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I seek to correct a deficiency in Malory studies, the inadequate attention paid to the thematic implications of Malory's treatment of armor and various forms of combat. I explore three topics: Malory's changes to his source texts in his depiction of the style of armor and the form of tournaments insofar as they bear on defining the temporal setting of his narrative; Malory's implicit definition of the virtues of the ideal knight errant and tournament champion; and his definition of the knight-commander in war. My over-arching conclusion is that Malory's treatment of combat is essentially ethical.

The style of both armor and tournament combat in Malory both suggest a pre-fifteenth-century temporal setting, a finding which suggests that scholars' attempts to evaluate the behavior of Malory's knights in the light of fifteenth-century tournament regulations are anachronistic.

A "checklist" of virtues for the ideal knight is created through discussions by Malory's leading knights. Malory's "score-keeping" of tournament performance is therefore important to clarify which knights are qualified to participate in this discussion. The chivalric virtues recommended conform closely to those praised in the medieval manuals of Lull, Charny, and Bouvet. The qualities so defined become the standard by which to judge the relative merits of Malory's knights. From a close comparison and contrast of leading knights, Lancelot emerges as the ideal exemplar of the knight errant and tourney champion.

From a similar comparative study of knights who take command in war, in particular, King Arthur, Lancelot, Tristram, and Gawain, Lancelot also emerges as the ideal knight-commander, both in the light of the skills of military leadership recommended by medieval military manuals as well as the ethical standard provided by the medieval concept of the just war.

QUI PLUS FAIT, MIEX VAULT: EVALUATING COMBAT IN MALORY'S
LE MORTE DARTHUR

by

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Approved by

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Robert L. Kelly, Committee Chair

To my grandmother, Ethel Rone (1896-1990)

A Promise Kept

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When modern readers open the pages of Sir Thomas Malory's work, they are

confronted with a world of chivalry—and violence. Indeed, Laurie A. Finke and Martin

B. Shichtman claim that what "perhaps most sets Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* apart form

other examples of Arthurian literature is its excessive violence. It is not quantitatively

more violent than other medieval versions of the legend, but it is often more gratuitously

violent" (118). And though Malory has played a central role in bequeathing to the

English-speaking world the concept of chivalry, largely thanks to Caxton's printing of his

text as *Le Morte Darthur*, the violent aspects of Malory can create an almost

impenetrable barrier to understanding the book because the general brutality of the

Middle Ages is often difficult for the modern mind to comprehend. Take, for example

the following accounts of what some considered "fun" in the Middle Ages:

> In village games, players with their hands tied behinds them competed to kill a cat
> nailed to a post by battering it to death with their heads, at the risk of cheeks ripped
> open or eyes scratched out by the frantic animal's claws. Trumpets enhanced the
> excitement. Or a pig enclosed in a wide pen was chased by men with clubs to the
> laughter of spectators as he ran squealing from the blows until beaten lifeless.
> Accustomed in their own lives to physical hardship and injury, medieval men and
> women were not necessarily repelled by the spectacle of pain, but rather enjoyed it.
> The citizens of Mons bought a condemned criminal from a neighboring town so they
> should have the pleasure of seeing him quartered. (Tuchman 135)

Readers may be tempted to dismiss such behavior as exclusive to the lower classes, those

not ascribing to the chivalrous codes of honor reflected in Malory's work. But here is

another account of a similar level of barbaric behavior, but this time from professional

soldiers:

> On April 27, 1487, at Domodossola, northwest of Milan . . . a battle took place
> between a Swiss army and the duke of Milan's troops, who subjected the otherwise
> victorious Swiss to a crushing defeat. In the following weeks, the Lucerne town
> council collected official eyewitness accounts of the battle. . .   It does not make for
> pleasant reading. A certain Mangold Schoch reported, among other things, that
> during the fighting 'the *welsch* [Italians] had chopped off the fingers of the Germans
> [that is, the Swiss],' stuck them into their hats, and walked around the city. He had
> also heard that dead Swiss soldiers had had the fat cut out of their bellies and that
> this fat had been sold in the apothecary shops of Milan. Some Swiss soldiers had
> even been eviscerated to this end while still alive; others had their throats slit; others,
> 'who had pretty hair,' the witness stated, had had their heads cut off, skewered on
> spikes, and carried about the city. (Groebner 127)

And that what we today think of as chivalry could, for the medieval mind, encompass an

almost similar level of brutality seems even more troubling. For example, take the

following excerpt from the knight-troubador Bertran de Born's possibly satiric "In Praise

of War":

> And once entered into battle
> let every man proud of his birth
> think only of breaking arms and heads,
> for a man is worth more dead than alive and beaten
> I tell you there is not so much savor
> in eating or drinking or sleeping,
> as when I hear them scream, "There they are! Let's get them!"
> on both sides, and I hear riderless

> horses in the shadows, neighing,
> and I hear them scream, "Help! Help!"
> and I see them fall among the ditches,
> little men and great men on the grass,
> and I see fixed in the flanks of the corpses
> stumps of lances with silken streamers.
> Barons, pawns your castles,
> And your villages, and your cities
> Before you stop making war on one another. (lines 37-53)

In a period where there were even tournaments dedicated to the Virgin Mary,[1] such calls to battle and violence were common. Few medieval English texts combine the violent aspects of the knightly profession with the inspirational gloss of chivalry more uneasily— to the modern mind—than Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*.

Though Malory's text contains few incidents so brutal and bellicose as the above examples, the modern distaste for the violence in Malory, and Malory's incessant recitation of it, may be responsible for the dearth of critical study on the fighting itself and its function in the text. Even contemporary critics of Malory find the persistent violence in *Le Morte Darthur* numbing. For example, in discussing combat in Malory, Jill Mann observes that

> The events of the narrative are repetitive and hard to connect with each other; since it
> is difficult to see them as a meaningful sequence, it is difficult to remember them,
> even over the span of a few pages. . . . Furthermore, this means that it is difficult for
> us to assess these actions in moral terms . . . . yet the knight's most characteristic
> activity is within the physical sphere, in *physical combat*, often undertaken for its
> own sake, or as the result of a randomly-imposed 'custome' (331 emphasis added).

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[1] Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence* 50.

Robert R. Hellenga, despite the fact that he devotes an article to Malory's tournaments, claims that the "tournaments are the worst offenders" and finds them—and the fighting in general— "wearisome" (67). Muriel Whitaker says the "chivalric exploits" in the Book of Tristram are so numerous that the "modern reader finds [them] boringly repetitive" (37). Whitaker also refers to the "monotonous regularity" of the details of fighting in her discussion of tournaments and adds, "The catalogues of participants [in tourneys] may produce an effect of chivalric plenitude but fail to engage the interest of the modern reader" (39).[2] Elizabeth Edwards notes that most "of the *Morte* is composed of narrations of combat," and claims that in "'The Book of Sir Tristram', particularly the sections Vinaver calls 'The Round Table' and 'King Mark', challenges comes so thick and fast that it is hardly possible to form any coherent view of overarching structure" (65).

Edward's use of the word "structure" here raises a central issue. Sandra Ness Ihle, in *Malory's Grail Quest*, notes that the "underlying assumption [of criticism on *Le Morte Darthur*] is that an accurate understanding of structure reveals intent and meaning" (166). So what is Malory's "structure" and upon what is it based? In discussing the pagan and Christian elements in *Beowulf*, Edward B. Irving raises a point which will help in discussing structure in Malory; he observes that "what a poet talks about and gives full attention to well over 95 percent of the time is what he or she is interested in and what the

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[2] Finke and Shichtman express a similar sentiment, finding the language of violence "monotonously repetitive" 122.

poem is chiefly about, and thus it is what readers and critics should give their attention

to" (189). This idea echoes a comment made by Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*:

> Good commentary naturally does not read ideas into the poem; it reveals and
> translates what is there, and the evidence that it is there is offered by the study of the
> structure of imagery with which it begins. The sense of tact, the desirability of not
> pushing a point of interpretation "too far," is derived from the fact that the
> proportioning of emphasis in criticism should normally bear a rough analogy to the
> proportioning of emphasis in the poem. (86)

Stated in the simplest of terms, the more there is of it, the more important it is. And

Malory's text is filled with fighting. As Karen Cherewatuk puts it, "Before Malory, the

tale of Tristram had always been a love story. In Malory's hands, 'Tristram' becomes a

catalogue of chivalric exercise" (215). The same comment could be applied to *Le Morte*

Darthur as a whole.

Given the views of Irving and Frye above, we could expect to find a key to

interpreting Malory in combat. Even Whitaker admits that "Occasionally, the tournament

has a tenuous connection with the plot" (38). This statement implies that tournaments are

not *normally* connected with the plot, and even when they are, that connection is only

vague, and it makes no claims at all concerning Malory's theme. I really cannot fault

scholars, and readers in general, for this view—particularly as regards Malory's

'Tristram' section—but the central purpose of my study is exactly to clarify how such

martial concerns like tournaments as well as wars, individual combats, and even the

knights' armor in *Le Morte Darthur* are related closely to with the themes of his work.

Despite the few studies which address, directly or indirectly, violence in Malory, relatively little attention has been paid to the actual combat from which such violence normally stems, and only one article each has been written about armor and weapons. A lack of attention to knightly material culture can lead to a misunderstanding of the context of knightly combat—war, tournament, and individual combat—which neglect often results in the sort of critical positions which can be found in the more general scholarly comments on violence in Malory.

In the popular imagination the distinguishing characteristic of the medieval knight is his appearance, his arms and armor, thus knightly material culture provides an excellent starting point for an examination of combat in Malory, for it is with these items, the lance, sword, armor, and shield, that the knight plies his profession. Surprisingly, little scholarly attention has been paid to this aspect of Malory's text. There are only two articles which treat arms or armor in *Le Morte Darthur*, both of them by D. S. Brewer.[3]

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[3] I am not including two other studies here. The first, "The Armour of an Alienating Identity" Cohen, covers a wide range of Medieval texts, from *Beowulf* to Malory, and treats the term "armour" from a psycho-sexual perspective with almost no mention of armor as an aspect of material culture. It has little relation to my topic other than the very general observation that a knight's armor can prevent his recognition by others. For a contrast to Cohen's assertion that armor obscures the knights' identity, see Ailes.

The second study is "Malory's Body Chivalric" by Kathleen Coyne Kelly. Kelly employs an essentially Freudian strategy in her examination of "the masculine in Malory's *Morte Darthur* . . . within the frame made by the battlefield and tournament ground" (53) and finds that "at the precise moment that we expect to find the male body to be revealed most fully, that body is transformed and feminized" (53) because "spears and swords substitute for, and perhaps extend, phallus and penis" (62). Thus, because a man looks at another man on the field of combat, he is penetrated—raped—by the sword or lance in much the same way a woman would be, "'disappeared' through a process of

In his first article, "Hauberk and Helm in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*," Brewer confines

his attention to the knight's coat of mail and helmet, the two most common forms of

armor listed in Malory.[4] Brewer's overall claim is that Malory "assumes that his reader

has a general notion of armour" which is enough to invoke "the power of the

imagination," so Malory does not need to present a specific picture of his knights.

Therefore, "many inconsistencies, large and small, do not trouble the experienced reader"

(93). But a careful attention to armor in *Le Morte Darthur* reveals that Malory is not

being as vague or inconsistent as Brewer claims. As I will argue in my second chapter,

Malory intentionally includes anachaisms in his descriptions of armor that would have

been recognized as such by his audience. Additionally, Malory also gives an indication

of the types of shields which his knights employ which varies greatly from common

fifteenth-century practice.[5]

Brewer's second article, "Personal Weapons in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*," also

does not contain an argument or claim about the thematic use of weapons, but it does

provide a brief listing of the weapons mentioned in Malory arranged alphabetically. A

more thorough and historically detailed examination of the weapons in Malory, which I

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feminization" (58). Obviously, Kelly examines armor and weapons from a perspective so different from my own as to have no bearing on my study.

[4]Brewer is somewhat confused over the terms "basnet" (one of several types of helmets) and "unnailed" (in reference to damage to the hauberk), both of which I will explore more fully in my second chapter in addition to my examination of the shields in Malory's text.

[5] As I discuss in my second chapter, the knights' shields are an essential indication of the imagined historical setting of *Le Morte Darthur* and one of Malory's most obvious archaisms.

will also explore in the first chapter of my dissertation, reveals that, in addition to armor, some of the weapons do indeed have thematic significance and need to be considered in an overall interpretation of combat Malory's work.

When we turn to the venues of fighting in Malory, war, tournament, and individual combat, we find that less has been written about these subjects that one might expect of a text so filled with violence. For example, only three studies focus on the historical aspects of war in Malory.[6] In "Malory and the Battle of Towton," Peter Field argues that Malory's additions to his source for Arthur's final encounter with Mordred's forces at Salisbury—the description of the exhausted Mordred, the fact that Arthur's and Mordred's combat takes place on foot, and the pillagers despoiling the dead and dying by moonlight following the battle—may have come from Malory's personal experience at Towton.

Both the second and third studies of war in Malory come from Kevin Whetter. Despite the use of the general term "combat" in Whetter's "The Historicity of Combat in *Le Morte Darthur*," his article focuses on battles and sieges exclusively and does not address individual combat and its function in Malory. Whetter correctly recognizes that armed conflict in Malory's work contains pre-fifteenth century elements, but he incorrectly stresses the innovation of foot combat in the fifteenth century without noting the importance of such tactics in earlier medieval battles (thus giving Malory's work a more contemporary appearance than it actually has). In his second article, "Warfare and

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[6] I am excluding here studies which focus more on Malory's overall attitude toward war or violence in general, which will be discussed below.

Combat in *Le Morte Darthur*," Whetter's focus continues to be on warfare and battles

and includes little reference to tournaments and individual encounters "by adventure."

Though Whetter criticizes Andrew Lynch's observations about the problematic nature of

combat in Malory, ultimately he accepts Lynch's general claim that both the "greatness

and destruction [resulting from combat] are intermingled and inseparable" (Whetter

183).[7]

There are two articles which treat the historical aspects of the tournament in Malory.[8]

In "The Tournament in Malory's *Morte Darthur*," Robert Hellenga makes no claim for

any overarching thematic purpose in Malory's tournaments; nevertheless, his essay

remains the most thorough discussion of the tournament in *Le Morte Darthur* yet

published. Hellenga observes that "tournaments in Malory do not reflect the customs and

practices of his own day but of the period in tournament history between the pitched

battles of the twelfth century and the pageants of the fifteenth" (78), yet he does not

address the question of why Malory seems to include intentional archaisms, nor does he

mention the role of score-keeping. Furthermore, Hellenga slightly misrepresents the

origins of the *pas d'armes*, noting that it "originated in imitation of actual martial combat

. . . the defense or attack of a passage, a castle entrance, or bridge, etc." (77), when in fact

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[7] I discuss Lynch in more detail below.

[8] Despite its title, Valerie Ann Wilkinson's "Malory's Tournament of Surluse" is not actually about the tournament at all but is rather an examination of a brief conversation between Arthur and Lamerok *at* the tournament which, according to Wilkinson, reveals that Malory inserted attempts at characterization beyond what was included in his sources.

this style of combat owes more to the stylized and fantastic encounters of romance than actual practice in war.

The second article on tournaments corrects some of the problems in Hellenga's study. Anthony Annunziatta's "The *Pas d'Armes* and its Occurrences in Malory," exactly as the title implies, traces the formal and stylized type of tournament fighting normally referred to by its French name, the *pas d'armes*. Though Annunziata does not list every possible encounter that could fall into this category, he does provide six examples (out of what he believes is a possible thirty—far more than Hellenga recognizes) to show that Malory employs a fifteenth century setting for this type of combat. The problem with this argument is that the *pas d'armes* is actually not limited to the fifteenth century. In fact, it dates back to the late twelfth century. A secondary, and relatively minor, problem is that Annunziata counts only mounted encounters of this type when the *pas* frequently included foot combat.

Individual combat in Malory, whether in formal duels or "by adventure," has also received little treatment. Two articles examine formal dueling in Malory. In "The Duel of Chivalry in *Malory's* Book XIX," Ernest C. York distinguishes between the duel of law and the later duel of chivalry, and makes a convincing argument that Malory has in mind the duel of chivalry in his depiction of Lancelot's defense of Guinevere against Meleagant's charges of adultery. York also observes that Malory has slightly updated the nine other duels of law in *Le Morte Darthur* to include at least some aspects of the later duel of chivalry, especially mounted combat and the use of swords and spears. York's final point is that, in both comparing Malory to his sources as well as comparing English and French

laws covering such duels, Malory does not precisely depict either judicial or chivalric duels "as the Freynsh book saythe" (191).

The second study of dueling in Malory is Keith Swanson's "'God wol have a stroke': Judicial Combat in the *Morte Darthur*." Swanson argues that Malory's narrative encourages a more skeptical attitude, indeed "discredits," judicial combat more than his sources and "explores . . . the difficulty inherent in determining truth by [even] rational means" (157). The essay focuses on five judicial combats in Malory in which either a combatant fighting for an unjust cause wins (as in the case of Mark versus Amant and Arthur versus Accolon), or the justice of the causes becomes more problematic because "physical prowess increasingly appears as an important factor in determining the outcome of battle" as opposed to the actual rectitude of the cause for the victor (164). Although Swanson does not focus on the physical details of the fights themselves in any depth, his study is an important contribution in assessing this specific type of combat in Malory.

Jill Mann examines individual combat in Malory in two articles, and I treat them together here because they contain almost identical arguments.[9] In both studies, Mann claims that knights engage in both combat in particular, and adventure in general, not to *prove* who they are but instead to *discover* what they are, to test themselves against what fate has in store for them. While I agree with Mann that this concept plays an important role in many of the knightly combats in Malory, I will argue that combat more frequently

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[9] The first study, "'Taking the Adventure': Malory and the *Suite du Merlin*," focuses on the case of Balin. The second study, "Knightly Combat in *Le Morte D'Arthur*," is the briefer but also covers more of Malory's text of the two. As I discuss, Mann's conclusions are essentially the same.

involves a progressive revelation of the values of the individual knights in comparison with each other and which more adequately accounts for the knights' almost incessant reference to the knightly pecking order. Further, Mann's studies do not examine the actual details of the fighting in Malory itself.

Finally, there are a number of more generalized studies which focus on Malory's attitude toward combat and violence. These can be divided into three categories: those which criticize chivalry, or those attitudes or institutions associated with it, as causes of the violence in Malory's fictive world; those which argue that Malory is more of a pacifist than usually assumed; and deconstructive readings which assert that violence itself destabilizes *Le Morte Darthur* and renders problematic any unified view which Malory might try to impose on his text.

Studies by Michael Stroud, Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman, and Lisa Robeson all criticize the medieval social world itself, and particularly the mindset of the knightly class, as the central factor behind the violence in Malory's text.[10] Stroud opened this discussion in 1974 when he claimed that within the bastardized form of feudalism that had become the norm by the fifteenth century, Malory "glimpsed a system that would honor his life and condemn the pettiness he saw around him. He respected knightly virtues, but not those of the effete form of chivalry already popular in France and England" (Stroud 350). Malory therefore represents those fifteenth century knights who ignored the so-called finer sensibilities which had come to be praised in the knights

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[10] I am not including here Raluca L. Radulescu's study, "'Oute of mesure': Violence and Knighthood in Malory's *Morte Darthur*," which, though it does mention violence along with sorrow, lust, and anger, is largely focused on emotional excess "presented gradually, so that there is an increased sense of doom which finally dominates the narrative" (131).

of their day; for them, "Strength and skill in battle are good in themselves. 'Chivalry,' for Malory, refers to virtues such as prowess and worship" (345). Though love does develop as a motive for prowess as the narrative progresses, Malory continues to stress the knights' "martial abilities" even in the Grail Quest (345). Noting that Malory's society is "violent and unforgiving, intolerant of weakness and disdainful of compassion" (338), Stroud asks the question, "Why would Malory praise so violent a scheme of values?" (350). The answer he offers is straightforward: "Malory's personal values are so alien to our own that we must listen to his voice with a sensibility that few other writers demand" (352). Malory's perspective is thus nostalgic, accounting for the fact that his "tales portray *none* of the contemporary chivalric practices, and in most respects, run counter to them. Such tournaments as he describes are those of the 12th or 13th century, not the 15th century" (350 emphasis mine). The limitation of Stroud's study is that he does not consider those features from earlier centuries which survive well into Malory's period.

Whereas Stroud seems content to allow Malory his "alien" personal values, Finke and Shichtman claim that such values *are* the heart of the problem of violence in Malory. As they put it, "The foundation of a social order on the exchange of violence creates the very chaos it is designed to hold at bay" (119). The structure of this violence "is oriented toward a purpose, in this case the construction of a hegemonic masculinity based on martial prowess" (118) and "which determines hierarchies among men" (119). For Finke and Shichtman, romance itself functions "as a carrier of an ideology which endorses a sexual economy of violent exchange in which masculinity is built around the continual

circulation of women and wealth as rewards in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*" (117). Though

it is clear that masculine hierarchies in *Le Morte Darthur* are based largely on prowess, a

limitation of Finke and Shichtman's study is that it is focused entirely on Balin and

Gareth; therefore, other characters and plotlines where neither women nor wealth are

exchanged—but in which men do fight to demonstrate prowess and determine who is the

better warrior—receive no comment despite the fact that such encounters are the norm in

the case of individual combat (and Finke and Shichtman's argument does not seem to

apply to Arthur's war with Lancelot once the latter has returned to France).

Finally, Lisa Robeson also blames chivalry itself for the potential of escalating

violence in *Le Morte Darthur*. As she states it, "Full-scale civil war is made acceptable

to Arthur, Lancelot, and the knights of the Round Table because Malory presents war as

an unfortunate and unintentional result of the honorable practice of chivalry—war is

chivalry. War is merely a continuation of the honorable duels of knighthood" (10).

Robeson identifies chivalry's insistence on honor as a key factor in this escalation and

explains that the duels of knighthood easily lead into full-scale war because of frequent

equivocations on the word "war" itself. Unlike modern usage, Malory will often employ

"war" as a term for individual combats which, if they lead toward feuding among

powerful families of knights, can then escalate into the larger conflict for which we now

reserve the term. Robeson argues that Malory is aware of this problem, but she blames

fate or individuals rather than the system itself (22-26).[11]

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[11] Robeson is also one of the scholars already mentioned above who claim that Malory's
depictions of war are not realistic for the fifteenth century (21-22), a point to which I will

Of the more general studies of violence in Malory, two scholars—almost the precise opposite of the three just discussed—argue that while Malory presents a great deal of violence, he also interrogates it. In "Malory's Anti-Knights: Balin and Breunys," Thomas D. Hanks, Jr. notes that "being armed is central not only to Malory's fiction but to his society" (95), but he argues that *Le Morte Darthur*'s "anti-knights," Balin and Breunys, "pointedly question" Malory's ideology of being armed and concludes that "Malory does not merely *glorify* that ideology, as so many have suggested he solely does . . . but he also *questions* the preeminence of the armed male" (109 emphasis in original). In Hanks' view, Balin adheres to the norms of the knightly pursuit of prowess, but his tragic end calls into question the very system he follows. However, Hanks does not sufficiently account for both Arthur's and Pellam's criticism of Balin's actions. Hanks presents Balin as "noble, competent, and genuinely appealing" and as the "first of Arthur's quintessential knights (97), yet Balin is actually more rude, impulsive, and bloodthirsty than even many of Malory's antagonists. And Breunys sans Pité is clearly a villain despite his knightly status, so it is hard to see how his presence in the text could question the ideology of being armed when all of the other knights are horrified at his behavior.

In "Penitence as a Remedy for War in Malory's Tale of the Death of Arthur," Robert L. Kelly detects a theme of renunciation and penitence in Malory's final tale.[12] Kelly's

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return in my fourth chapter. Robeson notes this point in passing, and it is not an essential datum in support of her overall argument.

[12] See also Kelly's "Malory's Argument Against War with France: the Political Geography of France and the Anglo-French Alliance in the *Morte Darthur*."

study focuses on the penitential actions of both Lancelot and the Archbishop of

Canterbury in Book VIII and notes that Lancelot goes well beyond his public vindication

in the matter of the deaths of Gareth and Gaherys in his generous offer to found chantries

(as many as twenty-four), his renunciation of kingship, his "pacifist" response to Arthur's

invasion, his further renunciation of knighthood, and his final retirement from the world

as a hermit-priest.[13] Kelly argues that the size of Lancelot's offer to spend his entire

fortune (his "lyvelode") to found so many chantries—as well as his alms-giving to the

poor—implies his "guilt is not for the deaths of Gareth and Gaherys alone" (127).

Instead, "Lancelot has discovered, or rediscovered, what the implications are of founding

his knighthood on a commitment to another 'in right or wrong'" (127). In Lancelot's

mind, Gareth's death symbolizes his failure as a knight, and his "only adequate

atonement is to renounce his worldly identity" (127). Because Lancelot succeeds in his

renunciations and even experiences a saintly death, and because, after a "wasteland"

period of national atonement of seven years, both the kingship and the archbishopric are

restored, Kelly's argument seriously calls into question the commonly scholarly

assumption that the ending of *Le Morte Darthur* is tragic.

Finally, it is not surprising that the confusion generated by all of the violent

encounters in Malory can lead to deconstructive approaches to the *Morte* generally. The

first such study is Andrew Lynch's *Malory's Book of Arms: The Narrative of Combat in*

Le Morte Darthur. This is the only book-length study purporting to focus on "arms" and

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[13] As I have already stated, Kelly also discusses the Archbishop of Canterbury, but since
my own focus is on armor, combat, and violence in general, I omit Kelly's points about
the Archbishop who, obviously, is never a combative character.

combat in Malory. I say "purporting" because only two of Lynch's chapters (chapters two and three) focus on combat and its thematic function (or, more accurately, irrelevance) in Malory. The remaining chapters concentrate on a small selection of characters, namely Balin, Dynadan, Tristram, and Palomides and, though providing an often brilliant psychological analysis of these characters, do little to clarify the function of combat in Malory overall. Further, though Lynch's title includes "arms," he engages in no sustained comment on weapons or armor and therefore makes no claim as to their significance in Malory's text. Lynch argues that Malory's "deepest narrative interest and . . . most important discourse are centered on combat prowess" (79), and that knightly combat, which the text's "repetitive structure [is] born to serve" forms the work's "dominant subject matter" (84)—so much so, in fact, that there really is no "wider pattern of moral conduct" binding the work together (xiii).

One of Lynch's key points about *Le Morte Darthur* is its lack of a central, "ideal" consistency (xx), and since his text focuses on Malory's use of "arms," he denies any overall thematic purpose for the numerous martial encounters in Malory. Lynch says, "there can never be one code, one generic pattern or one thematic register to describe the narrative function of Malorian arms" (38). As for any larger pattern of meaning in the text, Lynch notes, "I see the *Morte* as bound together by the sheer consistency of its discursive habits, *more* than by patterns of episodic sequence, or strict respect for chivalric conduct" (xviii emphasis added). Lynch's use of the term "more" here is telling, for "patterns of episodic sequence" means plot, and "chivalric conduct" could well refer to theme (or at least one theme) in Malory; in other words meaning in Malory

is not to be found in either plot or theme but in the overall abundance of fighting itself.

Lynch makes this position clear when he states, "Although it is possible to construct a

teleology of combat in Malory, there is no absolute need. His fights are not necessarily

for anything, other than the pleasure of witnessing to the great deeds themselves" (29).

Finally, Lynch comes very close to saying that the book is to be viewed solely as a long

paean to combat: "The fighting is made to seem as important *for its own sake* as for its

outcome" (41 emphasis added).[14]

  In "Thou woll never have done": Ideology, Context and Excess in Malory's War,"

Lynch extends the argument he presented in *Malory's Book of Arms*. In this case, he

reads Malory against several late medieval works which decry knightly violence and

finds "occasional anxieties about the results of war" because the *Morte* itself contains a

"split attitude" on knightly combat, war, and violence (24). According to Lynch, this

split stems from Malory's own attitude toward prowess and combat. Malory "believes

that knightly prowess, proved in battle or tournament, generates its own special

goodness" (26). He adds, "Prowess is offered as a true *sign* of right, rather than as an

outcome of moral deliberation" (26 emphasis in original). Thus, for a knight to be good,

he must fight (26-27). Lynch argues that the difficulty is that "militarily effective actions

are 'good' or 'noble' for Malory in a deep sense, but it is not truly a moral sense" (26)

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[14] Lynch's book does contain three claims which I will address more fully in the chapters to follow: Malory patterns his fighting after the styles of knightly combat in the fifteenth century, he glosses over the gory details of actual combat, and—mostly significantly—fighting in Malory is not related directly to any overarching thematic concern in *Le Morte Darthur*. While I agree that *Le Morte D'Arthur* contains seemingly countless incidents of combat, I disagree that the book is centrally concerned with fighting "for its own sake" (41).

and blames the *Morte* for its "refusal or avoidance of consistent moral scrutiny" (31).

Lynch offers the examples of Lancelot's killing of Gareth and Gaherys—which he says

"does not qualify as true combat, with its accepted honours and risks" (36) —as well as

Arthur's war against Lancelot, which he calls "very close to shameful" (41) and about

which Arthur expresses "no Christian repentance" in his final speeches (34). Thus,

Malory's values are "militarist" (24), but Lynch again finds no unified view of knightly

violence in the text. As he puts it, "looking over the whole book, it is far easier to see an

ad hoc, localized form of apologetics than the consistent application of one system of

moral thought. Indeed, the overall method could be more accurately categorized as a

refusal or avoidance of consistent moral scrutiny" (31); therefore, any reading of

Malory's ideological world as a whole is "spurious" (41).

Catherine Batt's *Malory's* Morte Darthur*: Remaking Arthurian Tradition* also treats

violence from a deconstructive perspective, specifically how Malory's Arthurian world

marks an unsuccessful attempt to contain violence despite its inherent debate on the

subject. Batt's study genders violence, arguing that Malory represents "the male

chivalric body as a focus for celebration and for anxiety" (72). For Batt, Malory

consciously deconstructs violence to interrogate "the uses of Arthurian legend but also

meditates on the uses of literature in general, questioning, from a masculine perspective,

the ontological and epistemological bases of fifteenth-century writing" (xxiii). But Batt's

treatment of violence is not concerned with examining combat *qua* violence as much as it

focuses on how Malory's multiple perspectives on violence have a de-stabilizing effect

on his text, rendering any unified authorial vision impossible. Thus, despite the greater emphasis Batt places on gender, her reading generally agrees with Lynch's position.

