delyverde of thys swerde but by a knyght" (I: 61.31-33). She cannot

remove the sword from its sheath, nor does it appear that she can remove the

sword's girdle from around her waist. It is, in effect, cursed. When Balin

succeeds in drawing the sword, he admires it, but he does not comment upon the

scabbard. He apparently takes the scabbard, though, because after Balin's death,

Merlin prepares both sword and scabbard for Galahad to find:

> And anone after Balyn was dede Merlyn toke his swerd and toke of
> the pomel and set on another pomel. So Merlyn] bade a knight that
> stood before hym to handyll that swerde, and he assayed hit and
> myght nat handyll hit. Than Merlion lowghe.
>  'Why lawghe ye?' seyde the knight.
>  'Thys ys the cause,' seyde Merlion: 'there shall never man handyll
> thys swerde but the beste knyght of the worlde, and that shall be sir
> Launcelot othir ellis Galahad, hys sonne. And Launcelot with thys
> swerde shall sle the man in the worlde that he lovith beste: that
> shall be sir Gawayne.'

> And all thys he lette wryte in the pomell of the swerde…Also the scawberde off Balyns swerde Merlion lefte hit on thys syde the ilonde, that Galaad sholde fynde hit. (I: 91.15-26, 31-33)

Malory reports that Galahad indeed finds the scabbard (although he does not describe this discovery in detail), and Galahad arrives in Arthur's court with the empty scabbard at his side.

These brief mentions of Balin's scabbard are all the attention that it receives in Malory's text. Neither it nor its sword is named; we are not told what it is made of, nor is it described in any detail. The scabbard's acquisition is not described in either Balin's or Galahad's case, and it appears to have no extraordinary qualities or special properties. Although the sword possesses a fratricidal lineage which I have discussed in the related chapter,[1] the scabbard plays no part in these remarkable events. I argue, however, that its very ordinariness makes it significant in the structural pattern of the narrative. Balin's scabbard is completely commonplace, and its mundaneness leaves room for its parallel scabbards to be exceptional, as both of Arthur's scabbards are.

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[1] As Ellis observes, "family deaths – culminating, of course, in Balin's fratricide – figure predominantly in its history" (68).

*Arthur*

The scabbard of Arthur's first Excalibur is not named or described either, although the anvil from which Arthur draws it in the London churchyard serves as a temporary substitute:

> And whan matyns and the first masse was done there was sene in the chircheyard ayenst the hyhe aulter a grete stone four square, lyke unto a marbel stone, and in myddes thereof was lyke an anvylde of stele a foot on hyghe, and theryn stack a fayre swerd naked by the poynt, and letters there were wryten in gold about the swerd that saiden thus: 'WHOSO PULLETH OUTE THIS SWERD OF THIS STONE AND ANVYLD IS RIGHTWYS KYNGE BORNE OF ALL EN[G]LOND.'
> (I: 12.29-36)

The miraculous appearance of the stone and anvil provide the remarkable provenance and prophetic writing which renders the first Excalibur a revelatory talisman and designates "second" sword status, despite the fact that it serves as its wielder's first sword chronologically. As I have already noted, Hodges observes that the anvil and stone in which the sword is sheathed represent a rigid, might-makes-right kind of chivalry. This stony rigidity contrasts with the second Excalibur's watery provenance – Arthur receives it from the famous arm in the lake – which indicates a more fluid set of chivalric values (80).

The second Excalibur also comes with an enchanted scabbard which makes it all the more valuable to the one who wields it. Arthur, however, reveals that he does not recognize at first the scabbard's worth. After Arthur receives the second Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake, Merlin gives him a little test:

> Than kynge Arthure loked on the swerde and lyked hit passynge
> well. Than seyde Merlion, 'Whether lyke ye bettir the swerde othir
> the scawberde?'
>  'I lyke bettir the swerde,' seyde Arthure.
>  'Ye ar the more unwise, for the scawberde ys worth ten of the
> swerde; for whyles ye have the scawberde uppon you ye shall lose
> no blood, be ye never so sore wounded. Therefore kepe well the
> scawberde allweyes with you.' (I: 53.34-54.6)

Arthur makes a mistake in valuing his sword above its enchanted scabbard.