In summary, we have seen that there is little scholarly attention to how the material culture of Malory's warriors may relate to the theme of *Le Morte Darthur*, nor is there agreement concerning the relationship between combat, or violence in general, and theme in Malory. What remains to be done is to differentiate Malory's period from earlier centuries as regards arms, armor, combat, and violence to situate Malory's contemporary world and that of his text in their proper relationship. Such "sorting" will reveal that Malory intentionally uses anachronisms as well as an almost heraldic score-keeping system to suggest to his readers that there is a proper, and successful, form of knightly conduct.

My dissertation is a detailed study of Malory's use of armor and combat and will show how these topics in Malory not only suggest a pre-fifteenth century, quasi-historical setting for *Le Morte Darthur* but, in the case of combat, even provide a thematic structure for the work overall. My argument is divided into three chapters.

Following this Introduction, the second chapter section is a discussion of the "historical" world of Malory's work based on material culture and contemporary texts. In the first part of the chapter, I examine tournaments in Malory from the standpoint of their historical context and argue that features of the tournament such as a general lack of rules, the relative priority of the melee over the individual joust, and other features suggest a thirteenth-century setting for *Le Morte Darthur*. Secondly, I examine armor. Using archeological evidence and period texts, I examine the terminology Malory

employs for armor in *Le Morte Darthur* from the standpoint of their historical development through Malory's own period. This analysis will show that Malory generally archaizes the equipment of the knights in his text by at least two hundred years or more. Taken together, my findings on tournaments and armor suggest that Malory intentionally presents a pre-fifteenth century context for his work; therefore, scholars' attempts to evaluate the behavior of Malory's knights based on fifteenth-century tournament regulations seem anachronistic and invalid.

In my third chapter I look at small-scale combat in Malory, both in errantry and especially on the tourney field. I show that tournament "score-keeping" in Malory serves as a standard of qualification: the knights with the most success become qualified to participate in discussions with other knights of similar success concerning the characteristics of the ideal knight. I then demonstrate that the virtues praised by Malory's leading knights conform closely to similar virtues praised in the chivalric manuals of Lull, Charny, and Bouvet. The discussion of virtues by Malory's leading knights creates what may be viewed as a "checklist" which Malory employs to judge the behavior of the knights in *Le Morte Darthur*. Malory accomplishes this evaluation through the literary device of character contrasts, or foils. After surveying the qualities of several of Malory's leading knights, I show that Lancelot emerges as the best example of the ideal knight and tourney champion.

My fourth chapter considers large-scale conflict in Malory, war. In contrast to the views of some scholars, I argue that Malory neither glorifies war nor presents it unrealistically. I then show that Malory continues to use the device of foils to offer both

a strategic and moral evaluation of his most important knights. In the light of both the skills of military leadership recommended by medieval military manuals and also the medieval view of a just war, Lancelot again emerges as the ideal knight and commander, especially in contrast to Tristram, Arthur, and Gawain.

This analysis of Malory's text suggests two conclusions. The first result of my study is that arguments about Malory's work which are based on comparing his text with the actual practice of violence in the fifteenth century have to be approached with caution. Malory's contemporary audience would have been well aware that most of the armor and shields of his knights, having been made obsolete by the arms race of the Hundred Years' War, were out of fashion by the fifteenth century. Further, though none of Malory's descriptions of war, melees, jousts, or duels would have been recognized as representative of exact, real-world contemporary practice by his audience, Malory does include in his text enough hints of fifteenth century equipment, fighting techniques, and heraldic score-keeping that his readers could have seen at least points of contact between their own day and the bygone past. Thus, the chronological setting of Arthur's kingdom is archaic—Malory may well have had in mind some of the social and political concerns of the fifteenth century when he created his text, but the armor of his knights, their encounters, tournaments, and wars, all are part of a time long passed.

The second conclusion offered by my dissertation concerns the structure of Malory's work. As mentioned above, a number of scholars have observed that readers find it difficult to wade through the almost innumerable violent encounters in Malory and tend to look for meaning in other, more manageable aspects of *Le Morte Darthur*. While such

approaches clearly have their benefits, readers cannot ignore Malory's use of violence if they wish for a comprehensive reading of the text. In the end, one of the central narrative concerns that develop throughout *Le Morte Darthur* is Malory's exploration of the questions of when violence is appropriate and when it is not, and how violence should or should not be enacted. Contrary to the views of many of the scholars surveyed in this chapter, I will demonstrate that Malory does indeed have a particular ideal of knighthood in mind. But this ideal is revealed only gradually throughout *Le Morte Darthur* as Malory presents the strengths and especially the weaknesses of his leading knights. In the end, it is in Lancelot that Malory finds the most wide-ranging combination of knightly virtues. This final claim questions the common assumption that *Le Morte Darthur* is a tragedy and argues that Malory's purpose is more didactic than is frequently assumed.

CHAPTER II

MALORY'S THIRTEENTH CENTURY: AN EXAMINATION OF

THE TOURNAMENTS AND ARMOR OF *LE MORTE DARTHUR*

As I stated in my Introduction, the present study reassesses the function of combat in

Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. It is common for contemporary critics to decry the violence

in Malory's work, claiming its "militarist" values (Lynch, ""Ideology" 24) display a

"lack of moral emphasis" (26) to the point that "Malory's narrative commonly avoids or

downplays its heroes' potential culpability for military violence" (26). One scholar even

compares knightly violence in Malory to David Koresh and to the Columbine killings

(Hanks 109). I will argue that one reason for this misinterpretation is that Malory is

being judged by the wrong standards. In this chapter I first demonstrate that Malory

employs a thirteenth-century setting for his tournaments which should prevent us from

judging the violence we find there by the more "courteous" rules of the fifteenth century.

In the second half of the chapter, I examine Malory's use of armor terminology to

reinforce the judgment that the context is that of the thirteenth century.

Tournament and Historical Setting

Robert Hellenga's "The Tournaments in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*" is extremely

helpful in establishing the historical context for Malory's tournaments, but it needs to be

used with caution. Hellenga concludes, "The tournaments in Malory do not reflect the customs and practices of his own day but of the period in tournament history between the pitched battles of the twelfth century and the pageants of the fifteenth" (78). Thus Hellenga allows a minimum range of over two hundred years for the setting of Malory's tournaments. While I agree with Hellenga's general claim, I will argue that we can narrow this range considerably.

To introduce the procedure I will follow in analyzing the historicity of Malory's tournaments, I will begin by examining an earlier passage from Hellenga's essay:

> It has been shown that the descriptions which occur in the twelfth-century metrical romances are not highly romanticized, as we might expect, but correspond fairly closely to what we know about twelfth-century tournaments; but it does not follow that fourteenth or fifteenth century literary versions will correspond to the realities of fourteenth or fifteenth-century tournaments, especially when they derive more from earlier literary accounts than from actual observation. *Nonetheless, we must expect later versions to reflect later customs to a degree, and this is what we find in Malory.* (70 emphasis added)

The sentence I have italicized is the key. In determining the historical setting of Malory's tournaments, we must be careful not to ascribe a fifteenth century time frame to a given practice simply because it existed in Malory's day; oftentimes the fifteenth-century preserved a tournament practice from previous centuries. Instead, we must watch for practices which would have been exclusive to the fifteenth century if we wish to establish that Malory is thinking of the tournaments of his own period as Lynch and Cherewatuk

would have it.[1] When we follow this procedure, we find that there are no elements in the tournaments of *Le Morte Darthur* which cannot be traced back to at least the thirteenth century, and thus we can come to a far more exact date range than that allowed by Hellenga.

The general roughness of Malory's tournaments is the most obvious indication that we should not imagine a fifteenth century context for them. As Hellenga correctly observes, Malory's tourneys include "combats far more ferocious than any of the fifteenth-century spectaculars which Malory himself might have seen—or participated in" (Hellenga 67). At its inception in the early twelfth century, the tourney was rough indeed. According to Maurice Keen, tourneys in this stage of development were "only just distinguishable from real battle" (*Chivalry* 85). But by Malory's day, "the tournament [had] become more of a social event than a martial exercise" (Hellenga 70). In the *Morte Darthur*, however, we find rough behavior indeed. To cite only one of many examples, at the tourney at the Castle of Maidens, Palomides attacks Tristram with a spear when the latter has only a sword (531.3-5),[2] but Tristram throws down his spear and "gate hym by the nek with hys bothe hondis, and pulled hym clene oute of hys sadle, and so bare hym afore hym the lengthe of ten spearys, and than he lete hym falle at hys adventure" (531.6-9). Later, at the same tourney, Tristram smites Gaheris off his horse

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[1] For Lynch's comparison of Malory's tournaments to fifteenth century practice, see his *Book of Arms* (53) and "Ideology" (27-28). For Karen Cherewatuk's reading of Malory's tournaments in the context of fifteenth century rules, see her "Grete Booke" (60-61) as well as my discussion below.

[2] Hellenga incorrectly identifies Tristram as the one with the spear (76).

despite the fact that Gaheris does not want to joust and is not ready (533.9-12).[3] And, in

direct contradiction to Lynch's claims that "no knight in Malory carries a permanent

disfigurement" (*Book of Arms* 50), we find that such rough play has taken its toll on both

Bors and Lancelot: Bors has a permanent scar on his forehead (1082.31-34) and Lancelot

a scar on his cheek (1075.36-37).[4]

   More knights take part in Malory's tournaments than would have been the case in the

fifteenth century. Tournaments in Malory have knights participating in the hundreds. In

the Great Tournament, for example, six hundred knights on Arthur's team oppose four

hundred fighting for the opposition (1106.14-1107.6). But because of the increasing

expenses which knighthood demanded, the number of knights in England during the

fifteenth century fell steadily from roughly four hundred at the beginning of the century

to only 193 in 1459; even with Edward IV's wave of knightings, by 1465 there were still

only 237.[5] So at one tournament, Malory lists roughly five times the number of knights

in his day in all of England. Earlier periods, such as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,

saw huge numbers participating in tournaments because "knights" who could not claim a

chivalric lineage had not yet been banned from participating as they would be by the

fifteenth century.[6]

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[3] I will discuss this incident in more detail in Chapter III.

[4] For the realism of such scars, see Muhlberger's *Deeds of Arms* 106.

[5] Radulescu, *Gentry Context* 9.

[6] See Hardy 104.

Another feature of Malory's tournaments which would have seemed anachronistic to a fifteenth-century audience is Malory's preference for the melee over the individual joust. As Boulton observes, "after about 1380 the whole tournament was normally composed of various forms of the joust" (13). Jousting itself is an older form of tournament fighting than is often supposed in any case. Gravett and McBride note that individual jousting is documented back to the time of William Marshal (*Knights at Tournament* 11). So even in the cases where there is jousting in Malory—mostly during errantry—such practices should not lead us to imagine a fifteenth century context. Yet Hellenga emphasizes Malory's tendency to focus on individuals during tournament competition as evidence that, in this case, Malory is *thinking* of the form of tournaments held in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (73-74).[7] Muhlberger observes that the jousting recorded for tournaments in the thirteenth century often constituted matches preliminary to the melee proper (*Jousts and Tournaments* 20),[8] exactly what Malory presents during the morning of the first day of the tournament at Lonezep (731.6-21).

The physical space of Malory's tournaments also argues for a form later than the twelfth century but before the fourteenth. For example, Malory does provide viewing areas for spectators on occasion, though he places little emphasis on their participation (Hellenga 71). Though Keen notes several twelfth-century texts which include ladies as

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[7] See, for examples, his comments that there "is ample evidence that Malory thought in terms of opposing parties" (73), "During the actual fighting this sense of opposing sides is usually conveyed only by broad strokes" (73), and, "it is the individual who counts most. Tournaments are won by individuals, not sides" (74).

[8] See also Keen, *Chivalry* 86.

spectators, the practice does not become widely common until the thirteenth century

(*Chivalry* 91). Hellenga also notes the general lack of tournament pageantry in *Le Morte*

Darthur (78) which would have been associated with tourney practice during the

fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[9] The most obvious difference in the physical layout of

Malory's tournaments and those of the fifteenth century is the complete lack of the tilt

barrier which had become common early in the fifteenth century.[10] And just because

Malory does not mention the tilt does not mean that we should imagine one, for two

reasons. First, knights are frequently unhorsed during Malory's tournaments, but knights

were less likely to be unhorsed when jousting left side to left side as they would have

been with the tilt barrier separating them.[11] Secondly, in some tourneys, Malory tells us

which knights "go first." This seems to imply an initial joust before the grand melee, but

since we have to assume that such combat takes place on the same field as the melee,

then there cannot be a barrier that would inhibit the swirling movements of the knights in

the larger melee.

 The preceding discussion of the physical setting of the tournament in Malory leads

directly to another, distinctive form of combat in *Le Morte Darthur*, the *pas d'armes*.

Hellenga discusses the *pas* briefly, and claims that it constitutes a "new form of

tournament" (77), but he seems misinformed about what a *pas d'armes* actually was.

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[9] On pageantry, see Boulton (12) and Keen (*Chivalry* 99).

[10] For the fifteenth century development of the tilt barrier, see Barber and Barker,
Tournaments (213) and Baker, *The Knight* (18-19).

[11] For a more detailed explanations, see Guttmann's "Sports Spectators from Antiquity to
the Renaissance" (14).

Hellenga takes the *pas* to mean the defense of a barrier and cites Galahad's combat at the

gate of a castle (981.6-982.18) as the sole example of such combat in Malory (77-78).

But a *pas d'armes* was not merely the defense of a barrier; it was a highly stylized form

of combat. In "The *Pas d'Armes* and its Occurrences in Malory," Anthony Annunziata

has discussed this form of combat at length. Annunziata concludes that Malory's use of

the *pas* renders "Malory's narrative realistic to fifteenth-century readers" (47), which

could imply a fifteenth century element in Malory's combat. I will first discuss the

features of the *pas* and list Annunziata's examples, and I will then proceed to note a

weakness in Annunziata's logic.

Hellenga is at least correct in stating that the *pas* involved a knight defending a fixed

location. But as Annunziata points out, the *pas d'armes* was grounded on literary models

such as could be found in many early medieval romances and which led to arbitrary and

highly stylized settings and challenges (41). Also like those encounters in literary

models, the victors of the *pas d'armes* were granted favors by a lady or ladies, usually

tokens and/or kisses (41-21). Finally, and also as in romance, the *pas d'armes* frequently

made use of dwarves as messengers, attendants, and time keepers (42).[12]

Annunziata has counted some thirty combats in Malory's text which contain elements

of the *pas d'armes* (42), of which he provides the six following examples (42-47): In

"The Tale of King Arthur," Torre's encounter with a dwarf, displayed shield, horn, and

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[12] The *pas d'armes* is also discussed in Ferguson's *The Indian Summer of English Chivalry* (26), Berber's "Chivalry and the *Morte Darthur*" (29-30), Gravett and McBride's *Knights at Tournament* (28-30), and Keen's *Chivalry* (91-92). For many examples of historical passages of arms in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, see Muhlberger's *Deeds of Arms*.

subsequent joust; in "A Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake," Lancelot's striking a

shield to signal his intention to joust, along with the appearance of a dwarf and a

following joust; a second *pas d'armes* in the same book but this time hosted by Lancelot

and including a dwarf and the special setting of an island; in "The Book of Sir Tristram

de Lyones," Alexander the Orphan's proclamation of his intention to defend a castle for a

year and a day by which he wins the favor of Alys la Beale Pellaron; again in "A Noble

Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake," Lancelot's joust with Gawtere after the former has

passed by three pavilions, each of which displays lances and shields of three knights;[13]

and especially Gareth's repeated passages of arms throughout his tale, with specialized

settings (a bridge, for example), distinctively painted gear including matching shields,

armor, lances, and even a matching horse, formal challenges, puns on the word "*pas,*"

and ultimately the favors of a lady.

But now I must again take issue with both Hellenga's and Annunziata's logic. As I

mentioned at the beginning of this discussion of Malory's tournaments, we have to be

careful not to ascribe a fifteenth-century setting to a practice simply because it still exists

in that period. In point of fact, the *pas d'armes* was not "new" in the fifteenth century as

Hellenga claims, nor is it exclusive to Malory's period as Annunziata implies. For

example, the famous Ulrich von Liechtenstein, dressed in elaborate costumes, performed

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[13] Annunziata slightly misreads this episode. He argues that for Lancelot to ride past the knights without challenging them is a violation of the customs of chivalry, but he fails to note that Lancelot, disguised in Kay's armor, is also imitating Kay's *behavior*, thus doubly ensuring that at least one of the knights will challenge him--for he not only looks like Kay but acts like him as well--and Kay is viewed by many of the other knights as an easy mark.

not one but two tours of Europe engaging in numerous passages of arms at crossroads,

bridges, and other locations in the early *thirteenth* century.[14] Secondly, the *pas d'armes*

is based, as Annunziata himself admits, on literary models found in the romances, the

very types of romances which constitute Malory's French sources (47), and all of

Malory's uses of the *pas* occur during errantry, never at actual tournaments with an

audience present. Certainly Malory's own audience would have recognized the *pas*

d'armes context for many of Malory's combats, but if he had wanted to indicate a

fifteenth century setting by using the *pas*, he would have had to have such practice take

place at a tournament as was commonly done in his period. Thus, Malory's *pas d'armes*

are those of the romances, not actual fifteenth century practice on the tourney field.

Though the elaborate passages of arms which Malory may have witnessed in his day

contained highly stylized conventions, the tournaments in his work do not, and this fact

brings us to another aspect of combat in *Le Morte Darthur* which distinguishes it from

Malory's period: the lack of elaborate tournament rules. This topic is especially

important for how we read combat in Malory since Lynch relates Malory's combat to

Tiptoft's rules (*Book of Arms* 51). The issue is even clearer in the case of Cherewatuk,

who goes so far as to actually judge the behavior of Malory's knights based on Tiptoft.

For example, she castigates Lancelot when he "rushes off" his defeated opponents' helms

at Surluse ("Grete Booke" 60, *Works* 645.27-28) and cites Tiptoft's explicit prohibition

against slaying a horse when Lamerok is ambushed and murdered by Gawain and his

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[14] Ulrich's *emprise* is discussed at length in Crouch 14-16, 33, 37, 48, 58 and Barber and
Barker 49-52, 77, 112.

fellows at Lonezep ("Grete Booke" 61, *Works* 699.17-26). I will discuss Tiptoft's rules

and their applicability first and then proceed to examine Cherewatuk's claims.[15]

John Tiptoft was not only the Earl of Worcester (1427-1470), he was also the

Constable of England and presided over the Court of Chivalry. He had learned of the

elaborate scoring system for jousting employed by the Italians during a tour of Italy he

made during 1458-1461[16] and, at the urging of Edward IV, introduced his simplified

version of the Italian rules, *The Ordinances*, on May 29, 1466 (Ruhl 200). In order to see

if Malory might have these rules in mind as a standard whereby to judge his tournaments,

they are worth quoting at length. First Tiptoft lists four ways one may be "worthy to

have the prize":

1 First whoso breaks most spears as they ought to be broken shall have the prize
2 Item he that or whoso hits 3 times in the sight of the helmet shall have the prize.
3 Item whoso meets two times coronal to coronal shall have the prize.
4 Item whoso bears a man down with the stroke of spear shall have the prize.[17]

Next he lists the fouls and disqualifications:

1 First who strikes a horse shall have no prize

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[15] Though they do not mention Tiptoft, Finke and Shichtman's claim of Malory's "excessive violence" (118) may also be dispensed with if we view Malory not *vis-à-vis* Tiptoft but against the backdrop of thirteenth century tourneys.

[16] See Ruhl's "Visconti and Tiptoft" 198; for more details of the Italian influence on Tiptoft's perception of the tournament, see 193-198.

[17] Reformatted for clarity from Ruhl (201) though all numerals here and in the following are in the original.

2 Item who strikes a man his back turned shall have no prize
3 Item whoso hits the tilt 3 times shall have no prize
4 Item whoso unhelmets himself 2 times shall have no prize
    unless his horse does fail him. (Ruhl 201)

Tiptoft next lists regulations regarding what is allowed in the specific breaking of spears:

1 First whoso breaks a spear between the saddle and the charnel of the helmet
    shall be allowed for one
2 Item whoso breaks a spear from the charnel upward shall be allowed for 2
3 Item whoso breaks a spear so as he strikes him down or puts him out of his saddle
    or dismays him in such a wise as he may not run the next course after or breaks
    his spear coronal to coronal shall be allowed 3 spears broken. (Ruhl 201)

He follows with what is not allowed in breaking spears:

1 First whoso breaks on the saddle shall be disallowed for a spear breaking.
2 Item whoso hits the toil once shall be disallowed for two
3 Item whoso hits the toil twice for the second time shall be abated 3.
4 Item whoso breaks a spear within a foot of the coronal shall be judged as
    no spear broken but a fair attaint. (Ruhl 202)

Tiptoft continues with additional discussion of awarding prizes for specific lance strikes,

but the above is sufficient to convey the complexity of his scoring system. While it may

seem hard to believe, both the Italians and the Germans had even more complicated

regulations than Tiptoft's in the fifteenth century.[18] Given the above, there can be little

doubt that Malory is not consulting Tiptoft or any other such complicated system in *Le*

Morte Darthur. Malory simply declares the winner based on a combination of who stays

longest on the field with who has the most victories—it is as simple as that. As for fouls,

Malory merely indicates that horses are not supposed to be intentionally targeted;

accidental wounds to horses are allowed.[19] Tiptoft, on the other hand, prohibits any

striking of the horse, intentional or otherwise.

   We may now examine Cherewatuk's claims that Malory uses Tiptoft's rules.

Cherewatuk provides two examples as I noted above. In the first case, she criticizes

Lancelot for pulling off his opponents' helms, yet this is an obvious example of a non-

lethal "win." In the second case, she notes that the murder of Lamerok takes place at the

tournament of Lonezep. This second example is especially odd, since the murder is not

during the actual tournament itself, so no set of tournament rules can apply. The standard

Malory seems to suggest is that murder is a violation of a set of rules somewhat more

fundamental than those of a tournament.

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[18] The Italian system is discussed along with Tiptoft in Ruhl's "Regulations for the Joust
in Fifteenth-Century Europe: Francesco Sforza Visconti (1465) and John Tiptoft (1466)."
Ruhl also lists the German system in "German Tournament Regulations of the 15th
Century." See also Ruhl's "Sports Quantification in Tudor and Elizabethan
Tournaments" for the elaborate notational systems employed in fifteenth and sixteenth
century England.

[19] Lancelot forgives Palmoides' foul in striking the latter's horse (739.3-740.16). I
discuss this episode in more detail in the following chapter. Note also that at the
tournament of Surluse, Mellyagaunce tells one of his knights to kill Lancelot's horse
(1124.17-19), Malory's way of indicating an unrepentant cheater.

So it seems that from an examination of the tournaments in *Le Morte Darthur* we cannot view combat in Malory in light of fifteenth-century practice. Indeed, this examination has suggested that we imagine a thirteenth-century setting. The question remains, then, is there another set of data that can be examined in Malory's work which will either confirm or deny a thirteenth-century setting? As it happens, Malory's changes to the details of armor as they appear in his sources, particularly in his source for Book II, provide the answer.

When we turn to the subject of arms and armor in *Le Morte Darthur*, we find that Malory's specific additions and deletions to knightly gear confirm the claim that Malory's imagined setting for his fictive world is intended to echo the knightly practices of the thirteenth century.

Armor and Historical Setting

In Malory's source for Book II of *Le Morte Darthur*, the English *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, Sir Gawain leads a group of men out from Arthur's main forces on a foraging expedition during Arthur's Roman campaign. Gawain encounters a pagan knight, Sir Priamus, and a fight ensues. After the initial exchange, a passage heavily weighted with technical terms of armament follows. Highlighted are those terms especially relevant to my discussion:

> Then Sir Gawain was greved   and grouched full sore;
> With Galuth his good sword   grimly he strikes,

Clef the knightes sheld   clenlich in sonder.
Who lookes to the left side,   when his horse launches,
With the light of the sun   men might see his liver.
Then grones the gome   for gref of his woundes,
And girdes at Sir Gawain   as he by glentes,
And awkward egerly   sore he him smites;
An *alet* enameld   he oches in sonder,
Bristes the rerebrace   with the brand rich,
Carves off at the *coutere*   with the clene edge
Anentis the avawmbrace   vailed with silver;
Through a double vesture   of velvet rich
With the venomous sword   a vein has he touched
That voides so violently   that all his wit changed;
The *vesar*, the *aventail*,   his vestures rich
With a valiant blood   was verred all over. (lines 2557-2573 emphasis added)[20]

Malory changes the passage to the following:

Than sir Gawayne was grevid wondirly sore and swynges his good swerde
Galantyne, and grymly he strykys, and clevys the knyghtes shylde in sundir.
And thorowoute the thycke haubirke made of sure mayIes, and the rubyes that
were ryche, he russhed hem in sundir, that men myght beholde the lyvir and
longes. Than groned the knyght for his grymme woundis and gyrdis to sir
Gawayne and awkewarde hym strykes, and brastyth the *rerebrace* and the
vawmbrace bothe, and kut thorow a vayne, that Gawayne sore greyed, for so
worched his wounde that his wytte chonged, and therewithall his armure was all
blody berenne. (*Works* 230.3-13 emphasis added)

The italicized words above name specific pieces of armor in Malory's source text which

he deletes and also the two terms he retains from the poem in his own work in order to

raise a question: why does Malory retain some specialized terms and eliminate others? I

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[20] *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English* Stanzaic Morte Arthur *and* Alliterative
Morte Arthure. Eds. Larry D. Benson and Edward E. Foster. Kalamazoo: Medieval
Institute Publications, 1994.

will examine the above passages in detail below, but to place that discussion in a larger context, I will first take up the question why the technical terms of arms and combat in Malory's work have little interpretive importance for most readers and critics.

D. S. Brewer's comments may be taken as representative of this view. He observes that although "Malory has many incidental references to armour he is no more interested in it than he is in the technique of single combat or the tactics and strategy of battle" ("Hauberk" 87) and adds that, because of this lack of interest, Malory "cuts out realistic detail" (88). However, although Malory does delete details, he also sometimes replaces one specific term in his sources with another, equally specific, term in his own text. A close look at knightly material culture suggests that while Malory may have had some of the social, political, and religious issues of his own day in mind, he defines the material features of his Arthurian world as belonging to an earlier age, and indeed he seems intentionally to foreground this archaism in his narrative. Even when he does employ terms still in use in the fifteenth century, he employs them with such ambiguity that they could fit into the context of an earlier period. His deletion of terminology from his sources is particularly illuminating in this regard. Contrary to Brewer's view that Malory indiscriminately deletes terms merely to reduce the realism of the narrative, Malory assiduously removes terms which could be construed as *exclusive* to the fifteenth century and even back to the middle of the fourteenth.

The net effect is to suggest an early thirteenth century context for his Arthurian world. Determining the "historical" context of the armor and combat in Malory has considerable importance. If the armor of Malory's knights is that of the fifteenth century,

then the critic has ample warrant to interpret the combat—especially in war and

tournament—based on fifteenth century rules or accepted practices. On the other hand, if

the gear of the knights is from an earlier period, such warrant vanishes.[21] Thus the date

range of the various types of armor will play a prominent role in the examination. I will

generally follow Malory's source text before turning to his own version of the encounter

in question.

In the passage from the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* cited above, the first piece of

armor mentioned is the *ailette*, which Malory eliminates. Meaning "little wing" in Old

French, this piece of knightly gear was a small placard hung on the sides of the knight's

shoulders, probably attached by laces to the hauberk. Unfortunately, there are no

surviving examples of the *ailette*,[22] but images of it occur frequently in illuminations and

funeral effigies. It is normally rectangular in shape and roughly six inches by eight

inches, though of course there are variations not only in size but also in the basic outline.

However, almost without exception, the *ailette* bore the knights' coat of arms, which

seems to have led to a partial misinterpretation of its function. Claude Blair asserts that

the *ailette* only served for heraldic display (46) and was not, precisely, a type of armor.

Oakeshott concurs, saying they "had no defensive value, for their construction was flimsy

(buckram or leather), and they could not have been securely enough fastened to check a

blow" (272). Norman and Pottinger cite an example from the time of Edward II which

was composed of "parchment and pearls" (65). But here we find a clue to help unravel

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[21] See my discussion of Cherewatuk above.

[22] See Stone 6.

the confusion, for there is no practical way to attach pearls to parchment. The parchment must have been a thin leather covering, possibly tooled with decorative embossing, and attached to a more rigid underlying material. Indeed, Strickland gives examples of documentary evidence for *ailettes* made of whalebone (365), and the passage Malory adapts for his work says the *ailettles* are "enameld" (line 2565), which should remind us that only metal can withstand the high temperatures required for enameling. Such armor could certainly help to lessen the impact of horizontal blows aimed at the shoulder.

Two aspects of the *ailette* are important for Malory's deletion of it: its heraldic function and especially its date range. Malory seems to want his knights to be anonymous the majority of the time; therefore, a piece of armor (regardless of its defensive value) which typically displays a coat of arms would greatly interfere with this tendency. Further, the date range of the *ailette*'s popularity may well be the ultimate problem for Malory. The earliest use of *ailettes* is roughly the final two decades of the thirteenth century,[23] and they increased in popularity throughout the fourteenth century to the point that they became ubiquitous. In the early fifteenth century they become less popular with the near-universal use of more complicated and protective shoulder defenses of articulated plate. However, Malory's older contemporaries could certainly remember *ailettes*, and Malory himself would have seen them on funeral effigies from the previous generation of knights, so *ailettes* are too close to Malory's own day for him to include them.

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[23] See Norman and Pottinger (81) and Rothero (36).

The next three terms describing armor in Malory's source are the "rerebrace" (line 2566), the "coutere" (2567), and the "avawmbrace" (2568). All three of these are protection for the arm. Malory eliminates the *couter* (in its modern spelling), but retains the *rerebrace* and the *vambrace* (again following the modern spelling). I will first treat the deleted term and then consider the vambrace and rerebrace separately.

The term *couter* was applied variously in the Middle Ages to indicate either a flat, disc-shaped plate covering the outside of the elbow or the later dished form encasing all of the elbow. Modern armor scholars normally reserve "couter" for the earlier style and refer to the more cupped form as a "cop." Even the earlier disc form is rare in the thirteenth century; Blair notes only one example, from 1260,[24] and then observes that all other early examples are from the first decade of the fourteenth century (39). The dished form begins to appear as a separate piece of armor several decades into the fourteenth century, but by the middle of the century armors learn how to articulate it to the upper and lower arm defenses with sliding rivets. Even so, the disc form is frequently riveted directly onto the cupped form for added protection, and it is not until the end of the fourteenth century that the disc form disappears completely (Stone 215, Norman and Pottinger 84). This later *cop* continues in use until arm harnesses are abandoned after the defeat of the royal cavalry in the English Civil War. Since the distinction between the *couter* and the *cop* occurs purely for the convenience of modern scholars, Malory would

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[24] Rothero, citing the same example, clarifies that it is from the funeral effigy of William Longsword on pages 29 and 71.

have been acquainted with the "coutere" as the later dished style still regularly in use during his lifetime, so, once again, he eliminates the term.

In contrast to the *couter*, the *vambrace* and *rerebrace* have a much longer history.[25] The *vambrace*, originally a gutter-shaped plate for the forearm, occurs in a splinted form in the early seventh century in the Sutton Hoo find (Nicolle *Arthur and the Anglo-Saxon Wars* 34). However, the combination of the *vambrace* with the *rerebrace*—a similar protection for the upper arm—does not appear regularly until the beginning of the fourteenth century (Blair 285). In retaining these terms, Malory has for once not quite archaized enough, but his elimination of the *couter* does tend to make Gawain seem at least pre-fifteenth century. However, it should be noted that Stone cites an example of the *vambrace* dated to 1230 (652), so the possible early thirteenth century context of the *vambrace* is still open to question. Probably the best explanation of Malory's version of the encounter is he wants to indicate that Gawain has received a blow to the arm, and employing *vambrace* and *rerebrace* is the most convenient way to do it. It should also be noted that this is the only case in all of *Le Morte Darthur* where Malory names any specific armor for the limbs, and it may well be that Malory thought the terms fitting for his early thirteenth century context, especially so since without the *couter*, there is no way for the arm protection to be articulated in the manner of similar protection available in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Malory's final deletion in the above passage is a particularly telling one: he eliminates the poem's reference to both the "vesar" and the "aventail" (2576). Both of

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[25] The specific terms, however, are medieval French: "avant bras" (*vambrace*), and "arrière" (*rerebrace*). See Oakeshott *Archeology* 285.

these terms lead us into an examination of the armor for the head. I will treat the "vesar" (visor) first, for the *aventail* will lead to a discussion both of Malory's preference for mail armor in general.

The visor which Malory eliminates here brings up the rather complicated issue of the type of helmets we should picture for Malory's knights. I should say at the outset that a definitive answer to this question is probably impossible, but I will show that there are plausible reasons for assuming an earlier form than the later style of *bascinet* and/or great helm which Brewer would have ("Hauberk and Helm" 89-92). First, the visor. Only twice in Malory is a knight asked to "lyfte up his vyser" (241.22) or "put up" his visor (389.01).[26] Though it might seem reasonable to assume that in both of these cases Malory is indicating the sort of hinged visor which began to appear on great helms at the end of the thirteenth century and which was then transferred to the smaller *bascinet* in the fourteenth century, other passages in *Le Morte Darthur* seem to imply otherwise. For example, knights in Malory's text will occasionally take off their helms during a rest from a fight, as Percivale does on the grail quest when "he dud of hys helme for to gadir wynde" (912.32-33). If Percivale's helm has a movable visor, then completely removing the helmet would be unnecessary for him simply to breathe more easily.

So the question of the helmet style Malory suggests involves what other possibilities there are for "putting up" or "lifting" a visor without employing a hinge. Though body

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[26] Elsewhere Malory only mentions the visor two additional times (382.14 and 719.13), and in both of these cases the visors are not lifted or raised. Malory also employs the term "bavoure" once (267.21), but as this simply stems from the Old French word which indicates the mouth and therefore could simply imply the lower portion of the face-plate, it should not be confused with the much later piece of armor for the throat.

armor varied little from the year 1000 to approximately 1250, consisting largely of the hauberk, the styles of helmets during this same period were far more diverse. Fortunately for anyone carefully considering the armor of Malory's knights, there are a variety of helmet forms common throughout this period which exactly fit the context of fixed face-plates but which could also be "lifted." Such helmets had short back-plates and could thus be tipped back in the manner of the Greek helms so commonly depicted on ancient pottery, but modern readers might imagine a parallel to the manner in which a contemporary welding mask is rocked back on the head without the welder having to remove it. Apparently these forms of helmets evolved when the nasal of the Norman helmet widened and deepened to form what modern armor scholars refer to as goggles which then, in turn, lengthened further to cover the entire face. Though there are no extant examples of these styles of helmets, ample documentation exists in the form of stained glass windows, illustrated manuscripts. In *French Medieval Armies: 1000-1300*, Nicolle provides an example of such a short-backed helm with a fixed face-plate, though with a flat top, from wall paintings from the Templar Church in Cressac as well as from the stained-glass windows of Chartres, both from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries (43-44). Further, in *Knight Hospitaller (1): 1100-*1306, Nicolle gives an example of a domed and fluted helm with similar face protection (59-60).[27] Finally, in *The Normans*, Nicolle shows a domed Norman-style helm with no back plate whatsoever but which has a full face-plate (58).

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[27] Unfortunately, Nicolle does not cite his sources in this case.

Complicating the issue, though, is Malory's rare use of the word *bascinet*.[28] Brewer

takes this term to mean the roughly conical helm, with full back and sides, which became

the standard helm of the middle and late fourteenth century ("Hauberk and Helm" 89-91).

Though Brewer cites Blair's work (see his second note on page 87), he ignores Blair's

discussion of the various forms of helm to which the word "bascinet" can be applied, and

Blair's work itself, dating back to 1958, cannot take advantage of more recent scholarship

such as that cited in Nicolle's works above. It is well to recall that *bascinet* comes from

the Old French word for basin, and though the *OED* lists no occurrences of the word in

English before 1300, it seems reasonable to claim that the term could have been applied

to any roughly basin-shaped helm in England after 1066.[29] Of the three examples cited in

the previous paragraph, the flat-topped form and the fluted form would not seem to

qualify as shaped like a basin, but the Norman form clearly does. Thus, we have found

the helmet which fits the necessary criteria: fixed facial protection, with a low back so it

can be tipped up, and one to which Malory's "basnet" could be applied.

Having covered the visor and the helm, we can now proceed to Malory's deletion of

"aventail" from the poem. On this topic Brewer again seems confused. He claims that

Malory's knights wore "camails" attached to their *bascinets* ("Hauberk and Helm" 92),

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[28] Malory spells it "basnet" at 200.4 and pluralizes it "basnettys" at 234.9; these are the
only two occurrences of the word in *Le Morte Darthur*. Normally Malory uses some
variation of the word "helme." Kato lists 177 occurrences of "helme," 12 of "helmet," 4
of "helmette," and "helmys" 38 times, giving a total of 231 taken together against only 2
for bascinet, a ratio of well over 100 to 1.

[29] Indeed, Lachaud notes the occurrence of the word in a thirteenth century English
inventory well before the fourteenth century (344).

but Malory never uses the term. Indeed, Malory's deletion of "aventail" demonstrates we should imagine no such thing, for *aventail* is the English word for the French "camail" (see Blair 52), and both terms mean a mail curtain attached directly to the lower edge of a helmet, especially the *bascinet* of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The word Malory uses instead is "ventayles" (703.31), and it occurs only this one time in *Le Morte Darthur*. What is important here is that *camail/aventail* and *ventail* (in its modern spelling) are quite distinct forms of armor. Whereas the *camail* or *avential* is attached to the helmet itself and occurs after the thirteenth century, the *ventail* refers to the flap of mail covering the face on a *coif* worn *inside* the helm and was common from the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries (Blair 27).[30] Further, it is clear that Malory's knights do indeed wear *coifs* inside their helms because Galahad strikes Percivale "so on the helme that hit roof to the coyff of steele" (893.2-3). Clearly Galahad's sword has to cut through the helm before it can reach the *coif* inside, which would be impossible with an *aventail* or *camail*.

The above discussion of the *coif* leads us to Malory's addition of the "thyche haubirke made of sure mayles" (230.6) to his version of the passage, for he strongly implies that we should picture his knights in long *hauberks* of mail rather than the full plate of his own day. Though Malory's preferred term for armor is the more general "harness," which he uses in various spellings ninety-four times, his seventeen references to the *hauberk* occur with enough frequency throughout his text that he keeps the *hauberk*

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[30] The *coif* was any close-fitting cap which came down the sides of the head not unlike a modern Peruvian cap or even an open-faced ski mask. Coifs could be made of fabric for warmth, padded fabric to wear under a helm, or mail.

in the reader's mind.[31] But there are two additional reasons why we should imagine the

earlier *hauberk* for Malory's knights rather than the plate armor of the fifteenth century.

First, since a harness of plate had to be custom-fitted to the wearer,[32] it would be almost

impossible for one knight to fit in comfortably enough to fight if he had borrowed or

taken the plate from someone else.[33] Yet Lancelot, whom we know is "far bigger" than

Kay from the comments made by Gawter's brothers (275.31), is able to both wear and

fight in the smaller Kay's armor when he exchanges his own for Kay's (274.33-34).

Further, Gareth is able to wear and fight in Perarde's armor (304.22-23). Secondly,

Malory's knights can don their armor quickly (273.15), but plate can take up to an hour to

put on even with the help of a squire.

Additionally, we should consider the shields in *Le Morte Darthur.* As the Middle

Ages progressed and body armor became more protective, the shields grew inexorably

smaller. In the early thirteenth century, shields still had to be large enough to effectively

block blows to the legs, especially when the knights was mounted, as mail *chausses* had

not yet become universal.[34] As leg armor develops, especially with the addition of

greaves for the shins and *cops* for the knees, the shields become shorter. By the time we

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[31] Malory twice uses the term "haubergeon" (959.18 and 961.29), but this word designates merely a shortened form of the *hauberk*, not a later style of armor as Brewer seems to think ("Hauberk and Helm" 88). The terms *hauberk* and *haubergeon* appear together in thirteenth century inventories, as Lachaud notes (349, 351).

[32] Williams 51.

[33] Gravett 15.

[34] Imagine modern leg warmers made of mail. They were attached at waist level to the padded *gambeson* coat or to a belt.

reach Malory's period, knights armed head to toe in articulated plate abandoned their shields completely on the battlefield so that they could wield two-handed weapons. By the late fifteenth century, knightly shields were only seen on the tourney field, and even then they were quite small in size. Malory's knights, on the other hand, employ huge shields, so large, in fact, that both Lancelot (257.2) and Kay (299.36) can be carried on them.

We will look in vain for examples of any significant additions—and especially deletions—of armor terminology in Malory's other books, but the reason for this lack actually reinforces my point. Of all Malory's French sources, none are from later than the thirteenth century. Malory's other English source, the stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur*, dates from approximately the late fourteenth century, yet it is a condensed version of the French *Mort Artu*, itself from the early thirteenth century. Therefore, Malory's only source truly from the fifteenth century is exactly the one where he makes extensive changes to armor, bringing *Le Morte Darthur* in line with his other thirteenth century sources.

Thus, the evidence presented clearly shows that Malory carefully excises types of armor from his source material, so that there remains in his narrative no piece of armor exclusive to the fifteenth century. Indeed, when the historical development of armor is considered carefully, we can only conclude that Malory, in his selection of the terms of armor, tries to maintain the thirteenth century context of his French sources even when he uses his most recent source, the English *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, which Benson and

Foster date to approximately the year 1400.[35] For Malory, this poem's many references to forms of armor still in use during his day had to be excised if he were to maintain the impression of archaism he desired.

Finally, I need to emphasize that, while Malory archaizes the style of tournaments and armor, he does not treat combat romantically or nostalgically. Nor does he treat it unrealistically, as some critics have claimed. For example, Brewer argues that Malory refuses "to clutter up his text with realism" because he "is not interested in the technical details of fighting" ("Personal Weapons" 272). Robeson observes that combat in Malory does "not reflect the realities of fifteenth-century warfare" (21), adding that "the *Morte's* descriptions of battles . . . exclude the destructive possibilities of fifteenth-century warfare" (22). Lynch echoes this sentiment when he claims that Malory suppresses "the most unpleasant consequences of fighting" (*Book of Arms* 50). But an examination of not only armor, but also combat damage to that armor—as well as to the men wearing it— shows that in *Le Morte Darthur* Malory is keenly aware of combat's "destructive possibilities."

While I will treat the actual fighting itself in the chapters that follow, it is worth briefly noting here before we leave the subject of armor that combat damage to both armor and men reveals that *Le Morte Darthur* neither lacks reality nor whitewashes the horrors of knightly violence. While it is true that, given the high number of martial encounters in the text, there is little gore evident on a purely percentile basis, it would be an exaggeration to imply that Malory "excludes" the ill effects of combat as Lynch would

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[35] See their Introduction (4) and their note to line 3773.

have it (22). There are many instances of the horrors of fighting throughout the text, but

a few examples will show that Malory does anything but shy away from telling the other

side of the story.[36]

When he wants to, Malory can certainly supply gory details. For example, Lancelot

smites Gahalantyne on the helm with such force that "his nose, erys and mowthe braste

oute on bloode; and therewith his hede hynge low, and with that his horse ran away with

hym, and he felle downe to the erthe" (263.15-19). In another example, a blow to the

helm cleaves both the helmet and skull down to the shoulders (302.9-10). Even Galahad,

who normally refrains from killing, strikes a blow against Gawain so powerful that both

helm, mail coif inside, and the shoulder of a horse are slashed through (981.24-28). In

one of the most pathetic examples in the entire text, Lancelot's horse, wounded in an

ambush by archers, follows the cart carrying Lancelot, "and ever he trode hys guttis and

hys paunche undir hys feete" (1127.9-11). Finally, Arthur is so gore-spattered in a battle

that he is unrecognizable: "And kynge Arthure was so blody that by hys shylde there

myght no man know hym, for all was blode and brayne that stake on his swerde and on

hys shylde" (34.3-6). Almost countless times helms and shields are riven, body armor

hacked.

Malory, quite realistically, sometimes highlights the exertion required in armed

combat and the effect which using the heavy equipment has on the fighters. For example,

In Lancelot's fight with Terquyne, "sir Terquyne waxed faynte and gaff somewhat

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[36] I will return to Malory's presentation of the horrors of combat in Chapter IV when I
examine both his realistic treatment of the suffering caused by war as well as his moral
evaluation of large-scale conflict.

abakke, and bare his shylde low for weary," which allows Lancelot to grab Terquyne by the visor of his helm and wrestle him to the ground (267.17-23). In addition, as Gareth and the Red Knight are fighting, they exhaust themselves and rest briefly from the battle: "And thus by assente of them both they graunted aythir othir to reste, and so they sette hem downe uppon two mollehyllys there besydys the fyghtynge place, and eythir of them unlaced othir helyms and toke the colde wynde" (323.26-29).

Malory's changes point the way to a reexamination of knightly violence in *Le Morte Darthur*. They suggest that Malory is paying more careful attention to combat that has been allowed previously and that we must find another way to judge violence in Malory's text than by the tournament rules of the fifteenth century. In the chapters which follow, I will extend this argument to a consideration of combat, both individual fights which occur "by adventure" and in tournaments in Chapter Three and during war in Chapter Four. In these two chapters we will find that Malory's method of developing his narrative is dependent on the reader's ability both to keep score not just of victories but in how his characters contrast with each other in terms of their motivation for and behavior during combat. In the Conclusion, we will see that all along Malory has been suggesting that only one style of knightly conduct ultimately will lead to good governance.

CHAPTER III

BEYOND PROWESS AND WORSHIP: COMBAT AND MALORY'S USE OF FOILS

". . . be he never so strong, here he may be preved"[1]

I showed in the previous chapter that Malory distances his own time quite distinctly

from his fictive Arthurian world both through his changes from his source material as

regards the armor worn by the knights in Arthur's day and by maintaining his sources'

outdated tournament practices. In marking this chronological distancing, Malory shows a

purpose somewhat similar to historian Barbara Tuchman in her 1978 publication, *A*

Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century. Tuchman and Malory both

examine earlier ages which faced problems similar to those of their own eras. The

difference between the two authors is that Tuchman merely wants to show her readers

that humanity has made it through times far worse than those of the twentieth century.

Malory, on the other hand, actually prescribes a cure for the ills of his age: a reformation

of chivalry. I will argue in this chapter that it is in the combat of Malory's knights, both

in their actions and in their own comments on what constitutes proper "knightly"

behavior, that Malory presents his solution for the ills of his own troubled age.

Previous critics, however, have tended to take a far more negative view of combat in

Malory. In the only book-length study of violence in *Le Morte Darthur*, *Malory's Book*

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[1] King Pelleas' words to Bors concerning the Castle of Corbenic (799.3-4).

of Arms, Andrew Lynch argues that Malory's "deepest narrative interest and . . . most

important discourse are centered on combat prowess" (79), and that knightly combat,

which the text's "repetitive structure [is] born to serve" forms the work's "dominant

subject matter" (84)--so much so, in fact, that there really is no "wider pattern of moral

conduct" binding the work together (xiii). Malory, in Lynch's eyes, is centrally

concerned with the "thematics of combat" (xiii). This reading would imply that Malory's

audience may have viewed the text in a similar manner. While I agree that *Le Morte

Darthur* contains seemingly countless incidents of combat, I disagree that the book is

centrally concerned with fighting "for its own sake" (Lynch 41).[2]

Other critics have been no less positive. Elizabeth Edwards, for example, sees

Malory's tournaments as having an "anti-narrative tendency" which approaches "total

stasis" (67). In other words, *Le Morte Darthur* comes to a screeching halt each time there

is a tournament. Muriel Whitaker says the "tournament's chief purposes were the

demonstration of prowess in a social setting and the assertion of chivalric virtues" (38).

But she fails to enumerate what those virtues are, much less analyze them. Indeed, she

finds that Malory's "catalogues of participants" in tourneys "fail to engage the interest of

the modern reader" and further asserts that the fighting produces a "monotonous

regularity" (39).

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[2] For similar claims of a lack of thematic connection between fighting and Malory's
overall purpose in *Malory's Book of Arms*, see pages 41-43, 49-50, 56, 77-78. Lynch
extends this argument to cover the topic of war in Malory in his "'Thou woll never have
done': Ideology, Context, and Excess in Malory's War." I will respond more directly to
Lynch's claims about Malory and war in the following chapter, so it suffice here to note
that Lynch again finds no "consistent moral scrutiny" about war in *Le Morte Darthur*
(31).

In this chapter I will show that Malory's "score-keeping" serves as a standard of qualification of which knights can engage in the discussion about the attributes which typify the ideal knight. Tournaments, as public demonstrations of prowess and resulting worship, become especially important in this context, for here Malory's knights engage in discussions more widely observed than in the cases where similar discussions occur during errantry (which are away from the public eye). I next turn to a discussion of chivalric manuals, particularly those of Lull, Bouvet, and Charny. In this examination I show that, despite some of the differences in emphasis among the three authors, there is actually a consensus on the most important of the "knightly virtues." Following the previous two points, I then show that there is a correlation between the consensus of virtues offered in the chivalric manuals and those recommended by Malory's top knights. In essence, Malory creates a "checklist" of virtues which he then uses to judge the behavior of the knights in *Le Morte Darthur*. To accomplish this evaluation, he employs the literary principle of foils, my discussion of which makes up the final, and longest, part of this chapter. Throughout this discussion, Lancelot emerges as the best "earthly" knight in comparison to all the others.

Tournaments serve a number of functions in *Le Morte Darthur*. One function is the projection of power. Arthur's tournaments frequently pitch the knights of the Round Table against forces from areas which initially opposed Arthur's reign in Book I.[3] As

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[3] To cite only two examples, see the tourneys at Harde Roche where Arthur's forces face a team combined of knights from Scotland and Ireland (557.21-22) and Lonezep where Arthur's opponents come from Ireland, Surluse, Lystenoyse, Northumberland, most of Wales, and "many other countreys" (729.21-25). While individual prizes are awarded, Arthur's team nevertheless tends to dominate the field overall.

Arthur's forces best the teams from regions all over his realm, he demonstrates the

prowess of his knights and wins worship for his successes. Malory's readers would have

seen many of the tournaments which Arthur holds as extensions of royal power into areas

formerly opposed to Arthur's reign.[4]

    But in addition to projecting Arthur's power, tournaments also function to create

unity and can even serve as celebrations. For example, the first tournament in *Le Morte*

Darthur, decreed by the Archbishop of Canterbury at Merlin's suggestion, "was

ordeyned for to kepe the lordes togyders and the comyns" (13.13-14). And the first

tournament actually held by Arthur, between the forces of Arthur and the French kings,

Ban and Bors, is meant to be a tournament of fellowship (22.20-21.23.34). Significantly,

Arthur stops the tourney when the sides begin to fight too seriously (23.35-24.2).[5] The

three day tournament held to celebrate the triple wedding which ends the Tale of Gareth

is clearly meant as a celebration, as it occurs along with "all maner of plenté and all

maner revels and game, with all maner of mynstralsy" (362.20-21).

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[4] Robert L. Kelly shows that many of the regions which oppose Arthur's reign in
Malory's Book I have parallels in the challenges to royal authority from many of
fifteenth-century England's border areas in "Malory's 'Tale of King Arthur' and the
Political Geography of Fifteenth-Century England." Kelly's observation that Malory
"assumes his readers to be politically knowledgeable, attentive to his text, and capable of
drawing interpretively important immediate inferences from sometimes obscure clues"
(85) could also apply to Arthur's projection of power through tournaments as well as to
the wars Arthur faces in Book I which Kelly discusses.

[5] Vinaver notes that the tournament in Malory's source is used to secure the goodwill of
the French kings, but claims that in Malory "it serves no such purpose, for as soon as the
kings arrive they are told what is expected of them" (1290). He has clearly missed the
idea that the fighting itself bonds the two sides together.

I would like to focus on tournaments as places of "chivalric display," to use Whitaker's expression from above. In addition to the obvious display of prowess, Malory's tournaments are intended as places where knights gather and reach a consensus on proper "chivalrous" behavior. Whoever wins the most, who ever displays the most prowess, becomes the model for emulation by the other knights. But we also find that prowess itself is not enough. Though many would argue that prowess is the supreme knightly virtue,[6] Malory's greatest tourney winners, Lancelot and Tristram, show that other knightly virtues are essential. They also show, through their evaluation of the behavior of other knights, what is *not* allowed.

Considering prowess first, as Malory's knights themselves do, we find that both Malory and his knights seem obsessed with keeping score. Time and again we find not only lists of who fought and who won, but also examples of combat "reporting." *Le Morte Darthur* abounds with discussions of the knightly pecking order. The heralds frequently keep score at tournaments, as they do at Lonezep (734.30). Merlin reports Arthur's victories to Bloyse (37.25-38.2), the Red Knight tells Arthur of Gareth's successes (326.16-18), La Cote Male Tayle's deeds are "rehersed in kynge Arthurs

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[6] See Kaeuper's *Chivalry and Violence* and Muhlberger's *Deeds of Arms* for the concurrence of two historians on the importance of demonstrating prowess to the medieval knight. As we shall see, Lull and Bouvet both agree on this point, but see especially Charny's praise for prowess in war (discussed in more detail in the next chapter). According to Lynch, Malory "believes that knightly prowess, proved in battle or tournament, generates its own special goodness" ("Ideology" 26). He adds, "Prowess is offered as a true *sign* of right, rather than as an outcome of moral deliberation" (26 emphasis in original). Thus, for a knight to be good, he must fight (26-7). Lynch argues that the difficulty is that "militarily effective actions are 'good' or 'noble' for Malory in a deep sense, but it is not truly a moral sense" (26) and blames the *Morte* for its "refusal or avoidance of consistent moral scrutiny" (31). As I will show, Lynch pushes the argument too far.

courte, how he slew twelve knights within the castell Orgulus" (465.16-17), Ector and

Percivale report Lancelot's five hundred wins to the court (832.25-26),[7] even the youth

who escapes Mellyagaunce's ambush of Guinevere tells Lancelot who did well in the

fighting (1124.33-1125.4). The list goes on.[8]

In 1978, historian Allen Guttmann published the first book-length study in the

modern field of sports history, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*.

Guttmann argues for a number of criteria which distinguish twentieth century sports from

the organized play and competitions of previous centuries, particularly the modern

emphasis on "secularism, equality of opportunity to compete and in the conditions of

competition, specialization of roles, rationalization, bureaucratic organization,

quantification," and "the quest for records" (16). He concludes that the twentieth

century's obsession with breaking objective and quantifiable sports records constitutes a

relatively recent phenomenon in human history (89). It is not my intention to argue that

the Middles Ages in general, and Malory in particular, viewed tournament competition—

particularly as regards secularism, equality of opportunity to compete, or

rationalization—in the same way that we view sports today. Instead, I would like to

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[7] Achieving five hundred victories seems to constitute a magic number for Malory. He most likely had heard of William Marshall's famous record of taking over five hundred prisoners in tournaments; see Benson's *Malory's* Le Morte Darthur. On William Marshal himself, see George Duby's *William Marshal: The Flower of Chivalry*, Sidney Painter's *William Marshal: Knight-Errant, Baron, and Regent of England*, and David Crouch's *William Marshal*.

[8] See also Rumble (163) for a brief reference to Malory's score-keeping. For the medieval obsession with score keeping at tournaments see John Marshall Carter's "Sports Records in Medieval England: An Inquiry."

focus attention on a more general definition which Guttmann offers earlier in his text.

Guttmann wonders, "What is a record in our modern sense?" and responds, "It is the

marvelous abstraction that permits competition not only among those gathered together

on the field of sport but also among them and others distant in time and space" (51-52).

It is the marvelous abstraction that concerns me, though not exactly in the same sense as

Guttmann employs the term. I will argue that, for Malory, the marvelous abstraction is

not merely the record itself, the knight's number of victories in a tournament and which

demonstrates the knight's prowess. The achievement of a certain level of success allows

a knight in *Le Morte Darthur* to engage in a discussion of what constitutes the ideal

knight with other knights who have also achieved success in arms. Thus the marvelous

abstraction for Malory is the aggregate of knightly virtues—themselves quite abstract—

which forms the ideal knight.

So the marvelous abstraction, as I am using the term, takes us beyond the score-card

of victories to an examination of the other qualities which the knights praise in each

other. Of course we find that various knights praise various qualities. For example, Bors

praises Lancelot's mercy after the Assumption Day tourney (1083.25-27). At the tourney

of Lonezep, Tristram lists Lancelot's "sufferaunce, larges, bounté, and curtesy" (742.4-5)

while Palomides praises his "curtesy, proues, jantylness" moments later (742.15).

Tristram later sums up Lancelot's qualities when he says, "of all knyghtes . . . he bearyth

the floure" (745.20-21). At the Allhalowmasse tourney Lancelot himself offers a long

list of Gareth's qualities. In addition to praising Gareth's prowess in that he is "mighty"

and "well-brethed" (1088.35), he says Gareth "ys jantill, curteyse and right bownteuous,

meke and mylde, and in hym ys no maner of male engynne, but playne, faythfull an trew"
(1089.1-3).

Thus prowess, while acknowledged as the foundation of what makes a knight, is
shown to have limitations if stressed in isolation from other knightly virtues. The
"essence" of knighthood is what is in question even for the knights themselves—to fully
become what is acknowledged by the most important knights as this essence is worth
one's very life and constitutes the knight's very sense of himself—or should. Only in a
combination of prowess and worship with these other knightly virtues do we find
Malory's ideas about what constitutes the ideal knight. Significant for how we may
interpret combat in Malory is the fact that these lists of chivalric virtues bear striking
resemblance to similar lists in the manuals calling for chivalric reform in the medieval
period. These parallels suggest that Malory may have been familiar with some of the
commentators on chivalry.

Though I would not argue that we can know with certainty which commentators on
chivalry Malory read, his *Le Morte Darthur* makes clear that he was familiar with the
most idealistic notions current in his day regarding what constitutes the perfect knight.
During the fifteenth century there were three popular core texts which, to one degree or
another, agreed with the values Malory presents in his work and may well have
influenced his views. These manuals of chivalry are Ramon Lull's *Book of Knighthood
and Chivalry*, *The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi de Charny*, and Honoré Bouvet's *The*

Tree of Battles.[9] Each of these writers presents chivalry from a slightly different angle,

but I will argue that they all reach agreement on a core set of values which Malory uses to

judge his knights.

Of the three manuals of chivalry, Ramon Lull's is both the earliest and most popular.

Written in Catalan between the late 1260's and early 1280's,[10] *The Book of the Order of*

Chivalry was translated into Castilian, French, Middle Scots, and English and became,

according to Maurice Keen, "immensely successful" (10), constituting "the classic

account of knighthood" (11).[11] Certainly Lull holds the knight to the loftiest standards of

the three authors.

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[9] I am making a distinction between manuals of chivalry—which offer largely ethical advice—and two other types of manuals which knights may have read: the military manual and the combat manual. Military manuals offer strategic, logistical, and tactical advice. Combat manuals are literal training instructions for the handling of various types of weapons as well as jousting instructions and even empty-hand combat. The latter manuals, best represented by Sigmund Ringeek's *Knightly Art of the Longsword*, Filippo Vadi's *Arte Gladiatoria Dimicandi*, the *Codex Wallerstein*, and Hans Talhoffer's *Fechtbuch*, do not address ethical conduct in any significant way. The former, however, frequently discuss the laws of arms and just war theory along with their more practical considerations. The most popular of the military manuals was Vegetius' *Epitoma Rei Militaris*. I will treat in more detail Malory's probable knowledge of Vegetius in the following chapter on war. I should also note that both Charny and especially Bouvet discuss various aspects of war, but since their emphasis is consistently on personal conduct, they may be considered manuals of chivalry as much as military manuals.

[10] In his introduction to the text, Price gives the earlier date (iii); Kaeuper argues for 1279-1283 (*Chivalry and Violence* 275). Adams suggests Lull wrote the text "shortly after" his conversion of 1266 (vii-viii). All page numbers will refer to Adams' edition.

[11] The text's popularity in Malory's day is also attested by the fact that Christine de Pizan includes the bulk of it, along with Vegetius, in *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry* in 1410.

Lull pays due attention to the physical requirements of knighthood, saying, "Knights ought to take horses to jousts and attend tournaments" as well as hunt harts, boars, and other wild beasts, for in doing these things knights exercise themselves in their profession of arms" (27). But his main emphasis is on, as he puts it, "the preparedness of the knight's soul" (28). He then proceeds to cover faith (78), hope (78-79), and charity (79-80) in a straightforward and relatively brief fashion, but when Lull reaches prudence, he expands his advice, equating prudence—or what we would more commonly refer to as wisdom—with "intellectual mastery" (82), "intelligence" (83), and "reason and understanding" (83). Lull's longest contiguous discussion of a single virtue, though, is reserved for fortitude (83-92). He argues that fortitude combats a lengthy list of specific vices, but they include avarice (85-87), envy (90-91), and anger (91-92). Lull seems particularly concerned in this section to counter despair, for he says that it can arise from either sloth (87) or anger (88). Lull then concludes his review of the knightly virtues with a brief treatment of temperance, which he describes as the middle path between "too little" and "too much" (92-93).