Fortunately for him, however, he has Merlin to serve as his guide. Not only is

Excalibur's enchanted scabbard more exceptional than Balin's ordinary one, but

Arthur's treatment of the sword and scabbard also demonstrates his status as the

middle man in the spectrum. Balin does not spend even a moment contemplating

his sword's scabbard (although, considering its cursed status when he finds it,

perhaps he should have done), and Arthur only becomes aware of his scabbard's

exceptional value after Merlin reveals it.

Despite Merlin's revelation about the scabbard, Arthur still does not heed

the advice to keep the scabbard with him. Instead, he places the precious weapon

and its scabbard in what he believes to be a safe place: with his sister Morgan le

Fay. Morgan proves to be untrustworthy, however, as she replicates both the

sword and the scabbard, then sends Arthur the fake ones. She gives the real ones

to her lover Accolon, who uses them in his duel against Arthur. Arthur's good

intentions and his desire to place Excalibur and its scabbard in a place of

safekeeping show that he has listened to Merlin's counsel, yet his failure to

recognize Morgan's true character and his willful ignorance of Merlin's advice to keep the scabbard show Arthur's shortcomings. As with the other elements of the "Knight with Two Swords" episode, Arthur's scabbard and his treatment of it fall somewhere in between worst and best.

*Galahad*

Like Arthur, Galahad possesses two scabbards: the first is Balin's original scabbard which Merlin placed on the island for Galahad to find, and the second is the magnificent scabbard that he finds on board Solomon's Ship. Galahad's first scabbard is mentioned several times in the *Morte*, although it is not named or described in detail. The most important aspect of the scabbard is its lineage. By retrieving it from the island, Galahad fulfills Merlin's intentions and the scabbard provides the first narrative link between Galahad and Balin.

As I have already noted, Armstrong interprets Galahad's arrival at Arthur's court with an empty scabbard as evidence of his rejection of earthly knighthood and of his hyper-spirituality ("Christianity" 117-118). This same sense of otherworldliness reappears when Galahad's sword in the stone arrives at Camelot:

> And whan they cam unto [the] river they founde there a stone fletynge, as hit were of rede marbyll, and therein stake a fayre ryche swerde, and the pomell thereof was of precious stonys wrought with lettirs of gold subtylé. Than the barownes redde the lettirs whych seyde in thys wyse:

'NEVER SHALL MAN TAKE ME HENSE BUT ONLY HE BY WHOS SYDE I OUGHT TO HONGE AND HE SHALL BE THE BESTE KNYGHT OF THE WORLDE.' (II: 856.7-15)

This sword that Galahad draws from the red marble stone is an obvious parallel to the first Excalibur which Arthur drew from the stone in the London churchyard. Just as the provenance of Arthur's two swords represented different forms of chivalry, the provenances of Galahad's sword also herald a change in chivalric values. While the first Excalibur came from the stone and anvil and the second Excalibur came from the water, Galahad's sword combines the two as it comes from a piece of marble floating above the river. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen observes that, in Marie de France's lai *Lanval*, Lanval steps upon a mounting stone as he mounts his horse; Cohen draws a parallel between knight and stone, claiming that

> The marble block is united to the knight in shared heft. Unlike the chivalric lightweights he leaves behind, Lanval possesses stony solidity, petric steadfastness, foundational integrity. The large, dark piece of marble is simultaneously singular ('un grant perrun de marbre bis,' the particular 'great stone' used at Arthur's court for ascending horses, a stone with specific history) and plural (a piece of a much larger grouping, dark marble [*marbre bis*]: an impressive, unyielding substance of distinct provenance, dense rock difficult to mine and transport but valued for durability and striking coloration). (*Stone* 44)

As Lanval shares qualities with the mounting block, so Galahad shares the properties of the red marble stone. Both represent a blend of past and future: the stone shares a piece of Balin's history, and predicts Galahad's future while

Galahad is tied as Lancelot's son to the old order of chivalry while at the same he serves as the harbinger of the new spiritual order of knighthood. If the stone is both singular and plural as Cohen claims, then Galahad is equally so. He is an individual knight – perhaps the most individual knight, as the one who sits in the Siege Perilous and the one whose arrival all other knights have been anticipating since the inception of the Round Table – and a member of the larger knightly community. The stone is a miracle that floats above the water and guides itself down the river; Galahad is also a miraculous figure as he performs many supernatural feats and achieves the Grail Quest.

Cohen's idea that the qualities of the stone reflect the qualities of the knight extends to Arthur as well as he shares the mixed qualities of the stone and anvil from which he draws the first Excalibur. The first Excalibur is, in fact, not in the stone at all, but sheathed in an anvil of steel which sits upon the marble-like stone. The anvil attaches an earthly quality to the miraculous event as it reminds the reader of the human role in the forging of swords and provides an element of practical functionality to an otherwise supernatural event. Arthur, whose life and reign are infused with supernatural occurrences, is at the same time a functional and very human ruler who defends his country, fornicates with women, and conquers foreign lands. Further, the writing on Excalibur itself reminds us of Arthur's status as the earthly king of England.

This blend of supernatural and earthly elements is echoed in Galahad's first scabbard. After Balin's death, Merlin replaces the pommel of Balin's sword and places it in the marble stone to wait for Galahad's arrival, thereby repurposing the sword: instead of being an instrument of fratricide, once Galahad draws it, it will be transformed into a symbol of fulfillment and completion. While the sword has a new pommel and new purpose, however, the scabbard remains the same. Galahad's new sword and old scabbard present a blend of past and future, much as he does himself. He is the son of Lancelot and a member of the Round Table – he represents the very best of traditional Arthurian knighthood. Yet, he also represents a new kind of knight and another change in chivalric values. His arrival marks the beginning of the Grail Quest, the switch from earthly chivalry to spiritual chivalry, and the end of the old regime. Galahad's occupation of the Siege Perilous and the consequent completion of the Round Table also mark the beginning of its dissolution. This ironic combination of old and new, past and future is reflected in the reunion of Galahad's first sword with its scabbard. It also advances the progression of the narrative and builds thematically upon its predecessors while still leaving room for Galahad's second scabbard to outshine all the rest.

The pinnacle of the scabbard hierarchy is reached with Galahad's second scabbard, which serves as the most valuable and exceptional scabbard in the

*Morte*. In fact, it meets all of the criteria that Whetter and McDonald identify as significant in the medieval sword tradition: it is named, it is described in great detail, its acquisition is remarkable, it has extraordinary characteristics, and it has a distinguished lineage.

While neither Balin's sword or scabbard are named, and only Arthur's sword is named, both Galahad's second sword and second scabbard receive separate names: The Sword of the Strange Girdles and Mover of Blood, respectively (II: 995.14-18). Unlike Balin's and Arthur's scabbards, Galahad's second scabbard is described in detail: "hit besemyd to be of a serpentis skynne, and thereon were lettirs of golde and sylver" (II: 987.22-24) The gold and silver letters describe the maiden who will replace the sword's girdle. Solomon describes it as "a mervaylous sheethe" (II: 992.25), indicating its opulence and aesthetic beauty, and Percival's sister reveals that part of the scabbard is made from the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden (II: 995.14-18).

A parallel between Galahad and Balin emerges in the history of maiming that comes with the Sword with the Strange Girdles. Percival's sister relates the tale of the original Dolorous Stroke, struck by the pagan king Hurlaine with the Sword of the Strange Girdles, and she tells several other stories, including one featuring Galahad's own grandfather, of unworthy men who tried to pull the sword out of its scabbard and received grievous wounds in punishment. In the

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same way that Galahad rights many of Balin's wrongs – repurposing his sword and healing the Maimed King, for example – he also fulfills the requirements of the Sword with the Strange Girdles. The sword is for Galahad alone, and he is the only one who can draw it and wield it without fear of injury. Now that he has claimed it, no one else can pretend to be worthy of it.

In addition to the scabbard, the girdle of the sword is also described in detail. Percival's sister relates that the sword is, in fact, the refurbished sword of the biblical King David whose son Solomon replaced its pommel, hilt, and scabbard, then placed it in the boat where Galahad found it. The original girdle, however, was made of hemp which deteriorated over the centuries, and the scabbard describes a maiden who will replace the girdle. Percival's sister reveals that she herself has done so and presents Galahad with a girdle "semely wrought [with] golden thredys, and uppon that were sette full precius stonys, and a ryche buckyll of golde" (II: 994.31-33). She further discloses that the golden threads in the girdle are her own hair, which she has cut off in order to fulfill the prophecy.