Perhaps most the most significant of all the virtues for Lull is justice, for not only does he include it in the above discussion (80), it is the one virtue to which he returns time and again. Lull's emphasis on the knight's inner virtues could lead one to view his work as an essentially religious one—and certainly he does view knighthood as an order similar to that of the priesthood (23-24, 65)—but his treatment of justice reveals Lull's view of the knight as an active force in the secular world. "Chivalry," says Lull, "is involved essentially with justice" (39); therefore, possessing chivalry, "the knight is more

worthy to have authority over other people than any other man" because "he is less inclined to do a villainous deed than another man" (26). But it is not enough simply to avoid villainous acts; the knight must, according to Lull, actively defend widows, orphans, the sick and powerless (34), show mercy (35), punish the wicked (37), and, above all, defend the faith (21).

For Geoffroi de Charny prowess is the supreme knightly virtue. Charny's work has forty-three chapters, but fully the first fourteen are devoted entirely to discussions of prowess. But Charny, much Like Lull, compares knighthood as an order to the order of priesthood (181-190), but unlike Lull, for Charny the order of knighthood is "the most rigorous order of all" (175). Indeed, he claims that the "rigors" of knighthood are comparable to those of the priesthood—in fact, they are worse: the fasting, prayers, etc. of priests are "all nothing in comparison with the suffering to be endured in the order of knighthood" (175). He continues, "there is no religious order in which as much is suffered as to be endured by these good knights who go in search of deeds of arms *in the right way*" (177 emphasis added). But lest it be thought that for Charny any demonstration of prowess in deeds of arms qualifies for his highest praise, he clarifies that "those who perform deeds of arms more for glory in this world than for the salvation of the soul, may sometimes gain honor and renown, but the soul will profit little, and the renown will be the briefer for it" (177). The highest honor is reserved

> For those who perform deeds of arms more to gain God's grace and for the salvation of the soul than for glory in this world, their noble souls will be set in paradise to all eternity and their persons will be for ever honored and well remembered. (177)

Charny also offers two lists of virtues, though they do not exactly match each other (137-139 and 141-143). The first list is asserted in the negative, that is Charny poses a question in the form "was a man-at-arms/knight created or selected *not* to do so-and-so" with the answer always being, "Indeed no!" The second list asserts the recommended attributes in the positive. They may be summarized as: love God and the church, do justice, show pity and mercy, be active and not lazy, be moderate, generous, keep good company, keep your oaths, avoid slander, and be humble.

Honoré Bouvet's *The Tree of Battle* largely concerns war and leadership, but we may include it among the manuals of chivalry for two reasons. The first is its popularity in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In his Introduction to his translation of the text, Coopland observes that the *Tree* enjoyed an "enormous vogue" and was to be found "in the gentleman's library, royal or noble, in France, Burgundy, England, and Spain" as well as Scotland (21-22).[12] It influenced, to one degree or another: Christine de Pizan, the author of *The Boke of Noblesse*, and Nicholas Upton's *De Studio Militari*. Even the Duke of Norfolk, John Mowbray, may be found quoting it in his arraignment before the Duke of Somerset in 1453 (22-23). Strickland calls *The Tree of Battles* a "reworking into the vernacular" of John of Legnano's *Tractatus de bello, de represaliis et de duello* which he argues was the "most influential" of all the "tracts concerned specifically with the ethical and juridicial aspects of warfare" (*War and Chivalry* 32). But Strickland notes that Legnano's work would have been too theoretical for the common soldier, who would have, instead, turned to Bouvet's work for a more practical approach (33). Through

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[12] It should be noted that contemporary practice is to use Bouvet rather than Bonet.

Bouvet and Christine, the common man-of-arms would have found a simplified version of Legnano's work through which "the law of arms achieved a universal validity" (33).[13] Maurice Keen concurs, saying that thanks to Bouvet "the law of arms . . . was respected indifferently in all places, because it was founded in rules which all lawyers knew, and at the same time appealed to the social and professional pride which bound together all who bore arms" (*Laws of War* 22).

The second reason we may consider *The Tree of Battles* along with Lull and Charny is its emphasis on the ethical qualities necessary in all men involved in war, from the lowest knight all the way to kings and emperors. All of Malory's knights fall into one or more of these categories. Indeed, Kilgour calls Bouvet's work "a working manual for the medieval knight" (353). Leaving out all of Bouvet's tactical advice and concentrating on the ethical aspects of *The Tree*, we may note his insistence on the following qualities of a commander: do justice, visit the sick and wounded, and again do justice (131). For the emperor, Bouvet again urges justice along with purity, strength, justice (again), defense of the church, justice (for the third time), and temperance. He concludes by saying that the emperor should obey his own laws (208-210).

As we have seen, Lull, Charny, and Bouvet all stress the importance of prowess; Malory does so as well. We have also observed that the tournaments in *Le Morte Darthur* focus our attention on a community of values supported by Malory's leading knightly characters, and we can now turn to how Malory uses the literary principle of contrasts—foils—to critique what his knights actually do. We will find that although

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[13] Strickland calls Christine's work "derivative" of Bouvet (33).

there does seem to be a basic consensus on some of the key knightly virtues and therefore

parallels in the behavior of Malory's knights, Malory's criticism of chivalry lies in the

sometimes subtle contrasts between certain key characters.[14] These foils serve to clarify

Malory's vision of proper chivalrous behavior.

Since space will not allow a discussion of all of the various qualities recommended

by Malory's knights themselves as well as those of the chivalric manuals, I will focus on

prowess, wisdom, courtesy, promise keeping, fairness, and mercy. At the same time I

will show that Malory condemns various excesses including pride and obviously murder

and revenge. Further, space considerations will also not allow for an exhaustive cross-

referencing of how each of the major knights contrasts with all of the others, so I will

focus my attention on Gareth, Balin, Gawain, Arthur, and Tristram. Finally, I will show

how all of these characters not only contrast with each other, but more than any other

knight they serve as foils to Lancelot.

I begin my examination of Malory's use of foils with an unlikely candidate: Sir

Gareth. Gareth's rise from the traditional status of the Fair Unknown to one of Arthur's

greatest knights has been duly praised by various scholars including Guerin, Benson, and

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[14] Malory presents this contrasting of knights in numerous ways throughout *Le Morte Darthur.* The most obvious comparison is the simple "score card" at tournaments like the herald's record of Lavayne's twenty-four victories, Gareth's thirty-five, and Lancelot's fifty at the Great Tournament (1113.35-1114.3). But Malory also makes broader comparisons. For example, see the comparison between Gawain, Tore, and Pellinore on issues of ladies' service following the wedding of King Arthur (discussed by Kennedy 60-69). See also Kelly's discussion of the parallels and contrasts between Arthur and Galahad in "Arthur, Galahad, and the Scriptural Pattern in Malory," especially pages 12-14.

Ruff, among others.[15] Guerin finds Gareth's tale as "a happy picture of the Round Table

at the height of its effectiveness" and adds that "Gareth himself serves as a standard

against which the behavior of Gawain and his other brothers is to be measured" (117).

Benson argues that Gareth's quest proves his worth in a pattern typical of what he calls

the tourney-quest motif (102), gradually "learning noble manners, especially chivalric

self-control" (103). Ruff notes that Gareth's education in the tale parallels Lull's advice

so closely that Gareth's story serves as "a manual of chivalry" (105). Perhaps the

greatest praise for Gareth comes from Bonnie Wheeler, who finds in Gareth a parallel

with the alchemical transformation from lead into gold (182).

Though Gareth does not face particularly tricky judgments as we will find in the case

of Lancelot below, he does possess many positive qualities. Not only does Gareth show

his humility from the very outset of his tale in his meager initial request to Arthur for

"mete and drynke suffyciauntly for for [a] twelve-monthe" (294.15) and his endurance of

Kay's taunts (294.35-295.9), he also maintains his humility throughout his long journey

with the acid-tongued Lyonet. In addition, his slaying of six thieves and rescue of a

captured knight (300.25-301.4) show Gareth's sense of justice, as does his destroying the

evil customs of the Brown Knight Without Pity near the end of his tale (355.5-29). He

also grants mercy to the majority of the knights he defeats as he works his way up the

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[15] Dorsey Armstrong, in a lengthy summary and analysis of Gareth's tale and its
relevance to gender relationships throughout *Le Morte Darthur*, also praises Gareth's
knightly rise to fame but concludes that "the office of knighthood and the state of
matrimony cannot successfully coexist in the chivalric community" because Gareth's
marriage "ironically ends his chivalric career. Once married, he all but disappears from
Malory's text" (122). Leaving aside Armstrong's claims about gender relationships, it is
precisely Gareth's surprising behavior at a later tournament that I will question.

increasingly difficult ladder of foes on his way to rescue Lyonesse. Amd throughout his

tale Gareth displays amazing prowess as he not only fights Lancelot to a near-draw

(298.26-299.14), holds his own with Gawain (356.33-357.4), but also definitively bests

the dangerous Red Knight of the Red Lands in a titanic fight which lasts from prime to

well into the evening (322.24-324.26). Much later in the text, Gareth earns Lancelot's

praise following Bor's report to him of Gareth's successes at the Allhalowmasse

Tourney. Lancelot says Gareth is:

> "a noble knight and a mighty man and well-brethed; and yf he were well assayed . . .
> I wolde deme he were good inow for ony knight that beryth the lyff. And he ys
> jantill, curteyse and right bownteous, meke and mylde, and in hym ys no maner of
> male engynne, but playne, faythfull an trew." (1088.34-1089.3)

So it seems certain that Gareth possess many fine qualities, but I would like to

examine Gareth's desire for worship more closely, emphasizing an apparently minor

incident at a later tournament previously overlooked by critics. As I have already noted,

Armstrong points out that Gareth "all but disappears" from *Le Morte Darthur* following

his marriage at the end of his tale. He does pop up here and there in occasional

tournaments as well as in the Grail Quest, and I will discuss his famous death in Book

VIII in the following chapter; however, I would like to examine closely Gareth's

behavior at a preliminary joust before the major tournament at Lonezep.

Before the first day's melee at Lonezep, there is a series of preliminary jousts

between the "yonge" knights (731.7). Gareth, at this point in the text traveling with

Tristram and Palomides, asks permission from Tristram to join in the young knights in

their jousting. Tristram actually laughs at the request but tells Gareth to do his best

(731.12-14). Gareth then draws with a hitherto unknown knight, Sir Selyses, nephew to

the King with the Hundred Knights. The badly bruised Gareth asks Palomides and

Tristram why they did not take to the field, and Palomides replies, "hit longyth nat to

none of us at this day to juste, for there hath nat this day justed no proved knyghtes"

(731.22-24).

To put this odd incident into context, I must return to Gareth's tale for a moment. In

Book IV, as Gareth pursues his quest to save Lyonesse, her sister Lynet warns Gareth

that the Indigo Knight, Sir Persaunte, "is the moste man of worship of the worlde excepte

kynge Arthure" (311.9-10). Determined to fight Persaunte, Gareth responds, "the more

he is of worship the more shall be my worship to have ado with hym" (311.11-12).

Gareth does indeed defeat Persaunte, who then himself warns Gareth against the next

knight on his fight-list, Sir Ironside, The Red Knight of the Red Lands. Persaunte tells

Gareth that Ironside has prolonged his siege of Lyonesse's castle with the specific intent

of drawing combat from either Lancelot, Tristram, Lamerok, or Gawain in order to

increase his own worship if he bests them. Having learned that Gareth was knighted by

Lancelot, Persaunte heaps praise on Lancelot, saying "of a more renomed man might ye

nat be made knight of, for all all knyghtes he may be called cheff of knyghthode"

(316.21-23). He then rattles off a list of the ten most famous knights, with Lancelot,

Tristram, and Lamerok coming in first through third in the hierarchy, adding, "Therefore

God spede you well . . . for and ye may macche that Red Knyght ye shall be called the

fourth of the world" (316.32-34). To this Gareth tellingly replies, "I wolde fayne be of

good fame and of knyghthode" (316.35-36). Since Gareth does indeed defeat Ironside,

why would he, roughly four hundred pages later, feel the need to prove himself against

junior—indeed, *unproven*—knights at Lonezep? The only answer can be that Malory is

criticizing Gareth's behavior. Having been off the tourney circuit for some time, Gareth

has sought to show his prowess against men of lesser reputation in what is apparently an

unfair attempt to win worship. And it is also apparent that Gareth is out of practice,

something Lull (27, 97), Charny (101, 115-117, 175), and Bouvet (120, 131) constantly

remind their readers that the knight must keep up.

In Balin, Malory provides a more obvious foil to Lancelot than Gareth, yet scholars

have had a difficult time in interpreting the series of disasters which constitute Balin's

brief career.[16] Laurie Finke and Martin Schichtman, for example, claim "Balin's failures

do not spring from a character flawed by rashness or impulsiveness" (127). Edwards

argues that, since Malory has abbreviated the story of Balin as it occurs in his source by

deleting "explanations," Balin becomes a lightning rod for cosmic malevolence"; there is,

she argues, "no real sense of why these things should happen to Balin and only to Balin"

(26). Lynch claims that Balin fails simply because *someone* has to: "Balin is not

understood here as an independent moral agent, but rather by his significance in an

intertextual process which wants to compare and contrast his story with other knights', to

their advantage" (23). And he adds, " . . . the demands of the following books, in which

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[16] Whetter argues that Balin is heroic throughout his essay, "On Misunderstanding
Malory's Balyn," yet he never defines what he means by the term; indeed, he claims that
we "should stop blaming Balin for events beyond his control" (161). As will become
clear, I assert quite the opposite.

Arthur, Lancelot, Tristram and Galahad will in turn be permitted adventures which 'prove' their greatness, require the misfortunes of lesser figures here [in the story of Balin]" (27). If Balin's story is to be interpreted "intertextually," does this reading not imply that Balin is subordinated to a larger point which Malory wishes to make? It is my contention, however, that Balin fails because he has a limited conception of chivalry; he lacks the knightly virtue which Raymond Lull ranks second only to justice: the virtue of wisdom (28).[17]

The story of Balin constitutes the first extended series of the encounters of a single knight, and I read it as Malory's signal to his readers that a limited conception of chivalry can have disastrous results.[18] Though Balin himself is not one of the great tourney practitioners, he will pile up an impressive list of victories nonetheless as he tries to win back Arthur's favor. To a certain degree, Balin is associated with tournaments because Malory has Arthur release him from prison "by good meanys of the barownes" (62.27) to attend, apparently, the joust and council meeting called to address the problem of the

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[17] In Balin's case, he lacks justice because, lacking wisdom primarily, he does what he *thinks* to be just. See my following discussion of his murders in court, for example.

[18] I have skipped Arthur's encounters with Pellinore because they are too few; however, they are worth noting because they are the first truly individual knightly encounters in *Le Morte Darthur*. When Arthur first meets Pellinore, the latter takes Arthur's horse (42.19-43.18). Arthur then knights Gryfflet, sends him against Pellinore, and Gryfflet loses (47.11-48.14). Angered, Arthur himself goes up against Pellinore despite Merlin's warning (49.7-10); Pellinore again wins (48.26-51.20). As will become apparent at the end of this chapter as well as the chapter on war which follows, these initial defeats of Arthur will not be without significance for how we view Arthur's own knighthood, leadership, and understanding of chivalry.

invasion of King Royns.[19] His capture of Royns (74.9-15) and great prowess in the battle

with Royns' brother, Nero, and the forces of King Lot (75.34-76.31) prove his greatest

and only unqualified victories. Unfortunately, Balin's failures outweigh his successes.

Yet most of Balin's "failed" encounters—all of which entail some form of combat—

constitute the very problem of Balin's short-lived career because they all stem from his

limited understanding of knighthood itself.

　　Certainly the test of the sword proves Balin is "a passynge good man of hys hondys

and of hys dedis, and withoute velony other trechory and withoute treson" (61.34-62.2)

and "nat defoyled with shame, trechory, nother gyle . . . a clene knight without vylony"

(62.20-22). But Balin's failings begin even before the actual test. In lobbying for an

opportunity to draw the sword, Balin tries to defend his meager attire and says to the lady

with the blade,

> A, fayre damesell . . . worthynes and good tacchis and also good dedis is nat only in
> araymente, but manhode and worship ys hyd within a mannes person; and many a
> worshipfull knight ys nat knowyn to all peple. And therefore worship and
> hardynesse ys nat in araymente. (63.24-27)

The fact that Balin is able to draw the blade when all others fail but overall causes so

much havoc demonstrates that there is more to being a good knight than the criteria of the

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[19] In his commentary, Vinaver notes that Malory has altered his source so that Arthur,
rather than the King of Northumberland, is responsible for the imprisonment. In both
cases the kings hold Balin accountable for their death of a royal kinsman (1305).
Malory's Arthur takes Balin's success in the sword test as sufficient proof of his worth
which, given the outcome of the majority of Balin's future actions, may well imply
something about Arthur's own understanding of chivalry. See my previous note.

sword test—and therefore more to it than "worthynes and good tacchis," more than "hardynesse," more even than "manhood and worship." Indeed, that Balin begins his list with worthiness, good habits (as Vinaver glosses "tacchis"), and good deeds but ends with merely worship and hardiness, as if this were his final say on the matter, indicates where his true emphasis as a knight lies. Merlin later confirms this view when he says of Balin,

> And that knight that hath encheved the swerde shall be destroyed thorow the swerde; for the which woll be grete damage, for there lyvith nat a knight of more prouesse than he ys. . . . of his strengthe and hardinesse I know hymn at lyvynge hys macche. (68.8-15)

Raluca Radulescu finds in Balin a tendency towards excess (124) and criticizes him for not observing "the limits imposed by temperance, which advocates moderation, calm, and tolerance" (125), but I find that this criticism does not cut deeply enough. An examination of Balin's encounters shows that, more than any of the other virtues recommended by Lull, Balin lacks wisdom. This lack becomes painfully obvious in repeated examples of Balin's failure to read the emotions of others, his tendency to make promises he cannot keep, his murders in court, and most of all in his refusal to listen to counsel.

Malory presents Balin's inability to read the emotions of others early in the tale. The prideful and jealous sir Launceor[20] takes it upon himself to "revenge the despite that [Balin] had done" in slaying the Lady of the Lake in Arthur's court (67.7-14). Riding

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[20] Malory calls him "orgulus" (67.9).

hard, he catches up with Balin and demands a fight. Knowing Launceor is from Arthur's court, Balin agrees reluctantly since he has no choice. Perhaps we should not hold it against Balin that he kills Launceor with the first blow of his lance because it is obviously a case of self-defense. But it seems difficult not to blame Balin for the death which follows. Almost immediately, Launceor's lady rides up, sees her lover dead, and, seizing Launceor's sword, swoons from grief (69.17-24). In what follows, let us keep in mind that the sword is in her hand while she is unconscious. When she recovers, she "made grete dole oute of mesure, which sorrow greved Balyn passyngly sore" (69.26-27). Balin wants to take the sword from her hand, but Malory tells us "she helde hit so faste he might nat take hit oute of hir hond but yf he sholde have hurt hir" (69.28-30). Then "suddeynly she sette the pomell to the grounde, and rove hirselff thorowoute the body" (69.30-31). One must ask why Balin did not take the sword from her hand before her recovery and, secondly, why he did not risk merely injuring her rather than let the obviously suicidal woman kill herself.

As if to drive home the point of Balin's lack of insight into others' emotions, Malory gives us a second, even stronger, example. Balin comes across the sorrowing Sir Garnysh and, to his credit, talks the man out of slaying himself (86.10-30). Garnysh tells Balin his grief comes from his suspicion that his lady is unfaithful, and Balin eagerly offers his help. Given directions to the lady's castle, Balin enters alone and sees the woman asleep in a garden in the arms of another man (87.15-23). Foolishly thinking it will help Garnysh get over his grief, Balin decides to actually show the lady's infidelity to the knight. Balin tricks Garnish into entering the garden by saying the lady is merely

napping; however, Garnysh surprises the unwitting Balin by murdering the slumbering

lovers. But *before* he does so, "for pure sorou his mouth and nose brast oute on

bledynge" as he stares at them (87.24-25). Does Balin not notice this? Garnysh then

turns on Balin and says, "O, Balyn! Moche sorrow hast thow brought unto me, for

haddest thow not shewed me that sight I shold have passed my sorow" (87.28-30) as if to

make plain Balin's lack of understanding. Balin tries to explain that his effort was to

show the lady's falseness (87.31-34), but Garnysh then kills himself too. For someone

who has already shown he can move in the wink of an eye in combat,[21] here Balin

demonstrates he can be surprisingly slow in more ways than one.

Balin also makes promises he cannot keep. Commanded by Arthur to fetch a passing

knight so the king may inquire about the man's obvious sorrow (79.23-28), Balin

convinces the knight, named Berbeus, to go back to Arthur by promising him safe

conduct (80.4-7). Since Berbeus has no reason to fear Arthur, his reluctance to return to

Arthur and the need for the safe conduct obviously stem from another reason.[22] Sure

enough, Berbeus is slain by the invisible Garlon practically at Arthur's tent (80.9-11).

Once again, we may perhaps hold Balin blameless for not seeing violence coming, but—

once again—he fails to learn from his mistakes. Later he meets Sir Peryne, also

apparently a target for Garlon, but he *knows* this time that Garlon is in the area. Balin

again promises safe conduct to Peryne as he did earlier for Berbeus, yet Peryne is also

slain by the invisible knight while under Balin's protection (81.6-10).

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[21] See his lighting-like blow to Garlon earlier (84.7-9).

[22] Berbeus initially refuses Balin's request to return to Arthur, saying, "That woll I nat . . . for hit woll harme me gretely and do you none avayle" (79.35-36).

Balin also shows his lack of wisdom in murdering not one, but two people in court. After his success in the test of the sword, Balin is ready to leave Arthur's court but sees the Lady of the Lake, whom he has sought for three years for the killing of his mother. Informed that she has asked for his head or the head of the lady originally carrying the sword, "he wente to hir streyght," saying, "Evyll be ye founde: ye wolde have myne hede, and therefore ye shall loose youres!" (65.34-66.2). He then lops off her head "before kynge Arthure" (66.3-4). Regardless of the feud between Balin's family and the Lady of the Lake, regardless of the possible justice in ending the life of an (alleged) murderer, one simply does not execute an unarmed woman with no explanation to anyone before the deed, with no consultation with the king standing right there. Balin's act, especially considering that the Lady of the Lake is, in Arthur's astonished words, "a lady that [Arthur] was much beholdynge to" and under Arthur's "sauffconduyghte" (66.7-8), strikes the reader as the most shocking outrage of the entire book.

And yet Balin is not finished murdering before a royal court. In the second case, Balin seeks the murderous and usually invisible Garlon at a feast. When the culprit, visible for the festivities, is identified to Balin, he uncharacteristically pauses to think:

> "Well," seyde Balyn, "ys that he?" Than Balyn avised hym longe, and thought: "If I sle hym here, I shall nat ascape. And if I leve hym now, peradventure I shall never mete with hym agayne at such a stevyn, amd muche harme he woll do and he lyve." (83.27-31)

While Balin's willingness to possibly sacrifice himself to bring justice to a murderer may, taken by itself, seem noble, it does not matter to Balin that Garlon is actually unarmed at

the time. Certainly Garlon seems foolishly to goad the sword-bearing Balin into retaliating when he strikes Balin merely for looking at him (84.1-3). On the other hand, murderous and rude though Garlon may be, he is nevertheless without a weapon of any kind. While Balin was thinking "longe" about how to handle the situation, perhaps it should have occurred to him—especially given the reaction at Arthur's court in his murder of the Lady of the Lake—that instead of responding to Garlon's blow with his sword, he should have replied with a formal challenge accompanied by charges of murder. Balin's response, however, is to split the man's skull in the midst of the feast. Adding insult to injury, he even takes the haft of the lance Garlon used to kill Peryne and still carried by Peryne's lady whom he has escorted to the feast, thrusts it into Garlon's corpse, and adds with grimly inappropriate humor, "With that truncheon thou slewyste a good knight, and now hit stykith in thy body" (84.15-16). Unlike Arthur's mere banishment of Balin, King Pellam, the host of the feast and brother of Garlon, tries to kill Balin on the spot (84.20-28). Their running combat eventually leads to the Dolorous Stroke, as we shall soon see.

Balin's lack of wisdom is also reflected in his persistent refusal to listen to the counsel of others. Even from the beginning of his tale, Balin shows this tendency. When he has succeeded in the test of the sword, the lady asks Balin to return the sword to her, but he refuses (64.6-7), assuming that if he could draw the sword, then he should have the right to keep it. But the woman tries to advise him: "Well . . . ye ar nat wyse to kepe the swerde fro me, for ye shall sle with that swerde the beste frende that ye have and the man that ye moste love in the worlde, and that swerde shall be youre destruccion" (64.8-11).

Yet Balin remains firm in his decision despite her words. The lady's dire predictions indeed prove true, but not before Balin refuses advice four more times. After Launceor's lady has slain herself, Merlin arrives to tell Balin

> . . . because of the dethe of that lady thou shalt stryke a stroke moste dolorous that ever man stroke, excepte the stroke of Oure Lorde Jesu Cryste. For thou shalt hurte the trewyst knight and the man of moste worship that now lyvith; and thorow that stroke three kyngdomys shall be brought into grete poverté, miseri and wrechednesse twelve yere. And the knight shall nat be hole of that wounde many yerys. (72.25-32)

Though alarmed by this prediction, Balin refuses to believe it. He responds, "Nay . . . nat so; for and I wyste thou seyde soth, I wolde do so perleous a dede that I wolde sle myself to make the a lyer" (73.1-3). Even after Merlin's prediction also comes true in such a spectacular fashion with the collapse of Pellam's castle, Balin still has three more refusals to go.

Fleeing from his latest disaster, the deaths of Garnysh, his lady, and her lover, Balin approaches a castle but first sees an inscribed cross by the road. In letters of gold, the cross states, "it is not for no knight alone to ryde toward this castel" (88.6-7). By this time, the reader is probably not surprised when Balin proceeds, and yet he is warned again. An old man appears and says to him, "Balyn le Saveage, thow passyst thy bandes to come this waye, therfor torne ageyne and it will availle the" (88.7-8). Balin, of course, proceeds. He ignores his last and final warning when, agreeing to the custom of the castle to fight a knight on an island, he leaves his own, blazoned shield behind in preference for a larger one which, naturally, lacks his own coat of arms (88.31-32). After

both he and his horse have crossed to the island in a boat, a damsel utters the final

warning:

> O, knight Balyn, why have ye lefte your owne sheld? Allas! ye have put yourself in
> grete daunger, for by your sheld ye shold have ben knowen. It is grete pyté of yow
> as ever was of knight, for of thy prowesse and hardynes thou hast no felawe lyvynge.
> (88.35-39)

The lady's words clearly import more than just casual advice about displaying one's coat

of arms to the best advantage, as her "grete pyté of yow as ever was of knight" should

indicate. This final combination of prophecy and (ignored) advice also comes true, for

the knight Balin fights is his own brother, who himself echoes the woman's words when

he laments "bycause ye had another shild I demed ye had ben another knight" (90.13-14).

And so the two brothers die together, both victims of Balin's lack of virtue—of wisdom.

Unlike Balin's difficulties with wisdom, Gawain serves as an excellent model of a

knight who seems to place prowess and worship, or at least his perception of worship,

ahead of other knightly virtues. Noticeably absent from Gawain's short list of virtues are

being true to one's word, or keeping faith, and placing vengeance before mercy and

justice. Certainly Gawain's prowess is unquestionable, for he frequently appears in lists

of Arthur's most powerful knights.[23] And Gawain shows himself to be a keen student of

knightly combat since he is twice able to recognize the disguised Lancelot simply by

observing his riding and fighting style (1071.13-14 and 1112.33-1113.1). Indeed, Malory

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[23] See 316.5-7 for example.

lists only six knights who can best Gawain (162.3-7). But Gawain seems unaware that

worship is founded on more than just prowess. Even early in *Le Morte Darthur*, in Book

I, when Gawain has completed a twelve month quest, the fifteen year old girl who has

been his occasional companion "coude sey but lytyll worship of hym" (179.7-8).[24] The

girl's observation is largely based on Gawain's inability to keep his promises, the first of

Gawain's failings I will explore.

Because of Gawain's accidental beheading of a woman (106.19-21), Guinevere puts

on him "a queste of ladyes . . . for ever whyle he lyved to be with all ladyes and to fight

for hir quarrels" (108.32-34). Gawain agrees to this life-long quest by swearing on the

"foure Evaungelystis" (109.1), yet he manages not only to break this oath but also a

promise to a fellow knight in the episode involving Pelleas and Ettarde. Gawain, still

accompanied by the girl mentioned above, sees a sorrowful knight best ten other knights

one after the other, but the victor nevertheless allows the defeated knights to tie him

beneath his horse and lead him away. The girl castigates Gawain for not helping the

bound man, but Gawain merely replies that the man seems to want no help (164.1-36).

Later, Gawain discovers that the man is Pelleas, who is hopelessly in love with the

prideful Ettarde. He pledges his help to the lovesick knight, swearing, "I shall promise

you by the feyth of my body to do all that lyeth in my powere to gete you the love of your

lady, and thereto I woll plyghte you my trouthe" (168.1-3). Malory emphasizes the

magnitude of the coming betrayal by having Pelleas respond to Gawain, whom he learns

is the son of King Lot and nephew to King Arthur: "syn ye ar so nye cosyn unto kyng

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[24] Also noted by both Radulescu (94) and by Whitaker (61), though neither explores the
comment in detail.

Arthure and ar a kynges son, therefore betray me nat" (168.10-11). Still more emphasis

is added to the seriousness of the pledge by the narrator: "sir Gawayne plight his trouthe

unto sir Pelleas to be trew and feythfull unto hym, so eche one plight their trouthe to

other" (168.31-33).

Gawain's plan is to swap armor with Pelleas, meet with Ettarde, and tell the lady he

has slain Pelleas, which will hopefully result in an outpouring of sorrow from Ettarde.

Gawain will then reveal that Pelleas is alive, and the grateful Ettarde will then grant her

love to Pelleas. Thanks to the duplicitous Gawain, things do not go according to the plan.

Ettarde is genuinely grateful to Gawain for killing Pelleas and offers her love to Gawain.