In addition to the illustrious lineage of the sword and its accessories, Galahad discovers his own biblical lineage as he is revealed to be the last of the bloodline of Solomon. Whetter and McDonald discuss the tradition of significant swords being "ancient heirlooms" passed down through generations (12-15), and here we have an extreme example of this phenomenon. Galahad's second sword

with its direct connection to the great kings of the Old Testament, and even to the Garden of Eden, is the most ancient of ancient heirlooms.

The superiority of Galahad's scabbard makes it the most impressive example in the *Morte*, surpassing the scabbards worn by his two fellow Knights with Two Swords, Arthur and Balin. Arthur, in turn, bears an enchanted scabbard that, although eclipsed by Galahad's scabbard, proves to be far more valuable than Balin's commonplace and utilitarian sheath. Although, according to Nickel, scabbards are not a traditional element of the medieval "Knight with Two Swords" episode, in Malory's work they perform a notable narrative function by reflecting the worthiness of their bearers as do the swords they encase.

APPENDIX C

Minor Boat Episodes

There are several boat episodes in Malory's work that do not fit the

paradigm I outline in Chapter Three. The purpose of this appendix is to discuss

the boat episodes that I did not address in my main chapter and the ways in

which they do not contribute significantly to the "body in a boat" episode type

that I examine.

*Arthur and Accolon*

At the beginning of the section Vinaver labels "Arthur and Accolon," King

Arthur, King Uriens, and Accolon are on a hunting expedition when they

encounter a mysterious magical boat:

> Than the kynge loked aboute the worlde and sawe before hym in a
> grete water a lytyll shippe all apparayled with sylke downe to the
> watir. And the shippe cam ryght unto them and landed on the
> sandis. Than Arthure wente to the banke and loked in and saw
> none erthely creature therein.
>   'Sirs,' seyde the kynge, 'com thens and let us se what is in this
> shippe.'
>   So at the laste they wente into the shippe all three, and founde hit
> rychely behanged with cloth of sylke. So by that tyme hit was
> durke nyght, there suddeynly was aboute them an hondred torchis
> sette uppon all the shyppe-bordis, and hit gaff grete lyght. And
> therewithall there come twelve fayre damesels and salued kynge
> Arthure on hir kneis, and called hym be his name and seyde he was
> ryght wellcom, and suche chere as they had he sholde have of the

> beste. Than the kynge thanked hem fayre. Therewythall they ledde
> the kynge and his felawys into a fayre chambir, and there was a
> clothe leyde rychely beseyne of all that longed to a table, and there
> were they served of all wynes and metys that they coude thynke of.
> But of that the kynge had grete mervayle, for he never fared bettir
> in his lyff as for one souper.
>
>   And so when they had souped at her leyser kyng Arthure was lad
> into a chambir, a richer besene chambir sawe he never none; and so
> was kynge Uryence se[r]ved and lad into such anothir chambir;
> and sir Accolon was lad into the thirde chambir passyng rychely
> and well besayne. And so were they leyde in their beddis easily,
> and anone they felle on slepe and slepte merveylously sore all the
> nyght.
>
>   And on the morne kynge Uryence was in Camelote abedde in his
> wyves armys, Morgan le Fay. And whan he woke he had grete
> mervayle how he com there, for on the evyn before he was two
> dayes jurney frome Camelot. And whan kyng Arthure awoke he
> founde hymself in a durke preson, heryng aboute hym many
> complayntes of wofull knyghtes. (I: 137.18-138.17)

This is the first magical boat to appear in the *Morte*. It takes on the characteristics

of the typical, traditional fairy boat and shares descriptive elements with the

boats about which I have already written: a silk canopy, a luxurious bed, and no

visible pilot. The addition of the self-lighting torches, the beautiful maidens, and

the decadent meal all contribute to the supernatural atmosphere. The magical

transportation of each of the passengers to different destinations and the boat's

subsequent disappearance from the narrative also add to its mystique.

This boat is a prime example of a magical rudderless boat in the romantic

tradition. It does not, however, demonstrate any shared characteristics with the

religious tradition, which is the reason I do not include it in my main chapter on

the blending of the two traditions in the *Morte*: there are no references to God or God's will in this passage; there are no Christian symbols or treasures on board the boat (for example, King David's sword, or the corpse of the saintly sister of Percival); and the passengers do not engage in any overtly Christian activities on board or after they leave the boat.

While it perhaps serves as a visual precursor to the boats I discuss in the main chapter, it is a less useful example for demonstrating the ways in which the religious and romantic traditions interact with one another in Malory's narrative.

<center>*Tristram*</center>

The French *Prose Tristan* contains a famous episode in which Tristan, poisoned by Morholt's sword and dying of his wound, boards a boat and drifts to Ireland, where he is healed. This original episode contains the blend of religious and romantic associations that are the subject of my study of "body in a boat" episodes. As I mention in the main chapter, the typical qualities of the romantic rudderless boat episode are: the hero is wounded, the boat is luxuriously furnished and decorated, the passage of time is unusual in some way on board the boat, the hero is healed at his destination, the hero meets a woman who becomes his lover, and the hero returns home. The episode in the *Prose Tristan* meets these criteria nearly perfectly. Tristan is wounded, and the boat he orders is "mout bele et mout bien corant [very beautiful and very well-sailing]"

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(*Le Roman de Tristan* 156). He orders a bed to be made within the ship and has his musical instruments placed there so he can amuse himself during the journey. He also orders enough meat to be placed on board to feed him for a short time. The boat, while perhaps not luxurious, is beautiful, sails well, and is well provisioned. It is not magical, however, which explains the ordinary passage of time during Tristan's journey: "bien deus semenes ou plus [a good two weeks or more]" (156). The boat drifts to Ireland where Tristan is healed and where he meets Isolde who becomes his lover.

The *Prose Tristan* episode is also infused with religious undertones. Although the boat is equipped with a sail, and Tristan has some control over its course, the knight is dying, and he recognizes that he may die on board the boat: "s'il plest a Dieu que je muire, la mort me plest bien, car j'ai granment langui [if it pleases God that I die, death pleases me well, for I have greatly suffered]" (156). In this event, he would become a corpse in a boat, drifting toward his burial place, just like St. James of Compostela and Percival's sister. By placing his fate in God's hands, he further evokes the images of the sailing ascetics and martyrs such as Mary Magdalene whose ships were guided by divine will.

Malory, however, completely changes this episode in his own version, and he removes nearly all evidence of both romantic and religious traditions in his account:

> So whan the kynge undirstood hit he lette purvey for syr
> Trystrames a fayre vessel and well vytayled, and therein was putt
> sir Trystrames, and Governayle wyth hym, and sir Trystrames toke
> his harpe with hym. And so he was put into the see to sayle into
> Irelonde.
>   And so by good fortune he aryved up in Irelonde evyn faste by a
> castell where the kynge and quene was. (I: 384.13-18)

In this passage, Tristram retains only the most rudimentary romantic elements:

he is wounded and he sails away in a boat to be healed in Ireland where he meets

Isode, who is to become his lover. The boat is described in simple terms, "fayre"

and "well vytayled." There is no mention of a silk canopy or of Tristram's bed,

nor is there a description of the sailing apparatus. Unlike the French Tristan, who

in true romantic fashion sails alone, Malory's Tristram is accompanied by

Governayle, who presumably is the boat's navigator. Further, the boat is not set

adrift for God to guide it; rather, the two men are definitively sailing to Ireland.

There is no drifting about; they have a specific destination in mind, and they sail

directly to that destination. Although Tristram is poisoned and dying, the

possibility of his death occurring during the journey is not mentioned. Once King

Mark and his court learn that Tristram's cure can be found in Ireland, the matter

seems to be settled: a cure exists, so Tristram will be cured. In Malory's version,

the associations with corpses (or potential corpses) in boats are virtually

eliminated.

*King Harmaunce*

In the course of their adventures together, Tristram and Palomides come

upon the body of King Harmaunce, who has been treacherously slain and whose

corpse has been placed in a boat in the Humber River. The corpse clutches in its

hand a letter explaining who he is and asking that any good knight who finds

him come to the Red City to avenge the king's death. Palomides asks that he be

chosen to fulfill the quest, and Tristram lets him (II: 700.23-702.15). The story of

King Harmaunce's death is repeated upon Palomides' arrival at the Red City (II:

711.15-713.33).