It should be noted that at no time during his initial meeting with Ettarde does Gawain

make any attempt whatsoever to sway Ettarde's feelings from himself to the "deceased"

Pelleas. Indeed, apparently not satisfied with Ettarde's open affection for him, Gawain

feels he must resort to still more trickery. He says that he cannot grant his love to Ettarde

because he is already in love and asks for her help: "Woll ye . . . promise me to do what

that ye may do be the faith of your body to gete me the love of my lady" (169.22-24).

She makes her promise, at which point Gawain reveals that she is the one he loves,

adding, "therefore hold your promise" (169.27). Her response, "I may nat chese . . . but

if I sholde be forsworne" (169.28-29), may be playful in the context of their conversation,

but given the emphasis on keeping one's word in the episode, it certainly does not bode

well for Gawain's understanding of chivalry, for he—the liar—has turned someone else's

truth-keeping into an excuse for sexual predation. Furthermore, it is hard to see how in

this episode he is fulfilling his earlier oath to Guinevere if he now feels it is acceptable to

trick women into his bed. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that some four hundred pages later in the text, Gawain attempts—but fails—to abduct a lady away from her knight who is sleeping by a well (449.20-34).

Oath breaking is not Gawain's only shortcoming; his obsession with revenge is even more destructive, for it runs throughout Malory's text, causing outrage, murder, and even war.[25] Even in Book I, less than eighty pages into *Le Morte Darthur*, Gawain's tendency for revenge manifests itself. Despite the fact that King Pellinore slays Gawain's rebellious father, King Lot, in fair battle, Malory's narrator is quick to tell us "kynge Pellynore bare the wyte of the dethe of kynge Lott, wherefore sir Gawayne revenged the deth of hys fadir the tenthe yere aftir he was made knight, and slew kynge Pellynor hys owne hondis" (77.20-22). Since the *OED* gives one definition of "wyte" as "the source or origin of blame," we can tell that Gawain has held on to this grudge for ten years.

What is most disturbing about Gawain's pursuit of revenge is this ability to bide his time in such a calculating fashion, as though the anger seethes beneath the surface, waiting to be unleashed when it will be most effective. Such Machiavellian control is especially apparent in Gawain's revenge against Lamerok. Envious of Lamerok's success at a tournament and angry about Lamerok's love for his widowed mother, Gawain calls a secret meeting with his brothers (excepting Gareth). Perhaps no colder words occur in *Le Morte Darthur*:

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[25] I will consider Gawain's role in helping cause Arthur's war with Lancelot in the next chapter. At present, I am concerned with establishing that a desire for revenge is a flaw in Gawain apparent as early as from Book I.

> . . . wyte you well, my fayre bretherne, that this sir Lamerok woll nevyr love us, because we slew his fadir, kynge Pellynor, for we demed that he slew oure fadir . . . and for the deth of kynge Pellynor sir Lamerok ded us a shame to oure modir. Therefore I woll be revenged. . . . Well . . . holde ye styll and we shall aspye oure tyme. (608.15-24)

Note that the ever-vengeful Gawain does not stop to consider that Lamerok could have genuine affection for Margause but instead assumes that Lamerok's motives are themselves merely a form of revenge. Gawain and his confederates do indeed ambush and murder Lamerok, as Lancelot publicly points out to Gawain in Book VIII (1190.2-10).

But Gawain's desire for revenge is not merely ignited by something as serious as the death of his father or his mother's "betrayal"; it even flares up because of the death of his dogs. When Sir Blamoure kills two hounds which have attacked and slain a pet deer given him by his lady, Gawain attacks him (105.20-106.11). Gawain defeats Blamoure, but the latter "cryed mercy and yelded hym and besought hym as he was a jantyll knight to save hys lyff" (106.13-14). What happens next is worth quoting in full:

> "Thou shalt dey," seyd Gawayne, "for sleynge of my howndis."
> "I woll make amendys," seyde the knight, "to my power."
> But sir Gawayne *wolde no mercy have*, but unlaced hys helme to have strekyn of hys hede. (106.15-19 emphasis added)

At this point the knight is saved when his lady throws herself between Blamoure and Gawain's stroke, resulting in the beheading discussed above. Given the context, Gawain's determination to kill Blamoure for slaying his dogs goes well beyond any

enactment of justice. What is striking about the passage is that Gawain's desire for

vengeance clearly leads him to violate one of the fundamental requirements of knights

univserally advised by Lull, Charny, and Bouvet: giving mercy when asked.[26] Malory's

narrator sums up Gawain's character best when he explains why Gareth wishes to avoid

his brother's company near the end of Book IV: "For evir aftir sir Gareth has aspyed sir

Gawaynes conducions, he wythdrewe himself fro his brother sir Gawaynes felyshyp, for

he was evir vengeable, and where he hated he wolde be avenged with murther" (360.32-

35).

Even Arthur is not immune to chivalric failings. In fact, since he is king, these short

comings are all the more to blame because he is supposed to lead the kingdom, to bind it

together by his example. Certainly Arthur performs good deeds, not only in slaying the

Giant of St. Michael's Mount for example, but on a larger scale in unifying his kingdom

as well as freeing it from Roman hegemony. Yet Arthur's successes on an individual

level are never the equal of his best knights. For example, in Arthur's first individual

combat, against Pellinore, he loses, breaking the sword he pulled from the stone in the

process. He is only saved from Pellinore's final attack by Merlin's spell.[27] Merlin

reminds Arthur that he had earlier warned him not to fight Pellinore, but Arthur has

persisted in challenging Pellinore largely because the latter had previously taken Arthur's

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[26] Perhaps this incident leads to Guinevere's additional requirements of Gawain in his "quest of ladies." She demands "ever that he shode be curteyse, and never to refuse mercy to hym that askith mercy" (108.34-35).

[27] The lengthy combat runs from 49.11 to 51.20.

horse.[28] Here we may detect hints early in the text of a certain prideful bellicosity in

Arthur which leads not only to occasional outbreaks of discourtesy, but even to unfair

behavior in tournaments. In essence, Arthur himself demonstrates what happens when

certain of the key elements of chivalry are pushed too far.

Obviously the best way for a knight to demonstrate his prowess is to win in combat,

but if this desire is not balanced by some of the other, more gentle, virtues of chivalry, it

can lead to the bellicose or "macho" attitude which Arthur occasionally exemplifies. For

example, Malory adds particularly grim humor to Arthur's personality. When the Roman

ambassadors arrive to demand Arthur's tribute, he replies,

> But thy ys myne answer: I owghe the Emperour no trewage, nother none woll I
> yelde hym, but on a fayre fylde I shall yelde hym my trwage, that shall be with a
> sherpe spere other ellis with a sherpe swerde. And that shall nat be longe, be my
> fadirs soule Uther! (48.21-25).

Vinaver notes that the "grim humor" of this reply is Malory's addition and is

"*characteristic* of Malory's Arthur" (1300 emphasis added).

Along with Arthur's bellicose humor, Malory increases Arthur's tendency towards

anger. This anger can be seen when yet another messenger arrives at Arthur's court to

demand tribute, this time from King Roins. Oddly, the symbol of this tribute is to be

Arthur's beard, which will fill the missing place on a mantle which contains the beards of

eleven other kings. If Arthur refuses the beard, Roins will invade, destroy Arthur's lands,

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[28] See 42.7-43.18.

and take both the beard and Arthur's head along with it (54.21-33). Arthur's angry reply

is largely original to Malory:

> Well . . . thou haste seyde thy message, the which 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. But telle thou thy kynge thus, that I owghe hym none homage ne none of myne elders; but or hit be longe to, he shall do me omage on both his knees, other ellis he shall lese hys hede, by the fayth of my body! For thy ys the moste shamefullyste message that ever y herde off. I have aspyed thy kynge never yette mette with worshipfull man. But telle hym I woll have hys hede withoute he do me omage. (54.34-55.10)

Vinaver points out that in Malory's source for this passage, "Arthur is amused rather than

infuriated by Rion's strange request" and "uses no such epithets as *orgulus*, *lewdiste*,

shamefullyste, and . . . does not threaten to put [Rions] *on bothe his knees*" (1302

emphasis in original). But Vinaver does not *account* for the anger. They key is in

Arthur's use of the words "shamefullyste" and "worshypfull." These words imply that,

for Malory's Arthur, what is at stake is reputation. Arthur will not allow his worship to

be publicly shamed, so rather than the amused confidence of the Arthur in the source,

Malory's Arthur responds with an almost confused loss of composure, reinforced by the

redundant references to Roins' head.

Arthur's belligerence can also take the form of a surprisingly willful discourtesy, as

evidenced by his treatment of Isode the morning following the first day's fighting at the

tourney of Lonezep. In this episode, Lancelot looks out a window and sees Isode riding

into the forest with Palomides, Tristram, and Gareth, and he compliments her. Arthur

arms and commands Lancelot to do the same, determined to pursue them and get a better

look. Apparently unrecognizable in their helms, Arthur and Lancelot catch up to the

group in the forest. But Lancelot warns Arthur:

> Sir . . . hit is nat good that ye go to nyghe them, for wyte you well there ar two as
> good knyghtes as ony now ar lyvyng. And therefore, sir, I pray you, be nat to hasty;
> for peradventure there woll be som knyghtes that woll be displeased and we com
> suddenly uppon them. (743.16-20)

Arthur's disturbing reply is merely, "As for that . . . I woll se her, for I take no forse

whom I gryeve" (743.21-22). It is hard to imagine a more discourteous or prideful

attitude.

Things turn out exactly as Lancelot predicts. Arthur does not announce who he is

and, his head still covered by his helm, gawks at Isode. Palomides challenges him,

saying "Thou uncurteyse knight, what sekyst thou here? For thou art uncurteyse to com

uppon a lady thus suddeynly. Therefore wythdrawe the!" (743.33-35). Arthur does not

respond but merely continues to stare. Palomides then grabs a spear and strikes Arthur

from his horse. The situation could have easily escalated out of control, but fortunately it

is all smoothed over by Lancelot and Tristram. Tellingly, this incident immediately

follows Tristram's praise of Lancelot which includes his "curtesy" (742.5) as well as

Palomides' praise of him which *also* includes "curtesy" along with "jantylness" (742.15).

Malory's narrator additionally notes that all the kings, lords, and knights agreed that

during Arthur's time both Lancelot and Tristram showed, among other virtues, the most

"curtesy" (742.23-27). Malory is clearly and systematically setting up Arthur's following

actions as a foil to the courtesy of Tristram and especially Lancelot.

The tourney at Lonezep provides another example of Arthur's bellicosity, this time on the field itself. Even before the incident discussed above, Arthur shows his determination to win despite the fact that it could mean fighting unfairly, clearly a form of envy. At the first day's fighting at Lonezep, Tristram, Palomides, Gareth, and Dynadan combined manage to defeat over fifty knights; most of these knights are Arthur's kin. Arthur turns to Lancelot and says, "So God me helpe . . . this is a grete shame to us to se foure knyghtes beate so many knyghtes of myn. And therefore make you redy, for we woll have ado with them" (735.4-7). Lancelot's response appeals to a sense of worship Arthur apparently does not understand: "Sir . . . wyte you well that there ar two passynge good knyghtes, and grete worship were hit nat to us now to have ado with them, for they ar gretely travayled" (735.8-10). But Arthur simply replies, "As for that . . . I woll be avenged" (735.11), unconcerned with the others' exhaustion.[29]

Arthur's envy also causes him to halt a tourney he feels he cannot win. This incident takes place at the Great Tournament, significantly the last tournament directly narrated in *Le Morte Darthur* and, equally significant, sourceless.[30] Despite the fact that Arthur's side has a three to two advantage in numbers, the disguised Lancelot, Gareth, and Lavayne help the side with fewer numbers outfight Arthur's team. Arthur is "wrothe oute of mesure that he and hys knyghtes might nat prevayle that day" (1112.22-23).

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[29] An additional example of similar unfair behavior from Arthur is his arrangement for tournaments to begin well before noon so Gawain "shulde have the bettir in batayle whyle hys [magical] strengthe endured three owrys" (1217.1-7). Arthur is one of only a few unnamed knights who know of Gawain's magical advantage (1217.9-11).

[30] Vinaver calls it, along with the healing of Sir Urry, "virtually unknown in Arthurian literature" (1591).

Gawain, as I noted earlier, recognizes Lancelot's riding and fighting style and informs

Arthur who the trio are. Arthur asks Gawain's counsel and Gawain advises halting the

tourney; Arthur agrees (1112.32-1113.19). I grant that in their discussion, Arthur and

Gawain reject the idea of ganging up on the three with twelve men each as shameful

(1113.14-15), but this is no reason to halt the fighting. The only explanation for ending

the tourney when Arthur does can be that he wishes to avoid losing *more*, and therefore

keep down the opposing side's score—hardly "chivalrous."[31]

Whereas Balin's, Gawain's, and even Arthur's moral failings are obvious, those of

Tristram are a bit more difficult to discern. Indeed, numerous scholars have asserted that

Tristram and Lancelot have extremely close parallels with each other. Indeed, both

Beverly Kennedy and Danielle MacBain have argued that Lancelot becomes increasingly

like Tristram as Malory's fifth book progresses.[32] While I agree that there are undeniable

similarities between the two characters, I will argue that Malory employs these

correspondences in order to draw his readers' attention to the contrasts between these two

great knights. Particularly when we pay attention to Tristram's involvement in combat,

decisions about *why* to fight, and reflections on the worship conferred by his prowess in

arms, we will find that even more clearly than in the case of Balin, Malory uses Tristram

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[31] We may recall Malory's addition of Guinevere's lengthy comments that all men of
worship hate an envious man, contrasting such a one with men who are "curteyse and
kynde and jantil" who "hath favoure in every place" (764.26-31).

[32] See Kennedy 179-181, and MacBain throughout, but especially 59-64.

as a foil to Lancelot in order to suggest what is lacking in some conceptions of chivalry

as it operates at even its seemingly highest level.[33]

As Tristram is accounted one of the greatest knights in Malory's work, it is only

fitting that I acknowledge his various forms of success before I enumerate his failures, for

it is in these positive qualities that we will later see his closest parallels with Lancelot.

Indeed, Tristram enjoys a wide range of sterling qualities: performing good deeds,

showing mercy, practicing fairness, giving generous worship to others, demonstrating

prowess, winning vast worship, and finally achieving the ultimate compliment, direct

acknowledgment from other knights of his equality with Lancelot.

Perhaps the first quality one thinks of in conjunction with the ideal of the medieval

knight is the performance of good deeds, and Tristram certainly does not fail to use his

martial prowess in fulfilling this image. For example, a lady comes to him complaining

that a child in her charge has been kidnapped (405.16-20). Of course Tristram is prompt

in riding off to save the child and soon finds the kidnapping knight, just as quickly

putting his prowess to good use: "Anone the knight turned his horse and made hym redy

to fight, and than sir Trystramys smote hym with a swerde such a buffet that he tumbled

to the erthe, and than he yelded hym unto sir Trystramys" (405.27-31). Tristram's

reputation grows to such stature that simply knowing he is abroad is enough to keep a

giant in his lair (499.32-38), but hearing the false rumors spread by Mark of Tirstram's

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[33] Rumble argues that clarifying the nature of the "moral tragedy" explains why Malory included all of the Tristram material, but Rumble agrees with my position that one of Malory's purposes in the story of Tristram is to "emphasize Tristram's subordination to Lancelot" (160). As I will show in my final chapter, I do not agree that *Le Morte Darthur* is, overall, a tragedy.

death, the giant is soon at large. Unfortunately for the giant, he gives Tristram the opportunity to perform a second rescue—even during his period of madness. This time, Tristram saves not a child but a knight, Sir Dynaunte, whom the giant is about to slay. With little ado, the unarmed and unarmored Tristram takes up the knight's dropped sword and promptly strikes off the head of the giant (500.18-21).

But even better than a simple good deed, of course, is destroying an evil custom, since the latter is a form of persistent evil. Tristram does not fail here either. Immediately after drinking the famous love potion with Isode and arriving at the castle Plewre, Tristram and the princess are taken prisoner (412.19-30). According to the evil and bizarre custom of the castle, whoever passes by with a lady has to allow Brewnor to compare the knight's lady with his own. Whichever lady is the less fair then loses her head, and the two knights will fight over the one left alive. Tristram, claiming that Brewnor's lady is guilty of collusion in this twisted practice, promptly beheads her (415.9-11). The inevitable knightly combat ensues, with the result that Brewnor loses his head as well. As if to reinforce the importance of the fight, Malory devotes twenty full lines of text in Vinaver's edition to the two-hour battle (415.15-35).

Tristram also displays both mercy and fairness in the context of his martial pursuits. King Angwysh of Ireland is accused of murder and recruits Tristram as his champion against Sir Blamoure, one of Lancelot's kinsmen. After obtaining assurances of Angwysh's innocence, Tristram agrees to the combat. Tristram defeats Blamoure, but the latter requests to be slain rather than suffer the shame of yielding (409.25-32). At Tristram's insistence and much discussion back and forth between Angwysh, the judges,

Blamoure's brother, Bleoberys, and even Blamoure himself, the defeated knight is finally

convinced to ask for mercy—which Tristram is happy to grant (409.24-411.2).[34] He also

shows fairness to Lamerok, himself a great tourney-winner with five hundred victories to

his credit, when Tristram refuses to continue combat with Lamerok when the latter—as

well as his horse—become weary (428.33-429.25).

Despite Tristram's occasionally rocky relationship with Lamerok, Tristram also

shows great generosity in trying to give the worship of a fight with Lamerok—which

ends in a draw when they both become too weary to continue—to Lamerok (483.28-29).

Somewhat humourously, Lamerok wishes to do the same for Tristram (483.19-22). The

courteous standoff ends when they both decide never to fight each other again (483.30-

484.2). Tristram shows similar generosity in giving worship to Segwarydes (446.17).

Of course in addition to the good works Tristram performs comes the fundamental

demonstration of prowess itself as well as the winning of worship that goes along with it,

both of which combine to focus our attention on him in the first place. In addition to

Tristram's deeds listed above—many of which involve the demonstration of his

prowess—he does especially well on the tourney circuit. For example, At the tournament

at the Castle of the Maidens, he wins the prize on the first day (524.18-21), and on the

second day the prize goes to the King of North Galis because Tristram fights on his side

(527.16-18). His deeds at the tournament of Harde Roche are so "mervaylous" that king

Arthur thinks he might be Lancelot in disguise (558.10-12). Later, at the same

tournament, Arthur challenges the disguised Tristram because he will not reveal his

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[34] This is an especially important post-combat reconciliation since it results in oaths of
eternal friendship between Tristram and Lancelot's entire clan (411.3-8).

name, but Tristram "smote kynge Arthur agayne so sore that horse and man fell to the

erthe" (559.31-33). He even defeats Arthur a second time during the first day's fighting

at the Lonezep tournament, giving Arthur "suche a buffet that kynge Arthure had no

power to kepe his sadyll" (736.31-32). And on the same day, he does so well against

several of the Orkney clan that they withdraw from the melee (27-32). On the second

day of the tournament, Tristram's deeds are so great that the crowd and the judges cannot

decide whether to award the prize to him or to Lancelot (753.32-754.2) until Lancelot

convinces all concerned that, since Tristram was on the field longer and struck down

more knights, the prize should go to him (754.3-8).[35]

Of course the demonstration of prowess leads Tristram to great worship. Time and

again Malory tells us of his fame.[36] Indeed, when the prize is finally awarded to Tristram

in the last example above, "there was the hole voyse of kynges, deukes and erlys, barons

and knyghtes that sir Trystram de Lyones 'thys day ys preved the beste knyght'" (754.9-

11). Eventually Tristram's impressive record of chivalric successes earns him the

greatest compliment which Malory can pay, persistent comparisons with Lancelot.[37]

On the other hand, to a far greater extent than with Lancelot, there are aspects of

Tristram's behavior and personality—demonstrated largely through combat or factors

relating to it—which are troubling. Indeed, worship itself seems to be a problem for

Tristram, for he gives evidence of an excessive desire for it. While some of the above

[35] Vinaver notes that Malory has a tendency to increase the number of Tristram's
victories (1475).

[36] To cite only a few examples, see pages 389, 408, 434, and especially 509.

[37] See examples on pages 407, 415, 417, 418, and 470.

examples show that Lancelot is ever anxious to give worship to others, from his earliest

encounter with Marhalte, Tristram grasps at fame. His remarks to Marhalte are

particularly telling:

> A, fayre knight and well proved . . . thou shalt well wete I may nat forsake the in this quarrel. For I am for thy sake made knight, and thou shalt well wete that I am a kynges sonne, borne and gotyn uppon a queen. And suche promise I hav made at my nevewys ["uncle's"] requeste and myne owne sekynge that I shall fight with the unto the uttirmuste and delyvir Cornwayle frome the olde trewage. And also wete thou well, sir Marhalte, that this ys the gretteste cause that thou coragyst me to have ado with the, for thou arte called one of the moste renomed knyghtes of the worlde. And *bycause of the noyse and fame that thou haste*[,] *thou gevyst me corrayge to have ado with the*, for never yet was I proved with good knight. And sytthen I toke the Order of Knyghthode this day, I am right well pleased, *and to me moste worship*, that I may have ado with suche a knyghte as thou arte. And now wete thou well, syr Marhalte, that *I caste me to geete worship on thy body*. And yf that I be nat proved, *I trust to God to be worshipfully proved uppon thy body* . . . . (381.13-31 emphasis added)

One might be tempted to see in this early speech from Tristram a youthful over-

enthusiasm, particularly his almost rambling and redundant final two sentences, but he

never loses his obsession with worship. Even as a more mature knight, he nevertheless

allows Morgan le Fey's damsel to lure him off in search of worship, and it is only thanks

to the intervention of Gawain that Tristram does not fall into the waiting ambush of

Morgan's thirty knights (510.18-511.11). [38]

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[38] One facet of this obsession with worship is Tristram's concomitant over-assertion of his prowess. See for example, the incident where he strikes down Gaheris even though Gaheris neither wants to joust nor even seems to be ready (533.9-12).

But an obsession with worship is not Tristram's only failing. Malory makes

Tristram more prideful than he is in the *Prose Tristan*, being given to what I would call a

habit of excessively asserting who he is and rattling off the list of his accomplishments.

For example, the very first thing Tristram says when he meets a Cornish lady after he, his

wife, Isode le Blaunche, and her brother, Keyhydyns have been shipwrecked is

> Wete you well, fayre lady . . . that I slewe sir Marhalte and delyverde Cornwayle
> frome the trewage of Irelonde. And I am he that delyverde the kynge of Irelonde
> frome sir Blamoure de Ganys, and I am he that bete sir Palomydes, and wete you
> welle that I am sir Trystrames de Lyones thay by the grace of God shall delyver this
> wofull Ile of Servage. (442.17-23)[39]

Malory makes an even more radical change in stressing this self-praise when Tristram,

captured and possibly facing execution, pleads for his life. Vinaver notes that in the

source text, it is the people of Cornwall who remind Tristram's captors of his service, but

Malory gives the speech to Tristram (1464):

> Fayr lordis! Remembir what I have done for the contrey of Cornwayle, and what
> jouparté I have bene in for the wele fo you all. For whan I fought for the trewage of
> Cornwayle with sir Marhalte, the good knight, I was promised to be bettir rewarded,
> whan ye all refused to take the batayle. Therefore, as ye be good jantyll knyghtes, se
> me nat thus shamfully to dye, for hit is shame to all knyghthode thus to se me dye.
> For I dare sey . . . that I mette never with no knight but I was as good as he or better.
> (431.14-22)

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[39] Vinaver notes that in the source, the speaker is Segwarides, who is far more "modest"
here (1465).

And I should further point out that in the source, there are no references to knighthood, nor is there any hint of the sentiment contained in Tristram's final, boasting sentence.[40]

If Geoffroi de Charny's now-famous maxim *qui plus fait, miex vault*[41] ("who does most is of most worth") may be taken as a principle Malory embraces in *Le Morte Darthur*, then Lancelot certainly emerges as the knight of most worth. He not only performs great feats of arms and wins praise from Malory's other top knights, more significantly he seems to be able to accomplish more—even in the non-martial sphere— while avoiding the worst vices of the knights previously discussed. He specifically contrasts with the rather limited accomplishments of Gareth; he also shows greater wisdom than Balin, more justice and forgiveness than Gawain, and keeps his promises— unlike Balin and Gawain. And though he does desire the worship craved by all of Malory's knights, Lancelot avoids the excessive desire for it shown by Tristram through his generosity in giving away tourney prizes.

Malory asserts Lancelot's superior prowess in many ways. Significantly, Lancelot is one of only two knights in *Le Morte Darthur* to equal William Marshal's coveted five hundred tourney victories,[42] but Lancelot accomplishes this feat in only three days, a record Malory feels so important that he lists it twice (827.25-29 and 832.25-26).[43] Even

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[40] See Vinaver's note to the passage (1464).

[41] *The Book of Chivalry* 86.

[42] Crouch 193.

[43] The other knight to reach this record level is Lamerok, though Malory's description, "he forjusted all that were there for the moste party of fyve hondred knyghtes" (444.26-28), leaves room to argue that Lamerok has defeated "almost" five hundred. This "five

in minor details, Lancelot shows superior prowess. For example, Ector summons a knight to joust by beating a basin with the butt of his spear three times (255.17-18), but when Lancelot later beats on the same basin with his spear (265.3-4), Malory adds to his source that the "bottom felle oute."[44] Lancelot's prowess can even allow him to fight his way out of especially difficult situations, as when he, ambushed in a tree without his armor on, nevertheless defeats his armored attacker with nothing but a broken branch (283.28-36). But aside form his five hundred victories in only three days, nothing illustrates Lancelot's prowess better than his battles with monsters. While Arthur defeats one giant in Book II (203.1-28), Lancelot kills two (271.30-37).[45] He even defeats a fire-breathing dragon (793.7-11), a monster no other knight in *Le Morte Darthur* has to face.

But it is not only in prowess that Lancelot excels Malory's other knights, he also possesses many of the other virtues praised both by the authors of the chivalric manuals and by Malory's top knights themselves. For example, Lancelot demonstrates more wisdom than Balin. Whereas Balin consistently ignores the opinions of others, Lancelot does not. When he and Bleoberis find two knights fighting over the classic "whose lady is the more fair" issue, they stop the fight and ask what is the debate. The two

hundred mark" comparison shows Malory's use of foils in microcosm, for Lamerok certainly faces neither the monsters nor the tricky judgments which we will see Lancelot confronting, neither does he display the wide range of the other chivalric virtues evidenced by Lancelot.

[44] See Vinaver's Commentary 1419.

[45] As Vinvaer observes, this incident is in the source, but Malory has changed the giants' weapons from swords to clubs to create an intentional parallel with Arthur's fight in Book II (1422).

combatants turn out to be Lamerok and Mellyagaunce. Lamerok, the knight of more

prowess, fights to prove Margause is the more fair, while the losing Mellyagaunce fights

on behalf of Guinevere. Of course the stage is set for Lancelot to take up the cause of

Guinevere against Lamerok, and he even challenges Lamerok. But Lamerok gives the

reasonable explanation that every knight "thynkith hys own lady fayryste" (487.10-11).

And before the fight can begin, Bleoberis interrupts, saying,

> My lorde sir Launcelot, I wyste you never so mysseadvysed as ye be at thys tyme,
> for sir Lamerok seyth to you but reson and knightly. For I warne you, I have a lady,
> and methynkith that she ys the fayryst lady of the worlde. Were thys a grete reson
> that ye sholde be wrothe with me for such langage? . . . Therefore I pray you, be
> fryndis! (487.20-27)

To his credit, and despite his initial anger, Lancelot takes the words of both Lamerok and

Bleoberis to heart, changes his mind, and even asks forgiveness (487.29-30). But he goes

well beyond just listening to counsel; he actively seeks it out. To cite just two examples,

he requests the counsel of a hermit on the Grail Quest (927.24) and solicits the advice of

his followers in a long discussion over the need to rescue Guinevere from Arthur's death

sentence (1171.9-1173.31). Particularly in this latter case Lancelot makes certain that all

of his followers are aware of the potential dangers not only in splitting from Arthur but

also in the rescue itself, making sure that everyone has his say before making up his

mind.[46]

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[46] Note that he directly asks their advice not once, but twice (1172.4-5 and 1172.11-12). I
will examine the justice of Lancelot's rescue in the next chapter when I take up the issue
of war.

Lancelot's wisdom is also revealed in his concern with justice since it entails making decisions about what is right regarding rewards or punishments in the actions of others. I will continue my examination of justice in the following chapter on war, so for the moment two examples of Lancelot's justice that do not involve war will suffice. The first is a somewhat humorous episode, but it also involves Malory's significant departure from his source text in giving Lancelot an opportunity to demonstrate justice not present in the source.[47] This is the episode involving Sir Belleus (259.28-260.37). Lancelot, finding a pavilion empty, has decided to spend the night inside, but he is awakened by the caresses of one with "a rough berde" (259.32). The bearded lover is Sir Belleus, who owns the pavilion and was expecting to find his lover inside. Both men leap quickly out of the bed and, grabbing their swords, race outside and engage in combat. Lancelot quickly wins, wounding Belleus seriously in the process.[48] Belleus yields and Lancelot asks what he was doing in the tent. After hearing the explanation, Lancelot apologizes for wounding the knight and says, "com on your way into the pavylyon, and take youre reste, and as I suppose I shall staunche your bloode" (260.10-11). Belleus' lover arrives and castigates Lancelot for wounding her lord, but Belleus speaks in Lancelot's behalf because of the latter's courteous treatment of him. The lady then asks Lancelot, as reparation, to help Belleus become a knight of the Round Table. Lancelot graciously accedes providing that Belleus proves himself worthy. So this episode clearly demonstrates that Lancelot has a

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[47] See Vinaver's Commentary 1417.

[48] In the source text, Lancelot kills the knight, thus preventing both the dialogue which follows and the "happy ending" (Vinaver's observation 1417).

very strong sense of justice, for, realizing his error, he is quick to admit it and make amends.

The second example of Lancelot's sense of wisdom and justice is a far trickier situation than the previous one. In this case Lancelot rides upon a knight chasing a lady in an effort to behead her.[49] Lancelot quickly rides his horse between the two and demands that the knight account for his behavior. The knight, Sir Pedivere, explains that the woman is his wife and that she has betrayed him by sleeping with another man. But the woman says that Pedivere is unnecessarily jealous of her love for her cousin and swears that "there was never sene betwyxte us none suche thyng" (284.33-34). She then requires Lancelot "of trewe knyghthode" to save her because Pedivere is "withoute mercy" (285.1-2). Realizing that he has encountered the classic "he said, she said" dilemma, Lancelot has the wisdom to know that the case must be taken to the court for further investigation if justice is to be served. Pedievere agrees to go with Lancelot and the lady to court; nevertheless, he employs a ruse to trick Lancelot into looking away, draws his sword, and beheads his wife. Horrified and outraged, Lancelot dismounts and challenges Pedivere. However, instead of the fight ending in Lancelot's victory, which the reader expects, Pedivere drops to the ground and, in an attitude of supplication, grasps Lancelot's legs and begs for mercy. Lancelot responds, "Fye on the . . . thou shamefull knight! Thou mayste have no mercy: therefore aryse and fight with me!" (285.19-21).

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[49] The entire episode runs from 284.15-286.18. Vinaver notes that the only parallels to this episode are from the Prose *Lancelot*, Malory's main source for Book III, but he has altered the original considerably (1425-6). I would add that the most significant alteration is his aside concerning the final fate of Pedivere (286.4-18) which proves the rectitude of Lancelot's judgment.

But Pedivere refuses to rise until he is granted mercy. Lancelot's conundrum has now intensified, for he obviously wants to slay the man, yet despite his assertion that Pedivere deserves no mercy, he will not kill him outright but will only engage him in a fair fight. He even offers to fight Pedivere unarmored, but the knight will have none of it. Finally Lancelot demands that Pedivere take his wife's corpse to Guinevere for judgment. Pedievere agrees and does as he is told. We learn that Guinevere sends Pedivere to the Pope in Rome, corpse in tow. The Pope has the lady buried and then sends Pedivere back to Guinevere, and "after thys knight sir Pedyvere fell to grete goodnesse and was an holy man and an hermyte" (286.17-18). The significance of this resolution to the Pedivere episode, which I have noted is Malory's addition, is that it proves Lancelot's ability to judge correctly in a very tricky situation. I would also hasten to add that Gareth never faces a judgment this tricky; Balin, we can be sure, would have made exactly the wrong decision, and, keeping in mind Gawain's tendency to eschew mercy as well as his behavior in the Pelleas and Ettarde episode, I will leave it to the reader's imagination what Gawain would have done.

Also in direct contrast to Gawain's tendency to hold a grudge to the point of revenge is Lancelot's virtue of forgiveness. Especially important in this respect is that Lancelot forgives even despite initial anger. For example, at the tournament of Lonezep Palomides fouls by striking Lancelot's horse on purpose (739.7-8). Even the crowd is outraged:

> Than was the cry huge and grete, how "sir Palomydes the Saresyn hath smyttyn down sir Launcelots horse." Ryght so there were many knyghtes wrothe with sir

Palomydes bycause he had done that dede, and helde there ayenste hit, and seyde hyt was unknyghtly done in a turnemente to kylle an horse wylfully. (739.10-16)

Lancelott is justifiably angry. He says, "Wyte thou well thou haste done me this day the grettyste dispyte that ever ony worshipfull knight ded me in turnemente other in justys, and therefore I woll be avenged uppon the. And therefore take kepe to youreselff!" (739.22-29). Yet when Palomides craves Lancelot's forgiveness, the latter immediately cools off and agrees to ignore the foul (739.30-740.16). Even after defeating Madore in the trial by combat to defend Guinevere from the charge of treason,[50] the victorious Lancelot manages not only to forgive Madore, but even patches things up between Madore and the Queen: "And than sir Madore sewed dayly and longe to have the quenys good grace, and so by the meanys of sir Launcelot he caused hym to stonde in the quenys good grace, and all was forgyffyn" (1060.3-6). Perhaps the most touching example of Lancelot's ability to forgive occurs when the unclad Elaine kneels before him as he stands with sword drawn, furious over her betrayal in tricking him into her bed through sorcery, and she asks his forgiveness not only for her deed but for the life of their unborn son (795.31-796.3). One can only imagine Lancelot's increased sense of shock and horror,[51] yet he responds to the kneeling Elaine, "Well . . . I woll forgyff you" (796.8).

Also unlike Balin and Gawain, Lancelot keeps his promises. For example, in order to get out of his imprisonment in Morgan le Fey's castle, Lancelot promises a lady that he

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[50] See also my more detailed discussion of this episode below.

[51] Vinaver notes that Malory's addition to her appeal is the reference to her pregnancy (1525).

will assist her father in an upcoming tournament. The lady helps him escape, and he duly appears at the appointed rendezvous before the tournament several days later (261.2-3). Yet during the intervening time, when he was out of the lady's presence, it would have been an easy thing for him to slip away. Significantly, Vinaver notes that in Malory's source for this episode, "there is no connection between Lancelot's release from the castle of Morgan le Fey and his appearance at the tournament" (1416), so it seems that Malory has altered his source intentionally to illustrate Lancelot's truth to his word.

Lancelot even keeps his word when he does not have to, as we find in his fight with Madore de la Porte in "The Poisoned Apple" chapter of Book V. In this lengthy episode, Guinevere has dismissed Lancelot, "wrothe" with him because he has fought in the causes of many "ladyes and damsels which dayly resorted unto hym, that besoughte hym to be their champion" (1045.22-29). Of Malory's difference from his source in this passage, Vinaver claims, "By doing her own dismissing instead of letting Lancelot do it for her" as he does in the source text, "the Queen increases in stature" (1596-7). But another explanation for the change would be to show that Lancelot, since he has been released from the Queen's service and therefore from his vow to be her champion, is under no obligation to face her accuser in trial by combat. Yet he returns to fight—and defeat—Madore even though he is no longer bound by his oath to do so, an especially chivalrous gesture given her extremely harsh words to him (1047.1-9).

Like all of Malory's knights, Lancelot desires worship. Yet Lancelot does not take this desire to the extremes we have already seen in Tristram or Gareth. The most obvious examples of Lancelot's moderation regarding worship are his objection to the envy of

worship and his generosity in giving worship to others. In the first case, Lancelot's own

kinsmen grow jealous of Tristram's fame:

> . . . sir Trystram enchevyd many grete batayles, wherethorow all the noyse and
> brewte felle to sir Trystram, and the name ceased of sir Launcelot. And therefore sir
> Launcelottis bretherne and his kynnysmen wolde have slayne sir Trystram bycause
> of his fame. (784.33-785.4)

Discovering this murderous envy in his followers and kin, Lancelot unequivocally puts a

stop to it:

> Wyte you well that and ony of you all be so hardy to wayte my lorde sir Trystram
> with ony hurte, shame, or vylany, as I am trew knight, I shall sle the beste of you all
> myne owne hondis. Alas, fye for shame, sholde ye for his noble dedys awayte to sle
> hym! (785.7-11)[52]

What greater contrast to Gawain, who actually *promotes* envy of worship?[53]

Lancelot even wants to give worship away when he has earned it if he feels someone

else deserves it more. In fact, Lancelot displays this quality not once but twice with

Tristram. After the third day of the tournament at the Castle of the Maidens, Lancelot is

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[52] As Vinaver notes, Malory's source contains the basic sentiment Lancelot expresses
here, but Malory greatly expands Lancelot's speech from the single sentence in the
original (1523).

[53] See my discussion of Gawain's desire for revenge against Lamerok above, but I
reiterate my point that this thirst for revenge is not only inspired by Lamerok's
relationship with Margause, but also for Lamerok's success at a tourney and is therefore
partly an envy of worship.

unanimously praised by all as having won the day (533.34), but he cries out to the crowd,

"Sir Trystram hath won the fylde, for he began firste, and lengyst hylde on, and so hathe

he done the firste day, the secunde, and the thirde day!" (534.1-3). In the second case,

opinion is evenly divided between which of the two knights should have the prize, but

again Lancelot wants it given to Tristram (753.29-754.8).[54]

    I will conclude my consideration of Lancelot by examining his final two fights with

Gawain, for here we see many of Lancelot's virtues coming together in the last extended

scenes of personal combat recounted in *Le Morte Darthur*.[55] In these two fights we find

combined Lancelot's lack of concern with either worship or pride, his ability to take

counsel, his prowess and wisdom, and finally his mercy. That Lancelot does not take

excessive pride in worship can be seen in his restraint in enduring Gawain's threats and

insults as the latter rides daily in front of Benwick castle for six months, jousting with

any who will face him (1215.3-6). Gawain's language, in contrast, is especially proud

and insulting as he says, "Where arte thou, sir Lancelot? Ys there none of all your

proude knyghtes that *dare* breake a speare with me?" (1214.23-24 emphasis added) and

"Where arte thou now, false traytour, sir Launcelot? Why holdyst thou thyself within

holys and wallys lyke a cowarde? Loke oute, thou false traytoure knight, and here I shall

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[54] Vinaver notes that both this and the previous example are Malory's additons (1477 and 1519).

[55] The last combat described in *Le Morte Darthur* is Arthur's fight with Mordred, but Malory devotes little narrative space to it, recounting the encounter in only ten lines (1237.12-22). Technically, the ultimate combat is the reference to the "many bataylles" which Bors, Ector, Blamour, and Bleoberis fight "upon the myscreantes, or Turkes" on Malory's final page (1260.14), but it involves no descriptions of the fighting. Such brevity or complete lack of description serves to focus our attention of Lancelot's earlier combats with Gawain.

revenge uppon thy body the dethe of my three brethirne!" (1215.11-14). Finally Lancelot reluctantly accepts the counsel of his knights and kinsmen when they can no longer bear Gawain's insults and agrees to fight Gawain—twice.

Since both of the combats follow similar patterns and have similar results, I will treat them together. In both cases we see still more of Lancelot's chivalric virtues at work. It turns out that Gawain is magically possessed of a charm which increases his strength until noon, at which point it returns to normal. In adopting a strategy to cope with Gawain's unfair advantage Lancelot shows both his wisdom—at least from a tactical standpoint—and his prowess. But he also shows his mercy when, in both cases, he adamantly refuses to strike Gawain once he has wounded him so badly that Gawain can no longer stand (1217.29-31 and 1220.27-29)—and despite Gawain's continued taunts even after he has fallen (1217.33-1218.3 and 1220.32-1221.2). Indeed, he also shows mercy in warning Gawain before the second fight that he has figured out Gawain's magical trick and can easily counter it (1219.5-8).

Kenneth Hodges' central claim in *Forging Chivalric Communities* is that Malory presents various forms of chivalry not to suggest that only one is the right one, but simply to represent the competing styles and show how they contribute to the fall of Arthur's Kingdom. According to Hodges, this polyphony of chivalric voices cannot be unified or reconciled—much like the various chivalries of Malory's day—and Malory intentionally preserves the diverse style of his sources in order to highlight the contrast of the competing styles of chivalry. As Hodges puts it, "Malory is not demonstrating the superiority of one set of values over another; he is dramatizing the ongoing and

seemingly irresolvable struggle between competing values" (22). While I agree that Malory presents the variety of different "chivalries" in his knights, my analysis above shows that there is indeed "one set of values" that Malory prefers over the others—that represented by Lancelot. As I have shown, through the literary principle of foils Malory extends the score-keeping tendency of his knights into a comparison of the quantity and quality of knightly virtues—or lack of them—in even his most famous knights.

Throughout Malory knights praise men of prowess, strong in deeds "of their hands," but they are deeply regretful when they hear of men of great prowess but who do not follow accepted chivalric practice (the other virtues); this demonstrates their consensus that it takes more than prowess to make a true knight. Score-keeping not only gives worship to those strong "in their hands," but also ensures that the most successful knights are also the ones most likely to try to maintain their honor by additional means. That is, the more they are observed or "under the spotlight," the more they feel the pressure to conform to ideal knightly practice. So worship itself is not just praise but a means to ensure that knightly prowess is channeled rightly.

In the following chapter, I will focus more specifically on Lancelot's contrasts with Arthur and Gawain as well as Tristram, examining all four from the standpoint of their leadership skills in war and understanding of justice. We will find that Malory continues his literary technique of development by contrast, and frequently violent conflicts, right up to the very end of his text.

CHAPTER IV

MALORY'S BALANCED AND COMPREHENSIVE TREATMENT OF WAR

Despite the sheer narrative space devoted to tournaments and the combats of errant knights, it is in war that Arthur's kingdom begins and ends. Indeed, Uther's internecine wars which predate Arthur's birth and the references to crusading in Malory's closing lines well after Arthur's death alert us to the importance of this large-scale conflict in *Le Morte Darthur*. The previous chapter on tournament and individual combat established that Malory is, in effect, keeping score. The outstanding critical question as concerns Malory's treatment of war is whether Lynch is correct in claiming that, first, Malory has no overall consistent, comprehensive view as to whether war is desirable or not, and secondly, that Malory does not treat war with any observable intent to develop larger interpretive commentary. In the first part of this chapter, I argue in agreement with Lynch that Malory's treatment of war is complex, since, for example, Malory greatly values honor as a motive for war. But in contrast to Lynch, I also argue that Malory does indeed depict the suffering and other negative consequences of combat in war. In the second part of this chapter, I demonstrate that Malory's treatment of war is clearly judgmental, particularly in his comparison of Arthur and Lancelot as war commanders.

Since the Arthur-Lancelot contrast is so central to Malory's final book, and since "the end crowns all," it seems clear that Lynch's views are inadequate on both counts: Malory does make implicit ethical judgments about war, and he does use warfare to make

a major interpretive point, namely to stress the superiority of Lancelot to Arthur, both as

to tactics and ethics. This analysis, since it once again rests on the device of character

contrasts, ties in with the previous discussion of combat, in which character contrasts

demonstrate Lancelot's superiority in knightly, single, combat. As my authorities for the

medieval views on the tactics and ethics of war, I will use Vegetius as well as the

chivalric manuals by Charny, Bouvet, and Christine de Pizan.

War: Worshipful and Destructive

As we saw in the previous chapter, Geoffroi de Charny offers the now-famous

maxim: *qui plus fait, miex vault*, but he makes very clear that war provides the best

opportunity for earning reputation because it subsumes both the jousting skills and the

melee skills of the knight. I include most of the passage since it anticipates Malory's

view of the worshipful side of war:

> . . . no one should speak except in favorable and honorable terms, especially in
> relation to armed exploits in war, in whatever region, provided that they are
> performed without reproach. But it seems to me that in the practice of arms in war it
> is possible to perform in one day all the three different kinds of military art, that is
> jousting, tourneying, and waging war, for war requires jousting with the point of the
> lance and striking with the edge of the sword as in a tournament, and attacking with
> the swordthrust and other weapons, as war demands. Therefore one should value
> and honor men-at-arms engaged in war more highly than any other men-at-arms; for
> in the practice of arms in jousts some are pleased enough with what they do without
> undertaking any other deeds of arms. The same is true in relation to tournaments, for
> some are satisfied with taking part in them and not in any other use of arms. And
> these two uses of arms are both to be found in armed combat in war. It is therefore a
> great and honorable thing that these uses of arms, of which some feel they have

achieved enough by performing just one, should all be carried out together by men-at-arms engaged in war each day they have to fight on the battlefield. For this reason you should love, value, praise, and honor all those whom God by his grace has granted several good days on the battlefield, when they win great credit and renown for their exploits; for it is from good battles that great honors arise and are increased, for good fighting men prove themselves in good battles . . . . (89-91)

I will argue that Kay, Balin, and Tristram are all knights who provide examples of the great worship to be won in war. Yet, as I will show, they all fall short of Malory's knightly ideal.

Sir Kay in particular exemplifies Charny's views of the superiority of worship won in war. In Malory's Book III, Kay is depicted as a relatively mediocre fighter when Lancelot has to rescue him from three knights (273.6-30). Lancelot defeats all three and even refuses Kay's help. Later, when Lancelot rides forth in Kay's armor, he seems to be a magnet for any who would have an easy victory (274.33-278.16). Nevertheless, Kay has a worshipful reputation largely founded on his previous successes in Arthur's wars. For example, when Arthur's forces are outnumbered in facing King Nero, in the battle which follows "sir Kay the Seneschall dud passyngely well, that dayes of hys lyff the worship never went frome hym" (75.29-30). Furthermore, in the War with the Five Kings, Kay sees the kings approach and, despite that fact that he has only three companions, offers to fight "two of the beste of them" and adds to his fellows, "than may ye three undirtake for all the other three" (128.35-37). Again Kay does so well in the fight that Arthur says, "That was well stryken . . . and worshipfully haste thou holde thy promise; therefore I shall honoure the whyle that I lyve" (129.13-15). Because of Kay's success, "allwayes queen Gwenyvere praysed sir Kay for his dedis" (129.17-18). Indeed,

Guinevere adds, "What lady that ye love and she love you nat agayne, she were gretly to blame. And among all ladyes . . . I shall bere your noble fame, for ye spake a great worde and fulfilled hit worshipfully" (129.19-22).

In addition to Kay, Balin and Tristram offer examples of knights who win great worship in war despite the fact that most readers would not normally think of them in such a context. Balin, who seems to illustrate a knight most unlucky in combat in that even his victories frequently turn out to be disasters, does indeed win great worship in the battles against King Nero.

Balin intentionally seeks worship in war. After incurring Arthur's disfavor, immediately he seeks to redeem himself by attacking Arthur's enemy, King Roins. He says to his brother Balan that "Royens lyeth at the sege of the Castell Terrable, and thydir woll we draw in all goodly haste to preve oure worship and prouesse uppon hym" (70.25-27). As the two brothers journey toward their encounter with Roins, Merlin stops them with encouragement and advice. He says, "Com on . . . and ye shall have grete worship. And loke that ye do knightly, for ye shall have need" (73.27-28). Apparently the thought of earning worship as well as recovering Arthur's love is enough to drive Balin on, for he replies, "As for that . . . dred you nat, for we woll do what we may" (73.29-30). In the encounter which results, where Balin and Balan alone defeat Roins and his escort of forty knights, Malory has nothing to say about worship earned in the fight—which does not quite qualify as a battle; nevertheless, Arthur is pleased to hear that "hys moste enemy was takyn and disconfite" (74.20-22). Malory reserves his praise for Balin's success in battle:

> So at that tyme com in [Balin] and his brother, but they dud so mervaylously that the kynge and all the knyghtes mervayled of them. And all they that behelde them seyde they were sente frome hevyn as angels other devilles from helle. And kynge Arthure seyde himself they they were the doughtyeste knyghtes that ever he sawe, for they gaff such strokes that all men had wonder of hem. (75.34-76.5)

And Arthur acknowledges Balin's deeds in war: "Be my fayth . . . they ar two manly knyghtes, and namely that Balyne passith of proues off ony knight that ever y founde, for much am I beholdynge unto hym. Wolde God he wolde abyde with me!" (78.20-23).[1]

Most readers would think of Tristram in association with tournament and errantry, but even he gains some fame in war. Though Lancelot is "passing wrothe" at him for preferring to return to Cornwall "for the love of La Beale Isode" instead of joining Arthur in his campaign to free Britain from Roman hegemony (195.8-10), he performs admirably in war later in the text when Cornwall is invaded. Answering Mark's plea for help, Tristram must wait to recover from a wound he received in jousting.[2] After an initial battle without the help of Tristram, Mark's forces almost suffer defeat. Tristram heals enough to take charge of Mark's forces, orders the invading King Elyas' ships

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[1] That Malory praises Balin's deeds in battle rather than his success in winning against twenty to one odds in the combat with Roins seems to bear out Charny's claims above about war earning the greatest amount of worship.

[2] It is not clear if the delay caused by Tristram's wound comes from Malory's source; see Vinaver's discussion of the difficulty posed by the surviving manuscripts as regards this incident (1495). One is tempted to wonder if Malory, given Charny's views on worship and war, is not implicitly criticizing Tristram's almost obsessive devotion to jousting.

burned, and a second day of battle ensues.[3]   After the first encounter between Dynas and

the invaders, Tristram joins the fighting: "So with that cam sir Trystram and slew two

knyghtes with one speare. Than he slew on the right honde and on the lyffte honde, that

men mervayled that ever he might do such dedis of armys" (622.9-12). So even Tristram

finally earns great worship in battle.

The greatest worship in battle, however, Malory reserves for Gawain, Arthur, and

Lancelot. Beginning with Gawain, who also intentionally seeks worship in war, we find

that, in fact, Gawain fiercely protects his worship while simultaneously seeking more.

During Gawain's and Bors' embassy to the Romans, Sir Gayus claims that Gawain and

the English are merely braggarts (207.21-24), and Gawain, "gravid . . . at his grete

wordys," beheads him (207.25-27).[4] Gawain and Bors flee the Roman camp to where

they have laid an ambush,[5] and a terrific battle ensues from which Gawain barely escapes

with his life. But word of the prisoners Gawain, Bors, and their men have captured—as

well as their great deeds of arms—reaches Arthur, and he "was than marvelously rejoiced

and cleyght knight be knight in his armys and sayd, 'All the worship in the worlde ye

welde! Be my faith, there was never kyng sauff myself that welded evir such knyghtes"

(217.5-9).

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[3] I discuss the wisdom, or lack thereof, in Tristram's cutting off Elyas' forces from retreat
according to the principle of Vegetius below.
[4] This incident is in Malory's source (see *MA* lines 1346-1354), but it is interesting to
note that neither Malory nor his source give one word of censure toward Gawain's
violent response for killing a man while, implicitly, under a flag of truce. For both
authors, the Roman's insult is apparently sufficient justification.

[5] I discuss the tactic of ambush in more detail below.

Perhaps the most extreme case of one of Malory's knights seeking worship in war is Arthur himself. He even puts good military strategy aside and sends warning to the Roman emperor, Lucius, "to dresse his batayle" before the fighting begins since "that is more worshyppe than . . . to overryde maysterless men" (206.7-14, Malory's addition 1382). But Arthur's worship in war begins well before his conflict with Rome. In Book I, Arthur fights a series of wars in order to put down rebellions and consolidate his realm. He also gains the respect of both his knights as well as his enemies in all of the battles these wars entail. For example, in first battle with the six kings who question Arthur's parentage and refuse to listen to Merlin's explanation, the newly-crowned king faces his "trial under fire" and does well: "alweyes kynge Arthur on horseback leyd on with a swerd and dyd merveillous dedes of armes, that many of the kinges had grete envye of his dedes and hardynesse" (19.9-11). Later, after four more kings have joined the revolt, Arthur sends messengers to Kings Ban and Bors of France entreating their aid. At the Battle of Bedgrayne, their combined forces meet the rebels, and an enormous clash of armies gives Arthur ample opportunity to prove his prowess and gain worship. During the battle, Malory tells us, "kynge Arthure dud so mervaylesly in armys that all men had wonder" (29.13-14), but the worship lasts long after the war is over. One hundred pages later we find that "Arthur hath the floure of chivalry of the worlde with hym, and hit preved by the grete batayle he did with the eleven kynges" (127.28-30). Even Merlin, who, as we will see below, sometimes criticizes Arthur's excess in war, forecasts Arthur's worshipful death in battle in contrast to his own (44.24-30).

As is true of Tristram, one does not normally associate Lancelot with war but rather with tournaments and, most of all, with errantry. But Lancelot also intentionally seeks worship in war. For example, during the war with Rome, Clegis informs Lancelot and Cador that their group escorting Arthur's prisoners to Paris is now facing six times their number of Roman forces lying in ambush. Clegis then says to the two leaders, "And therefore, lordynges, fight you behovys . . . other ellys shunte for shame, chose whether ye lykys" (213..29-30). Both Lancelot and the reader can tell by Clegis' use of "behovys" and "shame" which choice he prefers, and Lancelot concurs, saying, "Nay, be my faith . . . to turne is no tyme, for here is all olde knyghtes of grete worship that were never shamed. And as for me and my cousins of my bloode, we ar but late made knyghtes, yet wolde we be loth to lese the worship that oure eldyrs have deservyd" (213.31-35).[6] In the source text, the *Alliterative Morte Arthur*, Lancelot is not present with the forces transferring the prisoners, but Malory has added him to the episode so he can show Lancelot as a war leader (Vinaver's Commentary 1387). In the battle with the Romans, Lancelot wins great worship. As Malory puts it, "sir Launcelot ded so grete dedys of armys that day that sir Cador and all the Romaynes had mervayle of his might" and adds "ther was nother kynge, cayser, nother knight that day might stoned hym ony buffette. Therefore was he honoured dayes of his lyff, for never ere or that day was he

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[6] Vinaver notes parallels between Arthur's movements in the Roman war and those of Henry V's Agincourt campaign, but what he does not note is that it is not Arthur who must cope with similar odds as Henry V faced at Agincourt, it is Lancelot here in this scene. Bennett notes that modern historians list Henry's forces at Agincourt numbered somewhat under 6,000 men, while accounts written just after the battle list the French forces from as few as 30,000 to as many as 150,000. Even considering the medieval penchant for hyperbolizing the numbers of forces in an army or battle, the best odds Henry faced would be roughly six to one. See Bennett 66-72.

proved so well, for he and sir Bors and sir Lyonel was but late afore at an hyghe feste

made all three knyghtes" (216.19-25). Even the experienced Cador cannot resist praising

Lancelot, as he reports to Arthur, "Sir . . . there was none of us that fayled other, but of

the knyghthode of sir Launcelot hit were mervayle to telle. And of his bolde cosyns ar

proved full noble knyghtes, but of wyse wytte and of grete strengthe of his ayge sir

Launcelot hath no felowe" (217.10-14). Lancelot continues to win worship in war when

he personally captures the Roman banner.

> Than sir Launcelot lepe forth with his stede evyn streyght unto sir Lucyus, and in his
> wey he smote thorow a kynge that stoode althirnexte hym, and his name was
> Jacounde, a Sarezen full noble. And than he russed forth unto sir Lycyus and smote
> hym on the helme with his swerde, that he felle to the earthe; and syth he rode thryse
> over hym on a rowe, and so toke the baner of Rome and rode with hit away unto
> Arthure himself. And all seyde that hit sawe there was never knight dud more
> worship in his dayes." (220.15-23)[7]

Thus, Malory appears, from such liberal praise of those who fight well in war, to

agree with Charny that the greatest worship comes from success in war. But a number of

critics have questioned Malory's presentation of war. Radulescu, for example, notes

what she feels is "the increasing sense of violence in Malory's narrative" and argues that

"we can draw the conclusion that excess [especially in violence] is presented gradually,

so that there is an increased sense of doom which finally dominates the narrative" in

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[7] Vinaver shows that Lancelot's striking down the Saracen Jacounde is Malory's addition
to the source. Malory clarifies Lucius' death from the account in the source, for there
Luicus is actually killed twice, once by Lancelot and once by Arthur. That Lucius
survives Lancelot's attack is Malory's correction. Finally, "there was never knight dud
more worship in his dayes" is Malory's addition. See Vinaver's Commentary 1390.

Book VIII ("Oute of measure" 131). Lynch seems to concur when he observes that

"Malory's narrative tends to act in the manner of his best knights, suppressing the most

unpleasant consequences of fighting" (*Book of Arms* 50) because "a fight in Malory has

its own structural integrity, a beginning independent of plot causes and effects" (56). As

Lynch would have it, Malory delays presenting the destructive side of violent conflict

until the last minute: "The narrative impulse . . . is to undo or defer as long as possible

the consequences—political and bodily—of fighting" (77). If, as Lynch asserts,

"courtesy, humility, and faith in God . . . are really adjuncts to the prime value placed on

arms" (45),[8] then we might assume that Malory will give little attention to the

destructiveness caused by war, but such is not the case.[9] Lynch seems to gloss over

Malory's presentation of the more negative side of the sacrifices required to win prowess

as well as the destruction which spills out of the knightly class and onto the general

public, something which Malory, at least, does not ignore. Indeed, *Le Morte Darthur*

[8] Surprisingly, this quotation occurs in the midst of Lynch's discussion of the healing of Sir Urry, where no combat is involved at all.

[9] Whetter gives a more balanced view of Malory's narrative of war, showing that Malory presents the bad along with the good. "The *consequences* of combat are Malory's focus as much as the combats themselves" (170 emphasis in original). Whetter argues that in the war between Arthur and Lancelot "Malory no longer presents the glory to be won in war, merely the destruction" (179). Yet he goes on to claim that "we cannot conclude that Malory is condemning war" (170); rather Whetter argues that "Malory throughout the *Morte Darthur* asks us to accept each side of this equation as equally valid" (171).

presents not only general slaughter and devastation but also extreme grief from many of

the central characters over the effects of war.[10]

Malory's critique of the general slaughter which war often causes occurs early in his

text, contrary to Radulescu's view that it appears only late in the narrative. In Book I,

when the combined forces of Arthur, Ban, and Bors manage to push back the eleven

kings across a river, Arthur is prepared to pursue them further, but Merlin rides up and

says to him, "Thou hast never done. Hast thou nat done inow? Of three score thousande

thys day hast thou leffte on lyve but fyftene thousand! Therefore hit ys tyme to sey

'Who!' for God ys wroth with the for thou wolt never have done" (36.26-29).[11] Malory's

presentation of slaughter continues in Book II, where Malory multiplies the one thousand

casualties suffered by the Romans in the source by a factor of ten.[12] The passage is worth

examining closely:

> So forth they wente with the kynge, tho knyghtes of the Round Table. Was never
> kyng nother knyghtes dud bettir syn God made the worlde. They leyde on with
> longe swerdys and swapped thorow braynes. Shyldys nother no shene armys might
> hem nat withstonde tyll they leyde on the erthe ten thousand at onys. (221.19-24)

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[10] I should point out here that the examples which follow occur throughout the book; they
are not simply postponed as Lynch claims in the passage quoted in the introduction to
this chapter. See *Book of Arms* 77.

[11] That Malory's first major critique of slaughter is applied to Arthur may well be telling.
I will return to this passage in the final part of this chapter in my discussion of Arthur's
bellicose tendencies. Vinaver's commentary indicates that Merlin does tell Arthur to stop
in the source for this passage, but Merlin does not make as clearly a moral point there.
The reference to God's wrath that Arthur "wolt never have done" is original to Malory.
See his Commentary 1294.

[12] See Vinaver's Commentary 1391.

Certainly the passage could be read as heroic because none "dud bettir syn God made the worlde," but such a reading would have to ignore the undercurrent of pity in the spilled brains and the failed attempts to ward off the blows of Arthur's knights and the lifeless bodies "leyde on the erthe ten thousand at onys."

Slaughter is also evident in Book V. When the "Syssones," under King Elyas, first attack Cornwall, the forces of King Mark and sir Dynas "were dryvyn to the castall of Tyntagyll with grete slaughter of people" (620.6-8). The "mortalyté" (620.12) is so great that Mark sends to Tristram for "rescow" (620.21). Tristram arrives, orders Elyas' invasion fleet "brent . . . unto the colde water" at night (621.29-30) and leads Mark's army out to battle the next morning. The battle lasts all day and results, once again, in "grete slaughter of peple" (622.22), so much so in fact that "for wounded peple every party withdrew to their resseyte" (622.23) and, Malory assures the reader, "wyte you well eythir party were loth to fight more" (622.28-29).