The boat which bears Harmaunce's body resembles a ship from the

romance tradition:

> Than were they ware in the wynde where cam a ryche vessel heled
> over the r[e]de sylke, and the vessel londed faste by them.
> Therewith sir Trystram alyght and his knyghtes, and so sir
> Trystram wente afore and entird into that vessel. And whan he cam
> in he saw a fayre bedde rychely coverde, and thereuppon lay a
> semely dede knyght all armed sauff the hede, [and] was all bloody
> wyth dedly woundys uppon hym, whych semed to be a passyng
> good knyght. (II: 700.24-32)

The silk covering and the fair bed match the description of other romance boats,

as well as other boats found in Malory. The resemblance ends there, however.

The corpse floating in the boat echoes the religious tradition, although there are

no indications of divine will or guidance in the text. The body is accompanied by

mariners who have been instructed by Sir Ebell to take the boat to the

tournament at Lonezep in order to find a worthy knight to avenge the king's

death, so there is someone to steer it, and it has a concrete destination. In this

case it more closely resembles the more realistic portrayal of Elaine of Astolat's

boat than of one of the divinely guided vessels carrying a saint's corpse.

*Percival*

During the Grail Quest Percival encounters a mysterious boat bearing an

old man as its passenger:

> Than was sir Percivale ware in the see where com a shippe saylyng
> toward hym, and sir Percivale wente unto the ship and founde hit
> coverde within and withoute with whyght samyte. And at the
> bourde stoode an olde man clothed in a surplyse, in lyknes of a
> pryste. (II: 914.20-24)

When Percival asks the old man where he has come from, the old man replies,

"Sir, I am of a strange contrey, and hydir I com to comforte you" (915.2-3). The

old man helps Percival interpret a dream, then commands the knight to leave.

After Percival disembarks, "the shippe and all wente away he wyste nat whydir"

(915.26-28).

The mysterious appearance and disappearance of the ship render it a

supernatural vessel. The old man's priestly garments and his claim that he has

come specifically to help Percival imply that he is a divine messenger. Through

these elements, we can again see the blend of the religious and romance

traditions. Percival, however, is never a passenger on the ship, therefore this episode does not fit the "body in a boat" episode type.

The same boat appears to him again, however, following his near-seduction by a demon in the disguise of a beautiful woman. The old man again helps Percival to interpret his experience by explaining that the demon was in fact the devil himself, and he relates to Percival the story of Satan's fall from heaven. He tells Percival that God's grace alone saved him from the devil's clutches and advises the knight to take the experience as a lesson. The old man then vanishes, and Percival boards the boat (II: 919.24-920.15).

At this point in the story, Percival fits the mold of the romantic hero very well. He has wounded himself as a form of self-punishment and sin prevention after his encounter with the demon, and he boards the boat alone. The boat disembarks and sails without guidance, and it is richly decorated with a canopy of white samite. Malory's narrative structure also affects the appearance of the passage of time. He never says how long Percival is on board, but it feels like a long time for a reader, who must read the adventures of several other knights before reaching the tale of Bors, who discovers Percival in the boat. It is with Bors' arrival that the boat begins to move away from the romantic motifs and gain more Christian significance.

*Bors*

During the course of his quest for the Grail, Bors hears a voice which urges him to find Percival's ship. Bors obeys:

> And uppon the seestronde he founde a shyppe that was coverde all with whyght samyte.
>   Than he alyghte and betoke hym to Jesu Cryste. And as sone as he was entird, the shippe departed into the see, and wente so fast that hym semed the shyp wente fleyng, but hit was sone durked, that he myght know no man. Than he layde hym downe and slept tyll hit was day. (II: 974.25-32)

In the morning, Bors finds Percival aboard, and the two knights tell each other about their various adventures and how they came to be on the boat. The boat continues to sail without any guidance or known destination: "So wente they downeward in the see, one whyle backwarde, another while forewarde, and every man comforted other, and ever they were in theyre prayers" (975.15-17).

The Christian elements are overt in this passage, and the boat begins to lean more toward the religious end of the spectrum. Bors obeys the voice – presumably a heavenly voice – and submits to Christ's will as he enters the boat. The primary activity on board the boat is prayer. Bors and Percival are now the mirror image of the sailing pilgrims from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: they have surrendered their well-being and their destination to God's providence in faith that He will lead them to a successful end to their quest. This desire is ultimately fulfilled, but not before they are joined by Galahad.

*Galahad*

As I mention in Chapter Three, Galahad experiences four separate magical boat journeys. All of the elements of the "body in a boat" episode only appear in the fourth one, though, so that episode is the subject of the Galahad section of my chapter. In this appendix, in the interest of exhaustively covering the topic and for the purposes of comparison and contrast, I include Malory's text describing the other three boat journeys and Galahad's activities during them.

*Journey One: Sailing with Percival and Bors*

Galahad's first boat journey occurs when he joins Percival and Bors on board the mysterious ship covered in white samite to which they are guided by God's divine will:

> And whan the mayden was horsed and he bothe, the lady toke sir Galahad a fayre shylde and ryche, and so they departed from the castell and rode tylle they cam to the see. And there they founde the shippe that sir Bors and sir Percivale was in, whych seyde on the shipbourde,
>   'Sir Galahad, ye be wellcom, for we have abydyn you longe!'
>   And whan he herde them he asked them what they were.
>   'Sir,' seyde she, 'leve youre horse hyre, and I shall leve myne also'; and toke hir sadils and hir brydyls with them, and made a crosse on them, and so entird into the ship.
>   And the two knyghtes resceyved them bothe with grete joy, and everych knew other.
>   And so the wynde arose and drove hem thorow the see into a mervayles place, and within a whyle hit dawed. Than dud sir Galahad of hys helme and hys swerde, and asked of hys felowis from whens com that fayre shippe.

'Trewly,' seyde they, 'ye wote as well as we, but hit com of Goddis grace.'

And than they tolde everych to othir of all theyre harde aventures, and of her grete temptacions. (II: 983.20-984.8)

Here, in addition to the romantic elements I have already discussed, we get confirmation that the ship is of divine provenance. The old man in priestly garments who aided Percival, and the mysterious voice which has directed the knights to find the ship have implied that God is directing both the knights' and the ship's movements, but here Percival and Bors explicitly state that they believe the ship comes "of Goddis grace." The knights remain on the boat until it becomes stuck between two rocks, and the whole company must transfer to another ship.

*Journey 2: Solomon's Ship*

By than the shippe had renne frome the londe of Logrys many myles. So by adventure hit aryved up bytwyxte two rocchis, passynge grete and mervaylous, but there they might nat londe, for there was a swalowe of the see, save there was another shippe, and uppon hit they myght go withoute daungere.

'Now go we thydir,' seyde the jantillwoman, 'and there shall we se adventures, for so ys Oure Lordys wylle.'

And wan they com thyder they founde the shippe ryche inowghe, but they founde nother man nor woman therein. But they founde in the ende of the shippe two fayre lettirs wrytten, which seyde a dredefull worde and a mervaylous:

'THOU MAN WHYCH SHALT ENTIR INTO THYS SHIPPE, BEWARE THAT THOU BE IN STEDEFASTE BELEVE, FOR I AM FAYTHE. AND THEREFORE BEWARE HOW THOU ENTIRST BUT IF THOU BE STEDFASTE, FOR AND THOU FAYLE THEREOF I SHALL NAT HELPE THE.' (II: 984.19-36)

On board the ship, Galahad finds the Strange Sword with the Strange Girdles,

and Percival's sister reveals the origins and history of the ship and the sword

before the ship departs:

> Than they wente frome that ship and wente to the other. And
> anone the wynde droff hem into the see a grete pace, but they had
> no vytayle. So hit befelle that they cam on the morne to a castell
> that men calle Carteloyse, that was in the marchys of Scotlonde.
> (II: 995.32-996.2)

Solomon's ship, as I discuss in Chapter Three, is the same ship in which Galahad

sails on his fourth boat journey. The ship itself represents a blend of religious and

romantic elements, with its sumptuous decoration, divine guidance, and biblical

associations. Galahad's second journey, however, lasts only a single night before

the knights arrive at the ship's destination.

*Journey 3: The Barge Containing the Body of Percival's Sister*

After the death of Percival's sister, the three Grail Knights part company,

and Malory's narrative turns to Lancelot's adventures on the Grail Quest.