The slaughter continues when Arthur makes war on Lancelot in Book VIII. Lancelot, finally goaded into battle by his men, meets Arthur's forces in their first battle, "And anone there began a grete stowre and much people were slayne" (1192.3-4). At the end of the day, with the battle over, forces on both sides "buryed the dede and serched the wounded men, and leyde to their woundes soffte salves" (1193.18-20). A second day of battle follows the first, but this time Lancelot's forces clearly have the upper hand. The "verry pité" of Lancelot moves him to allow Arthur's forces to withdraw in good order, though both sides "buryed the dede and put salve unto the wounded men" (1194.1-4).

Malory's repetition of the casualties and their treatment only serves to reinforce the human costs in suffering and death from war.

At the final battle of Salisbury Plain, Malory retains the number of the dead in his source yet manages to increase the sadness: "And thus they fought all the longe day, and never stynted tylle the noble knyghtes were layde to the colde erthe. And ever they fought style tylle hit was nere nyght, and by than was there an hondred thousand leyde dede uppon the downe" (1236.6-10). That Malory repeats the image of the corpses "layde to the colde erthe" and "leyde dede uppon the downe" only increases the *pathos* of the scene.[13] But perhaps the real horror is the ghastly vision of the looters pillaging the dead and mercilessly slaughtering the dying. Lucan, suffering himself from multiple wounds,

> harkened by the moonelyght how that pyllours and robbers were com into the fylde to pyll and to robbe many a full noble knight of brochys and bees and of many a good rynge and many a ryche juell. And who that were nat dede all oute, there they slewe them for their harneys and their ryches. (1237.34-1238.4)

In addition to images of the dead and dying in war, Malory also shows the devastation war can cause. For example, when the five kings invade Arthur's kingdom, they seem bent on nothing but destruction: "a grete oste was entirde into the londis of kynge Arthure and brent and slewe and destroyed clene byfore hem both the cities and castels, that hit was pité to here" (126.35-36). Even Malory's book of Gareth, largely a

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[13] Compare this passage to the more simply stated version in the Stanzaic *Morte Arthure* (lines 3367-3376).

story of knight errantry, contains images of "muche smoke and grete noyse" which mark

the siege of Lyones' castle by the Red Knight of the Red Lands (319.33).

Perhaps the best example of the devastation caused by war may be laid at Arthur's

feet in his campaign against Lancelot. The source text, the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*,

provides the basic idea of Arthur's destructive scorched-earth policy:

> Now are they shipped on the se
> And wenden over the water wide;
> Of Benwick when they mighte see,
> With grete rout they gonne up ride;
> Withstood them neither stone ne tree,
> But brent and slogh on ich a side . . . . (lines 2532-2537)

But note that, in Malory's version, the devastation is considerably increased: "And so the

kynge passed the see and landed upon sir Launcelottis londis, and there he brente and

wasted, thorow the vengeaunce of sir Gawain, all that they might overrenne" and "made

full grete destruccion and waste" (1211.12-17). The source poem implies that Benwick is

closer to the sea than in Malory's version, so the only area Arthur destroys is that

immediately surrounding Benwick castle (they can see the castle as soon as they land in

the poem). In Malory, however, Arthur's forces march across miles of France,

destroying as they go. Following the previous passage, Lionel advises Lancelot, "I woll

gyff you thys counceyle: lat us kepe oure stronge-walled townys untyll they have hunger

and colde, and blow their nayles . . ." (1211.24-26).[14] By using "townys," Lionel implies

that Arthur's forces either have had to march a long distance or are spread out over a

great area—or both—and highlights the extent of Arthur's destruction.

Malory also presents the negative side of war in his numerous scenes of characters

weeping or expressing pity over deaths suffered in battle. In Book I, for example, Kings

Ban and Bors join the battle to aid Arthur against the eleven rebel kings. King Lot,

leading Arthur's enemies, sees the need for an orderly retreat from the onslaught of the

fresh forces. They cause so much damage among his troops that Lot "wepte for pité and

dole that he saw so many good kngyhtes take their ende" (33.6-7).

We find another example of weeping in Book II. When Arthur hears Cador's report

of the recent battle with the Romans where Berell, Aladuke, Maurel, Mores, Manaduke,

and Mandyff—among many others—were slain, Arthur weeps with grief and "with a

keverchoff wiped his iyen" (217.16-24). Arthur is distraught in the source text, but the

weeping is Malory's addition.[15]

The weeping continues in Book II when Gawain and Gotelake weep for the death of

a child in battle. The boy, Chastelayne, manages to kill one of Arthur's enemy chieftains

in one of the Roman battles, but he cannot escape the Roman counter-attack.

Unfortunately for the boy, "than they chaced that chylde, that he nowhere might ascape,

for one with a swerde the hales of the chylde he smote in too. Whan Gawayne hit sawe

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[14] Lionel continues with a recommendation for a counter-attack. I discuss the rest of this
passage below.

[15] See Vinaver's Commentary 1388.

he wepte with all his herte and inwardly he brente for sorrow" (239.16-20). Gawain is

sorrowful in the source poem (see lines 2966-8), but his weeping is Malory's addition.[16]

Gotelake, a "good man of armys" also weeps at the story "that the wete water wente

doune his chykks" (239.22-23).

One might argue that it is natural enough for a commander to weep for the loss of his

troops or for an adult to weep for the death of a child, but Tristram provides an example

of a knight pitying the fall of his enemy. In Book V, after Elyas' invading forces have

fought two tough battles with the Cornish, Tristram and Elyas agree to settle the matter

with minimal loss of additional life and engage in a combat of champions. After a long,

grueling fight, Tristram finally defeats Elyas, who staggers about on the ground before

dying. Before Elyas collapses, Tristram has the chance to express his sorrow for the

defeated king (626.1-5).

Command and Control: Malory's Use of Vegetius

Malory's interest in war extends beyond simply presenting both the worship to be

won and the devastation caused by war. He also presents an exacting critique of war

from a military standpoint, as a tactician and not simply as an admiring, but unskilled,

devotee. We saw in my introductory chapter as well as in the introduction to the present

chapter that numerous scholars express opinions about the overall meaning—or lack

thereof—of war in *Le Morte Darthur*, and we also saw in the second chapter above on

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[16] Vinaver's Commentary 1402.

armor that Derek Brewer is, to date, the only scholar who treats the specific items of

knightly material culture in Malory, but these two poles of scholarly attention, the very

general and the extremely specific, leave open a vast ground in the middle which is

largely untouched in all of Malory criticism: Malory's treatment of war from a tactical

standpoint. Only one scholar has addressed this issue. In "Military Strategy in Malory

and Vegetius' *De re militari*," Diane Bornstein argues that Malory uses Vegetius to alter

his sources in numerous places as regards tactical matters, but further claims that Malory

> In spite of all his admiration for the Arthurian world . . . has a critical attitude toward
> the foolhardy courage and individualistic escapades of the knights of the Round
> Table. Vegetius gave him a standard by which to judge them. Instead of pursuing
> damsels and the grail, they should have been defending King Arthur and the realm of
> England, like disciplined, patriotic soldiers. (128)

While I agree with Bornstein's general claim that Malory used Vegetius in some

form,[17] I will argue in this section that Bornstein misinterprets some of Vegetius' advice,

misses entire categories of tactical issues which Malory includes, and, finally, that

Malory's criticism of the "Arthurian world" is far more focused than Bornstein allows.

She claims that Malory "admires Arthur's heroic spirit" (218) despite his censure of

Arthurian chivalry. I will argue, in contrast, that Malory uses Vegetian principles

specifically to cast doubt on Arthur's tactical ability while simultaneously praising

Lancelot's. I organize my argument according to Vegetius' advice on the following

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[17] Cherewatuk praises Arthur's strategy and claims that he follows Vegetius ("Grete
Booke" 55), but she does not discuss such use from a tactical or military standpoint. She
merely makes the general observation.

categories: descriptions of the order of battle and maneuvering on the field, the importance of reconnaissance and spies in war, the use of surprise attack and ambush, and knowledge of one's men as well as the disposition of the enemy.

As far as descriptions of the order of battle are concerned, Bornstein only notes that Malory changes the material in his source and follows the advice of Vegetius when he has both Arthur and Lancelot divide their forces into three divisions before the clash with each other in Book VIII.[18] Bornstein does not cite a specific page in Vegetius for this practice, but Vegetius does, more or less, recommend it. What Vegetius actually does is list specific positions for ten different cohorts, but these are all organized into the center and right and left "wings" (46-48) which medieval writers refer to as "battles."[19] While it is true that this passage represents Malory's change to his source, Bornstein is unaware that elsewhere in *Le Morte Darthur* Malory retains the "batayles" of his sources and thus she gives Malory a more "Vegetian" flavor than he has on this point.[20]

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[18] Bornstein's observation 126. The relevant passage in Malory is 1191.26-29. For Malory's changes, see Vinaver's Commentary 1636.

[19] See Bornstein's note 7 on page 129 for the edition of Vegetius she uses, written for Lord Berkeley in Middle English in 1408 AD. This manuscript, never printed, is unavailable to scholars without access to the Pierpont Morgan Library, so I have used the standard modern English translation by Milner which I have checked against Clark. As I will argue below, Malory most likely knew Vegetius through Christine de Pizan's work or some similar compliation, but we probably can never know for sure. See also Hall's *Weapons and Warfare in Renaissance Europe* (27) for the use of the term "battle" and both medieval and Renaissance organizations on the field.

[20] To cite only one example, Malory retains from his source Tristram's division of Mark's army into six battles (621.25-28). See Vinaver's commentary, 1495. Elsewhere, Mark uses three battles, but this *is* in Malory's source (see 619.28-33 and Vinaver's commentary 1495).

What Bornstein overlooks is Malory's use of Vegetius' advice on maneuvering

troops on the field. Vegetius gives no less than seven forms of engagement with the

enemy in an open-field battle (98-101), but rather than list them all, I will simply note

that each employs differing tactics designed to either bunch up or disperse the enemy in

order to destroy his command and control system as well as unit cohesion. In Malory,

Kings Ban and Bors maneuver their forces so that "bothe the northirne batylyles [of the

eleven rebel kings] that were parted hurteled for grete drede" (33.8-9). This maneuver is

Malory's addition,[21] and it forces the troops of Arthur's enemies in on each other, thus

destroying their ability to withdraw properly from the field—which is what they were

attempting at the time.

Bornstein also fails to note Malory's knowledge of Vegetius' recommendations on

the precautions necessary for leaving fortified positions when facing immanent battle.

Vegetius advises the commander to exercise caution in this tricky maneuver:

> You should also take care if you lead your men to battle from a camp or city when
> the enemy is present, lest, while the army is marching out in defile through narrow
> gates, it may be worsted by massed and prepared hostile forces. Therefore one
> should ensure that all soldiers get clear of the gates and form a battle-line before the
> enemy arrives. (86)

But Vegetius advises that if the commander has reason to fear he will not be able to

deploy his troops in time, he should wait until a better opportunity arises:

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[21] See Vinaver's Commentary 1293.

But if [the enemy] arrives for battle while your men are still inside the city, postpone your exit or at least pretend to. Then when the enemy troops start hurling insults at men they do not expect to come out, when they turn their attention to booty or withdrawal, when they break ranks, that is the moment for your crack troops to sally forth against the stunned enemy and attack them in force unexpectedly. (86-87)

Malory seems to have had this advice in mind in two contrasting battle episodes. First, in Tristram's battle with Elyas, the Cornish defenders have to leave a castle when the invading forces are immediately outside: "Thus they within issued oute, and they withoute sette freely upon them. And there sir Dynas ded grete dedis of armys; natforthan sir Dynas and his felyshyp were put to the wors" (622.5-8). Note that Malory's description implies that the group led by Dynas does not have time to deploy on the field fully before being immediately assaulted by Elyas' army, thus leading to their tactical disadvantage. Vinaver's commentary on this battle shows that Malory got it from his source, the *Romance of Tristram in Prose* (see 1451 and 1495), but Malory may well have had Lancelot's better handling of a similar situation in mind when he keep this detail in his text.

In contrast to Tristram's maneuvering his men out of a fortified position, Lancelot has better success. When his forces finally meet those of Arthur after the long siege of Joyous Garde, Lancelot manages to get his host, divided into the three battles discussed above, out of the castle in good order. Lancelot is physically able to do this because Malory provides Joyous Garde with three convenient gates for fast egress:

And than sir Launcelottis felyshyp com oute at the three gatis in full good array; and sir Lyonell cam in the formyst batayle, and sir Launcelot cam in the myddyll, and sir

Bors com oute at the thirde gate. And thus they cam in order and rule as full noble knyghtes. (1191.26-30)

Thus, Lancelot's forces are able to deploy on the field more rapidly than those of Tristram's in the previous passage, which has the effect of demonstrating Lancelot's superior skill over Tristram as a battle commander.

Another point Vegetius makes, and Malory employs in his changes to his sources, is also passed over by Bornstein: the importance of reconnaissance and spying. Vegetius spends two pages of his relatively brief text in stressing the necessity of scouting the territory ahead of an advancing army (71-72). Malory takes note of this advice in his addition of Clegis' report to Lancelot about a Roman ambush ahead of his forces as they transfer prisoners to Paris (213.25-28). This intelligence allows Lancelot time to select his tactics without falling into the trap unawares.[22]

Vegetius is also at pains to warn his readers of the dangers of enemy spies (72). Malory also engages the issues of reconnaissance and spying in two small, but significant, changes to his sources. Both of these changes seem designed to shed a bad light on Arthur. Malory's first change involves Merlin's plan to thwart enemy reconnaissance. As Arthur's forces near Bedgrayne in an attempt to locate and engage the eleven rebel kings, "there was made such an ordinaunce afore by Merlyon that there sholde no man of warre ryde nothir go in no contrey on this side Trente water but if he had a tokyn frome kynge Arthure, wherethorow the kynges enemyes durst nat ryde as

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[22] I discuss how Lancelot handles this situation in more detail below.

they dud tofore to aspye" (25.11-16). Vinaver notes that in Malory source for this plan, it is Arthur's idea and not Merlin's (1290). Given the advice from Vegetius, this apparently minor change causes Arthur to appear naïve since hiding the movement of one's troops from enemy spies should seem common sense even to a commander as green as Arthur is at this point in the text.[23]

Malory's next change regarding intelligence gathering is the addition of the incentive of spying on Margause's part when she comes to Arthur's court for the first time. As Malory says, "And thydir com unto [Arthur] kynge Lottis wyff of Orkeney in maner of a message, but she was sente thydir to aspye the courte of kinge Arthure" (41.12-14). Malory's addition of the spying motivation[24] gives an even more sinister tone to Arthur's disastrous affair with Margause, which of course results in the bastard, Mordred—and therefore makes Arthur's lack of judgment appear all the worse.

Bornstein does a better job with Malory's use of Vegetius on ambushes and surprise attacks, but even here there needs to be some modification to her argument. She reverses the presentation of the sequence of events in Malory where Arthur first uses a surprise attack in Book I but then falls for the same trick in Book II, which has the effect of making Arthur seem less gullible than he actually is in Malory's work. Vegetius advises that a commander "ought not to let slip any opportunity which the enemy's inexperience or negligence offers to us" and adds that if "an ambush is properly detected . . . it suffers

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[23] For the common medieval counter-measures against spying, see the article by Alban generally, but especially pages 89-97.

[24] Vinaver notes that "to aspye" is Malory's addition (1297).

more damage than it was preparing to inflict" (74). He also mentions in this passage the

advantages of a surprise attack on the enemy tents at night, which is exactly the change

Malory makes to his source when Arthur's forces descend upon the camp of the

unsuspecting army of the eleven kings (26.36-27.13).[25] Bornstein correctly notes that

Malory's main change from his source here is having the attack succeed purely because

of military force rather than partly through Merlin's magic.[26]

Given that the above surprise attack occurs early in Book I, it does seem curious that

Arthur falls for a similar trick roughly one hundred pages later. In his war with the five

kings, Arthur is anxious to bring battle to the invaders. Perhaps overconfident, Arthur

rushes north before all of his forces can be drawn up (127.1-14). The five kings realize

Arthur's tactical disadvantage and decide to exploit it:

> And therefore hyghe ye unto hym nyght and day tyll that we be nyghe hym, for the
> lenger he taryeth the bigger he is, and we ever the weyker And he is so courageous
> of himself that he is come to the felde with lytyll peple, and therefore lette us sette
> upon hym or day, and we shall sle downe of his knyghtes that none shall helpe other
> of them. (127.30-36)

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[25] Bornstein incorrectly implies that Vegetius mentions the use of fire in his advice, but
he does not do so. However, Christine's *Deeds of Arms and Chivalry*, which includes
much of Vegetius, praises Scipio, who finds "a way to have fire break out at night in the
tents of he enemy, and then jumped on them with such force that they did not know what
was happening" (47). Christine's reference to fire at night among the tents of the enemy
more exactly matches Malory's addition to his source and strongly suggests that his
knowledge of Vegetius either came directly from, or was supplemented by, Christine's
work. If this is so, then his knowledge of Bouvet's *Tree of Battles* (discussed below) may
have also come to him *via* Christine since she includes so many of Bouvet's opinions on
the just war. For Christine's sources, see Willard's Introduction to *Deeds of Arms and
Chivalry* (2-8). For a thorough examination of the originality of Christine's thought see
The Political Theory of Christine De Pizan by Kate Langdon Forham.

[26] See Vinaver's Commentary 1291.

In the commentary, Vinaver notes that Malory alters his source so the five kings have not only greater surprise—their attack comes at dawn in the source—but superiority in numbers (1339). Once again we see Arthur in a rather bad light as far as tactics are concerned.

Bornstein claims that Merlin's counsel not to pursue the retreating six rebel kings early in Book I (*Works* 19.26-27) is based on Vegetius' recommendation that a cornered enemy is more dangerous. She is correct on this point as regards Malory's probable use of the principle, but she fails to note that Vegetius introduces the point as a segue to what is commonly referred to as "Scipio's Golden Bridge" (101). This is the idea that one should allow the enemy a hope of escape in the face of defeat. What the enemy does not know, however, is that one has already prepared an ambush along the enemy's escape route. Thus, one keeps the enemy from feeling cornered and therefore fighting more passionately, but at the same time the wise commander can, in effect, safely "slaughter them "unavenged, like sheep" (101).

Malory seems to have the "Golden Bridge" in mind when he implies a criticism of Tristram's battle tactics. As I noted earlier, Tristram burns the ships of Elyas' forces when the latter invades Cornwall. Tristram's mistake, apparently, is to burn the ships *after* Elyas' forces are completely on shore. While Tristram's stratagem may limit Elyas' ability to supply his men, it does nothing to alleviate the immediate threat they pose. As noted above, it only serves to make them fight all the more fiercely. But Malory invents an episode with a similar strategy where Mark's brother, Bodwyn, defeats invading

Saracens. But in Bodwyn's case, he is able to burn the invaders' ships before they are

able to disembark, and thus he manages to slay all 40,000 of them (633.1-634.11).

Vinaver notes that the entire incident is Malory's addition (1500). Thus, Malory's

addition certainly makes it appear that Tristram, in contrast to Bodwyn, is not a student of

Vegetius.

Finally, a large category of Vegetian advice which Bornstein fails to note is his

recommendation that a commander have a clear understanding of men, both their abilities

as well as their moods. He further recommends that this advice should be weighed

against a similar understanding of the enemy. There are a number of examples of

Malory's use of Vegetius on this point, but I would like to focus on one particular

incident, largely Malory's addition to his source, which occurs during Arthur's campaign

against Rome. The episode is the Romans' attempted ambush of a prisoner transfer from

Arthur's main army to Paris, accompanied by a relatively small contingent of knights. In

general outline, the incident can be found in Malory's source, the Alliterative *Morte*

Arthure, but the changes Malory makes to the source material, both before the battle and

after, reveal his subtle understanding of Vegetian principles and highlight a contrast

between Arthur and Lancelot.[27]

Malory's most obvious change to attempted Roman ambush is the addition of

Lancelot to the group of knights on the expedition. Lancelot accompanies Arthur on the

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[27] In Malory, the episode runs from Arthur's summoning the knights for the expedition
on 212.4 and continues to the end of Arthur's and Lancelot's debate about the battle with
the Romans on 218.2. The source text runs from lines 1601 to 1945. Vinaver's
commentary on the episode, on pages 1385-1388, does not note all of the changes that
Malory makes, as I will show.

Roman campaign in the poem, but he is not present with the group transferring the prisoners. Despite his youth (he has only recently been knighted) Malory has him as co-leader of the force along with the more experienced Cador. In the poem, Cador alone is the central commander of the group; thus Malory transfers some of Cador's actions and speeches in the poem to Lancelot in his own version. As we will see, however, the changes are more important than this superficial observation.

In both versions the English suspect a Roman ambush lies in wait (the poem gives 50,000 Romans, a number which Malory increases to 60,000), for certainly it would be difficult to hide so many men. Again, both versions have Clegis, Claryon, and Clement (to use Malory's spelling of the names) ride out to reconnoiter the Roman lines, and Clegis offers a challenge to the Romans to see if any will joust. But here Malory's careful changes begin. In the poem, the Romans defy the challenge and even question the legitimacy of Clegis' coat of arms. As Malory tells it, however, once the Romans realize that Clegis is who he claims, their surly tone softens slightly, and instead of calling Clegis one of Arthur's "rebawdes" as they do in the poem (1705), a king in the Roman group says "Thou besemeste well . . . to be one of the good be thy bright browys" (213.21-22) and adds "there shall none that is here medyll with the this tyme" (212.23-24). When the three knights return to Cador and Lancelot with their report, Lancelot's reading of the Roman disposition as well as his understanding of the abilities of his own men become important in Malory's version, as a careful comparison between the speeches made by Cador in the poem with the speech Malory gives to Lancelot reveals.

In both versions of the episode, the leaders give speeches. Cador says in the poem, "It were shame that we sholde shoun for so little" (1719), disparages the Romans, and then recalls to the minds of his men their loyalty to Arthur and all the riches and lands he will give them if they win. Lancelot, in Malory's version, says nothing about material gain but asserts instead, "to turne is no tyme, for here is all olde knyghtes of grete worship that *were* never shamed. And as for me and my cousins of my bloode, we ar but late made knyghtes, yet wolde we be loth to lese the worship that oure elders have *deservyd*" (213.31-35 emphasis added). Obviously Lancelot is appealing to his men's sense of worship, but his stress on what the older knights have accomplished in the past also serves to reassure the men that there are those among them who can, and have, done great deeds. This stress on the experience of his men directly parallels Vegetius' comment that "no one should despair of the possibility of doing that which has been done in the past" (84). It also echoes Vegetius' assertions that winning always depends on which commander has the most experienced men and uses them to the best advantage, even if his men are outnumbered. As he assures his readers, "Victory is usually due to a small number of men, provided picked men are posted by a highly skilled general in those positions which judgment and utility demand" (100). It is also worth noting in this context that Malory deletes the line in the poem, "no scomfiture in skulkery is scomfit ever" (1644).[28]

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[28] Benson and Foster gloss this to mean, "No attack from ambush is ever defeated" (182). But note my discussion above on Vegetius' opinion about turning the tables on an ambush.

Malory's Lancelot also shows that he follows Vegetian principles in understanding the mood of both his own men as well as that of the enemy. Vegetius stresses the importance of a commander's sense of his troops' mood when he says, "Explore carefully how soldiers are feeling on the actual day they are going to fight. For confidence or fear may be discerned from their facial expression, language, gait, and gesture. . . . You will know to postpone [the battle] if the experienced warriors are afraid of fighting" (87). Malory's Cador, himself an experienced warrior, gives his support after Lancelot's speech, saying in chorus with other knights present: "Ye sey well . . . of youre knightly wordis comfortis us all. And I suppose here is none woll be glad to returne, and as for me . . . I had lever dye this day than onys to turne my bak" (214.1-5). There is no such group agreement from any other knights in the poem.

But Vegetius also gives advice on discovering the temper of the enemy along with one's own troops:

> It is also relevant to find out the character of the adversary himself, his senior staff-officers and chieftans. Are they rash or cautious, bold or timid, skilled in the art of war or fighting from experience or haphazardly? Which tribes on their side are brave or cowardly? . . . What is the morale of the enemy forces? Which side promises itself victory more? By such considerations is the army's courage bolstered or undermined. (81)

That the Roman host "removed a lytyll" in Malory's account at the sight of Lancelot and the other knights charging at them (214.31-35), which they do not in the poem, shows that Lancelot has read the situation correctly from Clegis' report in terms of the

disposition of the Romans as well. As Vegetius puts it, "It is difficult to beat someone who can form a true estimate of his own and the enemy's forces" (109).

Malory makes other changes to his source, not detailed by Vinaver, both in the account of the battle and in Arthur's reaction when he learns of it, but the latter is my concern here. Of course, in both texts Arthur is told of the battle with the Romans, its victorious outcome, and the losses suffered. In the poem, Arthur is immediately incensed that Cador's forces took on such superior numbers and he rounds on his knight:

> Then the worthy king writhes and weeped with his eyen,
> Carpes to his cosin Sir Cador these wordes:
> "Sir Cador, thy corage confoundes us all!
> Cowardly thou castes out all my best knightes!
> To put men in peril, it is no pris holden,
> But the parties were purveyed and power arrayed;
> When thou were stedde on a strenghe thou sholde have with-stonden,
> But yif ye wolde all my steren stroy for the nones! (1920-1927)

In Malory's account, however, Arthur first expresses joy over the victory before criticizing Lancelot, but his tone, while not quite as caustic as Arthur's in the poem, remains much the same. He says to Lancelot, "Youre corrage and youre hardynesse nerehande had you destroyed, for and ye had turned agayne ye had loste no worship, for I call hit but foly to abyde when knyghtes bene overmacched" (217.24-27). In the poem, Cador's reply is lengthier than Lancelot's in Malory's version, being almost sarcastic and wounded at the same time (1928-1937). Malory's Lancelot merely says, "Not so . . . the shame sholde ever have bene oures" (217.28-29), and he is immediately supported not only by Bors' assessment of the situation but also by the more experienced Cador. What

is noteworthy is that in the poem, despite the fact that Cador lacks the support Malory's

knights give to Lancelot, Arthur turns his speech to praise of Cador's great worth and

prowess. Malory's Arthur gives no reply at all. It is as if he is not willing to listen to the

views of the men actually on the scene who, after all, won a great victory, one which

certainly spreads fear of the prowess of Arthur's knights throughout the Roman camp.

Such treatment of Lancelot's bravery and success, as well as that of his men, runs counter

to one of Vegetius' final pronouncements on war: "Bravery is of more value than

numbers" (109).

Malory's Moral Judgment of War

In the first two sections of this chapter I argued that Malory not only presents the

glory and worship to be won in war but also the negative side and, further, that he even

judges war from a military standpoint. In this final section I focus my attention on the

moral dimension of war. Indeed, the most important criticism of Malory's treatment of

war is that *Le Morte Darthur* offers no moral judgment of it whatsoever. Of the critics

who make such a claim, Lynch has argued this point most emphatically. I noted in the

previous chapter that the focus of Lynch's *Malory's Book of Arms: The Narrative of*

Combat in Le Morte Darthur is more on individual combat than war, but some of his

claims there have relevance to my topic in this chapter. For example, Lynch asserts that

Malory is not interested any "wider pattern of moral conduct" in any of his combats (xiii)

and that he "proved incapable of thinking of fighting as possibly wrong in itself" (28).

But in his article, "Thou woll never have done": Ideology, Context and Excess in

Malory's War," Lynch's focus is entirely related to my topic here. For instance, Lynch

sees a "comparative lack of moral emphasis and of moral connection between causes and

effects in Malory's all-important military sphere. . . . Malory's narrative commonly

avoids or downplays its heroes' potential culpability for military violence, yet the

problem will not go away" (26). He adds that "looking over the whole book, it is far

easier to see an *ad hoc*, localized form of apologetics than the consistent application of

one system of moral thought. Indeed, the overall method could be more accurately

categorized as a refusal or avoidance of consistent moral scrutiny" (31).[29]

In contrast to Lynch, I will argue that moral judgment of war is exactly what Malory

presents in Book VIII. Such judgment becomes clear when Malory's changes to his

sources are examined in light of just war theory included in popular chivalric manuals,

particularly those of Charny and Bouvet. I will focus my attention largely on Arthur's

war with Lancelot and its causes, but will also consider more briefly his war with

Mordred.

Of course the root cause of Arthur's war against Lancelot stems from the ambush

which discovers Lancelot in Guinevere's chamber, but despite the apparently suspicious

circumstances of this meeting, there is good reason to question the "raid" from its very

inception. When informed by Aggravayne of the affair openly and "nat in no counceyle,

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[29] See also Batt, who calls violence in Malory "self-justifying" (xv) and finds "a
demonstrable lack . . . of an underpinning of moral legitimization" (xxi) and Cherewatuk,
who argues that Malory "shows little moral concern for moral complexities" ("'Gentyl'
Audiences" 205).

that manye knightis might here" (1061.17-18), Arthur has little choice but to allow an investigation. Partly to ensure justice but partly, it seems, to deny Lancelot the right to trial by combat,[30] Arthur twice commands that the ambushers catch Lancelot "with the dede" (1163.16 and 1163.19). Arthur's fault in this matter, however, lies in two areas. First, and despite Arthur's repeated command, Aggravayne says he will "take [Lancelot] *with the queene*" (1163.31 emphasis added)—not exactly what Arthur had said. Since the matter is obviously of such great import to the entire court, one would think that Arthur, to whom Aggravayne speaks these words directly, would have listened better and caught the shift in nuance. Instead, Arthur only advises Aggravayne and Mordred to take with them "sure felyshyp" (1163.34), and herein lies the second aspect of Arthur's fault. Of the list of twelve knights who join the ambush, all are either Scottish or specifically kin to the Orkney brothers.[31] There is no knight present to prevent the ambushers from telling the story any way they see fit once they have slain Lancelot, which they certainly expect to do given the odds, not to mention Aggravayne's assertion that he will bring Lancelot to Arthur "quycke or dede" (116332). I would argue that, for the sake of fairness, Arthur should have ensured that some knights not loyal to either Aggravayne or Mordred join the group.[32]

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[30] See Arthur's observation that Lancelot "woll fight with hym that bryngith up the noyse, and I know no knight that ys able to mach hym" (1163.16-18).