Lancelot has a vision in which he is directed to find a boat in the water. He finds

the boat bearing the body of Percival's sister and boards it. After a time, Galahad

joins Lancelot on the boat:

> So dwelled sir Launcelot [and] <sir> Galahad within that shippe
> half [a yere, and served God dayly and] nyghtly with all their
> power. [And often they aryved in yles ferre] frome folke, where
> th[ere repayred none but wylde beestes, and ther] they founde
> many [straunge adventures and peryllous which they] brought to

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> an end. [But for tho adventures were with wylde beestes] and nat
> in the q[uest of the Sancgreal, therfor the tale ma]kith here [no]
> menci[on thereof; for it wolde be to longe to telle of alle tho
> adventures that befelle] them.
>
> So aftir, [on a Mondaye, hit befelle that they aryved in the] edge
> of a forey[ste tofore a crosse. And thenne sawe they a knyghte]
> armed all in [whyte, and was rychely horsed, and ledde in his]
> ryght hond [a whyte hors. And so he cam to the shyp and] salewed
> the two knyghtes in the Hyghe Lordis behalf, and seyde unto sir
> Galahad,
>
> 'Sir, ye have bene longe inowe with youre fadir. Therefor com
> oute of the shippe, and take thys horse, and go where the aventures
> shall lede you in the queste of the Sankgrealle.' (II: 1013.3-21)

This passage returns to a more homogeneous blend of religion and romance. The

Christian elements are pervasive with the two knights' daily service to God and

the summoning of Galahad by a white knight who comes on the High Lord's

behalf. The romantic element comes in the form of the island-hopping

adventures, which resemble both traditional Irish *immrama* (literally, "rowing

about") and stories of sailing pilgrim saints such as Columba, Ailbe, and

Brendan the Navigator.[2] Lancelot and Galahad's sea adventures, far from folk,

among wild beasts echo both of these literary traditions and continue the

blending of secular entertainment with stories of monastic piety.

*Lancelot*

Lancelot is the first to find the boat with the body of Percival's sister. Like

Bors, he is directed to find the boat, and he obeys:

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[2] See Dumville 73-76 and Sobecki 196-201.

> And at the laste he cam by a stronde and founde a shippe withoute sayle other ore. And as sone as he was within the shippe, there he had the moste swettnes that ever he felte, and he was fulfilled with all thynge that he thought on other desired. Than he seyde,
>
> 'Swete Fadir, Jesu Cryste! I wote natt what joy I am in, for thys passith all erthely joys that ever I was in.' (II: 1011.12-18)

Malory further relates that Lancelot remains on the ship alone for more than a month, during which he prays daily and is sustained by holy manna and "the grace of the Holy Goste" (1011.30). Lancelot's sense of fulfillment and satisfaction do not last long, however, as he soon disembarks "to play hym by the watirs syde, for he was somwhat wery of the shippe" (1011.31-1012.1). It is during this interlude that Galahad joins him and their blend of religious and romantic adventures begin.

After Galahad takes his leave from the ship, Lancelot remains on the boat with the body of Percival's sister for another month: "And the wynde arose and drove sir Launcelot more than a moneth thorow the se, where he sleped but litill, but prayed to God that he myght se som tydynges of the Sankgreall" (1014.3-6). Lancelot's sojourn with Galahad has apparently renewed his interest in the Grail Quest and inspired him to practice prayerful contemplation. He is, in turn, finally summoned away from the boat so that he may continue to seek the Grail:

> So his befelle on a nyght, at mydnyght, he aryved before a castell, on the backe [syde whiche was ry]ch and fayre, and there was a postern [opened toward the see, and was open] withoute ony kepynge, save two [lyons kept the entré; and the moon]e shone ryght clere. A[none sir Launcelot herd a voyce that] seyde,

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'Launcelot, go oute [of this shyp, and entre into the castel] where thou shalte [see a grete parte of thy desyre.' (II: 1014.3-15)

Lancelot's experience on board the magical ship does not fit into the narrative pattern I identify in the "body in a boat" episodes for several reasons. He does not fit the picture of the romantic hero who boards the magical boat – he is not wounded, the passage of time is not unusual, and he does not encounter a fairy mistress or take a lover. His quick loss of enthusiasm for his experiences on board the miraculous ship also diminishes his role as a saintly figure.

*Conclusion*

Although Malory includes many episodes featuring supernatural boats transporting knights from one place to another, not all of them fit into the "body in a boat" episode type. In the cases where they do, as in the description of King Harmaunce and some of the Grail Quest journeys, I have chosen to use a representative example in my main chapter rather than exhaustive ones. The purpose of this appendix is to be exhaustive: to show the many other boats that appear in Malory's text and to discuss how they participate in the blend of romantic and religious genre conventions that I outline in Chapter Three.

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