[31] The list of knights appears on 1164.10-17. Malory specifically notes the allegiances of the knights (lines 14-17). Vinaver observes that in neither of Malory's sources are the additional knights named, much less their loyalties given (1630).

[32] Gawain's sons Florence and Lovell would not qualify as they are too closely tied by kinship to their uncles.

From its very inception as well as its composition of knights, the "posse" sent to capture Lancelot and Gunievere goes well wide of the advice of both Charny and Bouvet as regards slander and good counsel. Charny, for example, states plainly that one "may not accuse [another] of things he cannot really prove and set forth as facts" (117) and strongly warns his readers against tolerating "the slandering of others . . . or speaking ill without good cause" (143). Bouvet even recommends death for any who "spreads dissension and deadly rumour" (132). Hence Arthur's insistence on catching the two suspected lovers in the act, but he fails the test of listening to good counsel as opposed to bad. Charny advises that leaders should "love, honor, and hold dear the good and the wise and the men of worth, to pay heed to their words" but "drive away from their company all worthless people" and "keep away from themselves and their company all men of ill repute and evil way of life and to take no pleasure in them" (143; see also Bouvet 131). Malory's readers already know what his narrator has said, that Aggravayne, who brings this whole matter up, is especially "opynne-mowthed" (1045.21).

Unsurprisingly, the ambush does not go as planned. Not only do the fourteen knights not catch Lancelot in *flagrante delicto*, Malory makes clear that Guinevere's ladies are present in the room (1167.27-28).[33] By unchivalrously trying to force their

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[33] Vinaver points out that both of Malory's sources clearly states that Lancelot and Guinevere go to bed together: *Le Morte Arthur* has ""To bede he gothe with the queen" (line 1806) and the French has "se coucha avec la roïne" (92), yet Malory questions this detail (1165.10-13). Lancelot has even told Bors that he would "go and com agayne and make no taryynge" (1164.30-31) in Guinevere's chamber. For Malory's changes to his sources see Vinaver's Commentary 1630.

way into the chamber, the knights are already exceeding Arthur's specific command for,

since the door is locked, even if Lancelot and Guinever were in bed, they would certainly

be out of it by the time the door is opened. The ambushers engage in even more

unchivalrous behavior when the ambushers promise safe conduct to Lancelot for an

audience with the king (1167.15-17), yet Collgrevaunce attacks him anyway (1167.20-

23) in direct contradiction to Charny's advice against excessive ferocity (143)—let alone

lying. It seems that Arthur has allowed the worst possible group of knights the powers to

arrest his greatest and most popular supporter, not exactly a wise command decision.

Arthur seems to place fellowship ahead of justice, an odd view for a king who

foresees a war brewing. When Arthur learns of Lancelot's escape and his killing all but

Mordred of the ambushers, his words are telling:

> Jesu Mercy! . . . he ys a mervaylous knight of proues. And alas . . . me sore repentith
> that ever sir Launcelot sholde be ayenste me, for now I am sure that the noble
> *felyshyp* of the Rounde Table ys broken for ever, for with hym will many a noble
> knight holde. And now hit ys fallen so . . . that I may nat with my *worship* but my
> queen must suffir dethe. (1174.12-18 emphasis added)

It should be noted that these are not the words of Malory's narrator, but Arthur's own.

As if to reinforce Arthur's regard for Guinevere versus his concern for fellowship,

Malory later adds his lament:

> wyte you well, my harte was never so hevy as hit ys now. And much more I am
> soryar for my good knyghtes losse than for the losse of my fayre queen; for quenys I
> might have inow, but such a felyship of good knyghtes shall never be togydirs in no

company. And now I dare sey . . . there was never Crystyn kynge that ever hylde such a felyshyp togydyrs. (1183.32-1184.7)[34]

The narrator then steps in to explain the law of treason in Arthur's day (1174.19-29), but

that the law can be variously interpreted is made quite clear by Gawain's rebuttal to

Arthur's position above. Gawain's response is to call Arthur's judgment "over hasty"

(1174.33), and he then offers a perfectly reasonable explanation for Lancelot's presence

in Guinevere's chamber: she merely wanted to "rewarde hym for his good dedys that he

had done to her in tymes past" (1175.7-8) so as to *avoid* slander. Gawain then proposes a

simple solution, that Lancelot be given the right to trial by combat (1175.15-18).

But Arthur is determined to deny Lancelot this right,[35] and his words suggest that he

is giving way to a spiteful, vengeful streak buried somewhere deep within himself which

has been allowed to surface:

> I woll nat that way worke with sir Launcelot, for he trustyth so much uppon hys hondis and hys might that he doutyth no man. And therefore for my queen he shall nevermore fight, for she shall have the law. And if I may gete sir Launcelot, wyte you well he shall have as shamefull a dethe. (1175.19-24)

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[34] Vinaver claims that this lament is Malory's elaboration of his French source (1635), but "elaboration" is hardly the right word since the French says nothing about Guinevere.

[35] Affirmed by Bouvet, who says, "such combat is *due* where the matter calls for it" (117 emphasis added). Since Gawain's solution would put an end to the problem, the matter does seems to call for it—rather than the breaking of the Round Table which will surely result.

Obviously, by "have the law" Arthur means a sentence of death, but his use of "law"

connotes the legal basis for the decision. That this is not entirely—or even clearly—a

legal decision, however, is suggested not only by Gawain's differing interpretation and

therefore equally legal trial-by-combat solution, but also by Arthur's emotional "wyte

you well" and "shamefull" in pronouncing Lancelot's fate. In the English poem Arthur

consults his knights, and they all agree on the sentence (1920-1925). Vinaver notes that

in the French source "Arthur decides that the Queen must die, and then compels *his*

barons to pass the sentence" (1632 emphasis added). By eliminating Arthur's

counselors' participation entirely, Malory places the sole responsibility for the death

sentence on Arthur's shoulders.

    Seeming bent on revenge, Arthur tries to convince Gawain by reminding him that

Lancelot slew two of Gawain's sons in his escape along with his brother Aggravayne

(1175.27-33), but Gawain replies that he warned them not to oppose Lancelot (1176.1-

11). Nevertheless, Arthur orders Gawain to attend the burning of Guinevere, an order

Gawain flatly refuses to obey, calling the punishment "shamefull" (1176.15-22).[36]

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[36] Gawain's contrasting view of Arthur's position may recall Bouvet's insistence that a
ruler "must be just and law-abiding before all the world, and deliver tempered and
measured judgments, without any heat and without being arbitrary, and without favor,
and by good counsel" (209). See also Arthur's coronation oath, where he swears "to
stand with true justice fro thens forth the dayes of this lyf" (16.21-23). Vinaver shows
Malory's deviation from both his sources, saying of the long section 1174.30 through
1177.7 that "neither the French romance nor the English poem could have suggested to
[Malory] more than the bare outline of the scene . . . all the substance and the rhetorical
elaboration seem to be his own" (1633). For more on Arthur's failings as a king in this
context, see Kelly ("Penitence" 123-124).

Of course a necessary component of Arthur's war with Lancelot is Gawain's reversal

of his attitude after Gareth and Gaheris die in Lancelot's rescue of Guinevere. If Arthur's

determination to burn his wife at the stake were not bad enough, it is Gawain's desire for

revenge that keeps Arthur's forces in conflict with Lancelot. Since the justice of this

entire dispute is at issue, it is worth examining Lancelot's rescue in some detail. Let it be

recalled that Gawain's interpretation of the law implies that Arthur is not compelled to

order the burning, that Arthur has denied Lancelot the right to trial by combat, and that

Lancelot is a knight of the Round Table, sworn "allwayes to do ladyes, damsels, and

jantilwomen and wydowes socour" and "*strengthe hem in hir ryghtes*" (120.20-22

emphasis added). Certainly, by Arthur's refusing Lancelot the right to trial by combat,

Guinevere has also been denied her own defense. Given the circumstances, Lancelot's

rescue appears not only necessary to preserve Guinevere's life, but just.[37] Further,

Gawain's agreement with Lancelot's actions after the rescue—but before he learns of his

brothers' deaths—seems to confirm this view. He says,

> For full wyst I . . . that sir Launcelot wolde rescow her, other ellis he wolde dye in
> that fylde; and to say the trouth he were nat of worship but if he had rescowed the
> queen, insomuch as she shulde have be brente for his sake. And as in that . . . he
> hath done but knightly, and as I wolde have done myself and I had stonde in lyke
> case. (1184.18-24)

It should also be noted that Lancelot and his knights try to limit the deaths in the

rescue as much as possible, but we must read the relevant passages carefully to see this

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[37] Here I take direct issue with Robeson's claim that Lancelot's "attack is illegal by the
law of arms" (15).

fact. Malory first notes that "there were but feaw in comparison [with the large crowd] that wolde beare ony armoure for to strengthe the dethe of the queen" (177.13-14). That the populace assembled generally disagrees with Arthur's decision is made clear by the "feaw," but the "strengthe" shows that those who do bear armor support the decision since the *OED* shows that this word can mean to "fortify," "confirm," "force," or "compel." Malory states "who that *stoode ayenste* [the rescuers], there [near the fire] were they slayne" and then clarifies "So all that *bare armes and withstood them*, there were they slayne" (1177.21-24 emphasis added). Taken together, the previous passages show that the rescuers slay only those at the exact location of the execution site, and that those targeted by Lancelot and his knights wore armor, carried arms, and resisted the rescue. One is tempted to speculate that if none had actually opposed the rescue, it would have been bloodless.

Unfortunately, Gareth and Gaheris, themselves compelled by Arthur to attend yet wearing no armor in support of the decision, are caught in the middle. Malory informs his readers, however, that their deaths were not intentional: "And so in thys russhynge and hurlynge, as sir Launcelot thrange here and there, hit mysfortuned hym to sle sir Gaherys and sir Gareth . . . for they were unarmed and unawares" (1177.31-33). We have already seen that some of the knights defending the execution put up a fight, and in the jostling and confusion of the melee, it becomes easy to see how two unarmed men may be swallowed up in the broil. Lest someone wonder how it might be difficult to accidentally kill with a sword—as opposed to an accidental discharge of a firearm—it should be remembered that European swords almost invariably had two edges, were often

razor sharp, and moved with lightning speed.[38] As a knight draws back his sword for a

swing, the trailing edge of the blade can accidentally come in contact with an unintended

target. It should also become clear that as blades fly and targets move about, a shot

intended for one man may hit another, both of whom are either maneuvering themselves

or being pushed by the crowd, or both. Indeed, such a scenario must be the case with

Gareth and Gaheris, since Malory adds to his earlier description of their deaths, "in very

trouth sir Launcelot saw them nat. And so were they founde amonge the *thyckyste of the*

prees" (1178.3-5 emphasis added).

    Despite the fact that Arthur dreads the certainty of war once the two innocents are

slain (1183.27-1184.9), it should be noted that, in Malory's version, Arthur is the first to

mention revenge. Gawain is informed that Lancelot has killed both Gareth and Gaheris,

but he cannot believe it (1184.26-1185.6). Gawain cries out, faints, recovers, and runs to

Arthur, still in disbelief, informing him of the deaths (1185.8-17). What Gawain does not

know, however, is that Arthur has already learned the fate of the two brothers (1183.1-5).

Nevertheless, after much weeping and fainting from both Arthur and Gawain (1185.9-

19), Arthur confirms to his nephew that Lancelot "slew them in the thyk prees and knew

them nat," but he immediately continues with, "therefore lat us shape a remedy for to

revenge their dethys" (1185.33-35).[39] In both of Malory's sources, Gawain himself finds

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[38] The standard work on European swords is Oakeshott's *Records of the Medieval Sword*.
See also his *The Sword in the Age of Chivalry* and his more popular level work, *A Knight
and His Weapons*. In all of these texts Oakeshot debunks the misconception that swords
were akin to sharpened crowbars, unwieldy and slow-moving.

[39] Vinaver notes that the majority of the dialogue from 1185.13 to 1186.22 is Malory's
own (1635).

the bodies among the slain, but in his version Arthur's call for retribution seems to smother the fact that Lancelot "knew them nat." Whether consciously or not, Arthur finally seems to have found the key to infect Gawain with the plague of revenge.

As I mentioned above, Arthur dreads the war which he knows will follow the deaths of Gareth and Gaheris. Malory attributes to him far more emotion than either of his sources, but rather than increase the pathos and irony of the scene, Arthur's sorrow over the coming conflict renders his earlier desire for revenge thoughtless. Malory's Arthur seems out of control, perhaps even on a self-indulgent emotional rollercoaster. Both Bouvet (209) and Charny (141) stress the necessity for rulers to act with calm and prudence, but in Malory's version it is as though Arthur becomes so emotionally drained that his powers of rule are enervated. As Gawain takes over, Arthur recedes into the background, impotent.

Just as Arthur seems drained of power, so Gawain seems horribly energized. Vinaver argues that Gawain's terrible oath of revenge, largely original to Malory, is intended to provide a contrast to his earlier support of Lancelot,[40] but I would push the claim further. What Arthur has done is, to paraphrase the famous comment attributed to Yamamoto, "awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve." Indeed, Gawain not only threatens Arthur with the loss of his loyalty if he does not agree to the revenge Arthur himself has unleashed (1186.7-8), he seems clearly to have lost his mind. To illustrate Gawain's temper, one need look no further than his savage response to

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[40] For Gawain's oath, see 1186.1-12. Vinaver's Commentary to the passage occurs on 1635.

Lancelot's expression of regret over the deaths of Gareth and Gaheris: "Thou lyest, recrayed knight . . . thou slewyste hem *in the despite of me*. And therefore wyte thou well, sir Launcelot, I shall make warre uppon the, and all the whyle that I may lyve by thyne enemy!" (1189.22-25 emphasis added).[41] Gawain's claim that Lancelot intentionally killed his best friend "in the despite of" him is not simply tinged with madness, it seems fully out of touch with reality.

Hard to imagine though it may be, there is another aspect of Gawain's accusation above which is even more disturbing. Gawain says he will "make warre uppon" Lancelot. As I have noted, the wording of this passage is largely original to Malory, who may well have had in mind Bouvet's very clear view on who has the right to declare war. Bouvet asserts that only a ruler who has no sovereign can declare war (128) and specifically adds that one under fealty to another does not have this right (129).[42] Therefore, since Gawain has repeatedly referred to Arthur as his king[43] and thereby acknowledged Arthur as his sovereign, he is not "competent" to declare war. While it could be argued that Arthur implicitly agrees to Gawain's demand for war, thus "legalizing" the attack, it should be recalled that Gawain, not Arthur, is the first to *suggest* war (1186.9). The only right Gawain has according to the law of arms is to

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[41] Malory's source is the English poem, but he has greatly expanded the section, and the wording is almost entirely his own. See Vinaver's Commentary 1635-1636.

[42] See also Wright 15 and Keen *Laws of War* 246.

[43] See, for example, 1186.1 and 1189.2.

challenge Lancelot to single combat.[44] On the other hand, if Arthur *is* in command of his

forces, then the decision to pursue war redounds to his discredit not only because his

original desire is for revenge, but also beccause he allows himself to be bullied into a

conflict which he repeatedly—though not consistently—regrets following the very first

battle with Lancelot's forces at Joyous Garde when the latter prevents Bors from killing

him. Seeing Lancelot's "gete curtesy that was . . . more than in ony other man," Arthur

says to himself, "Alas, alas, that ever yet thys warre began!" (1192.30-33).[45] Certainly

Arthur allows the Pope to arrange a truce and agrees to accept Guinevere back, which

Lancelot has urged all along, but he again allows Gawain to push him into war, in this

case an invasion of France.[46]

The justice of this invasion itself is the last point I will question in Arthur's conflict

with Lancelot. Frederick Russell notes the importance of a formal declaration of war in

the Middle Ages,[47] and indeed at Lancelot's banishment, Gawain does threaten Lancelot

(1201.30-33), but is it a formal declaration? Let us recall that though Arthur, as the

defender, was not required to declare war against the various rebel kings in Book I,[48] as

the aggressor he does so against Lucius through the latter's ambassadors in Book II. Let

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[44] See Vale "Trial by Battle" 180.

[45] Original to Malory. See Vinaver's Commentary 1636.

[46] Kelly makes this same point. See his "Penitence" 123-124.

[47] *The Just War in the Middle Ages* 6, 49, 54, 89, 101, 140, 194, and 203. Russell's text
is the standard work on medieval just war theory, but see also Strickland *War and
Chivalry* 331.

[48] Bouvet asserts the right of defense without a declaration of war 192.

us further recall that it has already been established that Gawain himself cannot declare war. He has said that "the kynge and we were condescended and accorded" before Lancelot's return of Guinevere (1200.31-32), implying the consent of both the king and the barons, but it seems in the context that such agreement applies only to Lancelot's banishment, for Gawain's threat of war comes after Lancelot's long farewell speech.

As further support for my claim of the injustice of Arthur's war with Lancelot, there remains the violation of the Pope's command which Kelly notes ("Penitence" 126). I would add that there is nothing in the wording of the command which implies that it expires as soon as Arthur accepts Guinevere back. Indeed, Malory's wording shows that the "accord" is not the truce itself, but peace overall, for full "fayne he [Arthur] wolde have bene accorded with sir Launcelot, but sir Gawayn wolde nat suffir hym" (1194.22-24). As if to reiterate the point, Malory repeats the phrase almost exactly in the next sentence: "But in no wyse he wolde suffir the kynge to accorde with sir Launcelot" (1194.24-26). So though there remains some question of whether the war is properly declared, there is no question that Gawain and, ultimately, Arthur are proceeding against what amounts to God's word when they invade France.

Less need be said about Arthur's war with Mordred since obviously he is fighting a just war in this case, yet even here we find moral failures which violate the dictates of Charny and Bouvet, beginning with the fact that the battle takes place at all. Malory's source for the final battle at Salisbury Plain is the English *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, though

there are subtle differences.[49] In both the poem and *Le Morte Darthur*, there is a

command that if a weapon is drawn, then the attack should begin. But in the poem, only

Arthur gives this command, not Mordred (3320-3327). In Malory's version, both leaders

give the same order to their respective armies (1235.9-15), highlighting their mutual

distrust of each other. But in the poem, once the snake appears and the fateful sword is

drawn, Arthur also specifically gives the command to attack (3346-3349). Malory, on the

other hand, has the two leaders meet in the middle of the field, so when the snake strikes

and "bothe parties saw that swerde drawyn, than they blewe beamys, trumpettis, and

hornys, and shouted grimly, and so bothe ostis dressed hem togydirs" (1235.15-17). Both

leaders then have to return to their forces. The interesting possibility here is that, despite

the signals to attack, both armies must be looking in the direction of each other and

would therefore have their leaders in their line of sight—and neither Arthur nor Mordred

give the signal to stop. One must assume that the armies are out of bowshot of each

other, so for a moment in Malory's version, there hovers the chance that the battle did not

have to take place. Arthur in the poem charges into the fray with his forces "freely"

(3345),[50] but Malory's Arthur, returning to his lines, has time to utter the sad "Alas, this

unhappy day!" (1235.28). Since Malory's Arthur has been warned through Gawain's

post-mortem visitation that Lancelot's forces are on the way to reinforce him, and since

he knows he is facing an army of 100,000 (1234.33), one would think he would try all in

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[49] Vinaver's commentary on the onset of the battle is less detailed than one might wish; see 1650.

[50] Benson and Foster gloss this as "instantly," but the *OED* shows that this word can also mean of one's own accord, readily, or willingly.

his might to await those reinforcements. I admit that this suggestion is merely that, but

the possibility remains.

One thing is certain, Arthur's "heat"[51] against Mordred leads to his death. And once

more Arthur persists in ignoring the good counsel advised by both Charny and Bouvet as

he refuses the advice of the wounded Lucan. His advice is worth examining:

> Sir latte hym be . . . for he ys unhappy. And yf ye passe this unhappy day ye shall be
> right well revenged. And, good lord, remember ye of your nyghtes dreme and what
> the spyryte of sir Gawayne tolde you tonight, and yet God of Hys grete goodness
> hath preserved you hyddirto. And for Goddes sake, my lorde, leve of thys . . . . And
> therefore if ye leve of now, thys wicked day of Desteny ys paste!" (1236.28-1237.4)

Lucan's reference to Arthur's ability to be revenged must be to Lancelot's promised

reinforcements since Arthur has no army left with which to fight any forces Mordred

might still be able to raise. Further, his inclusion of God's favor in his speech suggests

that to pursue Mordred will be tempting Fate beyond the breaking point. Yet Arthur is

determined to fight it out with Mordred whether he lives or dies (1237.5), saying, "at a

bettir avayle shall I never have hym" (1237.7)[52]—precisely the opposite of Lucan's

counsel. So after the fight, to which Malory adds "grim" details,[53] Arthur's "A, sir

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[51] Here I again use Bouvet's wording (209).

[52] Vinaver asserts that "nothing corresponding to this [long] passage occurred in
[Malory's] sources" (1651).

[53] Vinaver's word choice (1651).

Launcelot! . . . thys day have I sore myssed the!" (1238.11-12)[54] should strike the reader, given the previous circumstances, not as sad so much as reprehensible.

Thus we have seen that Malory treatment of war is complex. While he does clearly present the possibility of winning worship in war, he also depicts the negative side of war as well, the slaughter, destruction, and grief it can cause. Furthermore, Malory employs character contrasts to offer not only a critique of the tactical leadership qualities of his most important knights, but also a moral evaluation of them as well. Lancelot again emerges as the ideal knight and commander, in contrast to Tristram and Gawain, but especially Arthur in that Lancelot listens to counsel, eschews revenge, and pursues justice.

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[54] Malory's addition; see Vinaver's Commentary 1651-1652.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Although the narrative of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* is pervaded by combat, little scholarly attention has been paid to either the historical setting of this combat in the form of tournaments and armor or to the thematic implications of the various forms of knightly violence. My dissertation has sought to correct this deficiency. Most importantly, I employ a knowledge of the material culture surrounding chivalry to interrogate the conclusion of Andrew Lynch, namely that "the predominant meaning of the story" is "the winning of knightly worship" (*Book of Arms* 32-33) and that "the text shows [no] conscious leaning towards other kinds of interpretation, especially those that are critical of normal chivalric values" (33).

I show that the format of Malory's tournaments do not conform to the classical rules of tournaments as defined by fifteenth-century authorities such as Sir John Tiptoft because they lack the complicated scoring system required in Tiptoft's *Ordinances*, and I confirm the general position of Robert Hellenga, namely that Malory's tournaments suggest a thirteenth-century context, rather than a setting contemporaneous with Malory. Moreover, Malory's changes to the terminology regarding armor over the terminology in his fourteenth-century English source, the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, lend strong support to the view that, at least in his depiction of combat, Malory was attempting to set his narrative in a time frame some two centuries previous to his own era. The importance of

this finding is that it seriously challenges the validity of scholars' attempts to evaluate the behavior of Malory's knights based on fifteenth-century tournament regulations. Such an approach, I argue, leads to the application of overly-refined chivalric standards for judging the behavior of Arthur and his knights, and leads to anachronistic ethical misjudgments of some of Malory's most admirable knights.

In an attempt to establish a solid basis for an appropriate standard of judgment to apply to Malory's knights, I argue that Malory's "score-keeping," especially at tournaments, serves as a standard of qualification: only those knights who succeed qualify to engage in the discussion about the attributes which typify the ideal knight. After surveying this discussion, I demonstrate that those chivalric virtues recommended by Malory's leading knights are supported as historically authentic by external authority insofar as they conform closely to the virtues praised in the medieval chivalric manuals of Lull, Charny, and Bouvet. Thus the discussion of virtues by Malory's leading knights creates a "checklist" of virtues which may then be used to judge knightly behavior in *Le Morte Darthur*. To accomplish this evaluation, Malory employs the literary device of character contrasts, or foils. From the implicit comparison of knights that emerges, Lancelot clearly stands out as the best example of the ideal knight errant and tourney champion.

Continuing to employ the device of character contrast through the use of foils, I address the topic of war in *Le Morte Darthur*. I first argue that, despite the claims of some scholars, Malory neither glorifies war nor presents it unrealistically. Rather, Malory continues to use foils to offer both a strategic and moral evaluation of his most important knights. In the light of both the skills of military leadership recommended by

medieval military manuals and also the medieval view of a just war, Lancelot again

emerges as the ideal knight and commander, especially in contrast to Tristram, Arthur,

and Gawain. Lancelot's superiority is especially evident insofar as he listens to counsel,

eschews revenge, and pursues justice.

I conclude that some of Malory's central themes throughout *Le Morte Darthur*

concern violent combat: namely the issues of when force is appropriate, and, when force

is appropriate, how it should be enacted. Malory's structuring of his text through various

forms of combat suggests that he viewed his work as a complex interrogation of differing

degrees of knightly virtue. What emerges from this interrogation is that more than just

prowess is required to fulfill the ideal of knighthood. The example of Lancelot shows

that a knight must possess additional qualities such as leadership skills, willingness to

listen to the counsel of others, generosity in praise for the success of others rather than

envy, forgiveness rather than vengeance, and especially a keen sense of justice. By

recommending these ideals of knighthood, Malory offers an implicit formula for a

reformation of chivalry.

The significance of this study is that it views combat in Malory's text in a[n ethical

perspective, contrary to the proposal that Malory glorifies the acquisition of worship

through demonstrations of prowess only (Lynch *Book of Arms* 32-33). Rather, Malory's

depiction of combat consistently questions whether a knight's actions are licit or illicit,

which clearly implies that he has an ethical frame of reference, as his first editor, William

Caxton, famously observed. My findings are thus similar to those in Beverly Kennedy's

Knighthood in the Morte Darthur, insofar as she observes that Malory "incorporates

every conceivable type of knightly excellence . . . [and] compares them to one another in

a lengthy series of knightly adventures" (82-82); however, I have not found the clearly

delineated three forms of knighthood, namely, the "heroic," "worshipful," and "true" for

which she argues (3-4). Indeed, if my study's claims are valid, I have shown that

Malory's critique of knighthood employs more subtle contrasts to achieve its goals.

I am far from claiming that my treatment of knightly combat in Malory is exhaustive.

One avenue of further research would be a consideration of medieval combat manuals

such as Sigmund Ringeek's *Knightly Art of the Longsword*, Filippo Vadi's *Arte

Gladiatoria Dimicandi*, the *Codex Wallerstein*, and Hans Talhoffer's *Fechtbuch*. While I

have excluded these texts from my study owing to their relative obscurity,[1] I have

nonetheless noted that Malory occasionally changes the specific descriptions of combat

techniques in a manner which suggests he may have been familiar with one or more of

these manuals, such as changes in the details of wrestling (51.14-15) and in handling a

sword (69.28-31). More research in this area of specific combat techniques could well

demonstrate that Malory is writing from the vantage point of more personal combat

experience than has been previously allowed by his two most recent biographers, P. J. C.

Field and Christina Hardyment.

Finally, although it is beyond the scope of my dissertation, I would like to suggest

that there is even a "higher" confirmation of the conclusions I have drawn concerning the

relative merits of Arthur, Gawain, and Lancelot. My observation concerns both the

knightly virtue of faith and, ultimately, the insistence on crusade by the authors of the

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[1] Only recently have these works been translated into English. The English translation by
Lindholm and Svard of Ringeek's work was published in 2003, Porzion and Mele's
translation of Vadi in 2002, Zabinski and Bartlomiej's translation of the *Codex
Wallerstein* also in 2002, and Rector's translation of Talhoffer in 2000.

chivalric manuals. This observation first appears in the contrasting ways in which the

deaths of Arthur, Gawain, and Lancelot are recounted.

Lull (*Book of the Order of Chivalry* 78), Charny (*Book of Chivalry* 177), and Bouvet

(*Tree of Battles* 211) all agree that the highest of the knightly virtues is religious faith.

And while I question Lynch's assertion that *Le Morte Darthur* demonstrates a

"comparative lack of moral emphasis and of moral connection between causes and effects

in Malory's all-important military sphere" and that "Malory's narrative commonly avoids

or downplays its heroes' potential culpability for military violence" ("Ideology" 26), I do

agree that there is "an absence of Christian repentance" in Arthur's dying speeches (34).

In the case of Gawain, however, we know that the final repentance which he recounts in

his lengthy letter to Lancelot (1231.8-1232.10) and receipt of "hys sacrament" (1232.13)

allow him into heaven, for he returns with tactical advice for Arthur in the company of

angels, described as "a number of fayre ladyes" (1233.29). With Arthur, we have no

such confirmation, as becomes apparent upon a close reading of Malory's famous recital

of the legend of Arthur's supposed return.

After Bedivere takes the wounded Arthur to the barge following the final battle with

Mordred and watches Arthur sail away, supposedly to Avalon, he later discovers a fresh

tomb at a hermitage. Circumstances imply that the tomb may be Arthur's, yet the former

Archbishop of Canterbury, who is in retirement at the hermitage, "knew nat in sertayne

that he was verily the body of kynge Arthur" (1242.19-20). Malory then recounts the

legend of Arthur's return, the text of which is worth quoting in full:

Yet som men say in many partys of Inglonde that kynge Arthure ys nat dede, but had

> by the wyll of Oure Lorde Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall com agayne, and he shall wynne the Holy Crosse. Yet I woll nat say that hit shall be so, but rather I wolde sey: here in thys worlde he changed hys lyff. And many men say that there ys written uppon the tumbe thys vers . . . . (1242.21-28)

Malory then gives the famous Latin verse usually translated as "Here lies Arthur, the once and future king" (1242.29). Noteworthy here is what Malory leaves open to question versus what he affirms. The legendary return is recounted as hearsay, but Malory himself clearly adds his own disclaimer, "I woll nat say that hit shall be so" and "here in thys worlde he changed hys lyff." So, quite unlike Gawain, Malory's readers are left not knowing what to think of Arthur's soteriologic status.

There is less doubt about Lancelot's salvation. As Robert Kraemer has shown in *Malory's Grail Seekers and Fifteenth-Century English Hagiography*, Lancelot's life has strong parallels to the generic feature of the saint's legend (92-101). But what especially concerns me here is Lancelot's death. When Bors and his companions find Lancelot upon his bed, smiling in death (1258.15-16), the Archbishop's dream of Lancelot ascending to Heaven in the company of angels is confirmed (1258.7-10). Further, Bors and the others also note "the swettest savour aboute hym that ever they felte" (1258.17), a clear parallel to the post-mortem incorruptibility of the saint's body after death which Kraemer lists as one of the generic features associated with hagiography (59). I would add one observation about this odor. Throughout *Le Morte Darthur*'s first seven books, without exception, pleasant odors are always associated with the presence of the Holy Grail.[2] So this final reference alludes to the Grail and reinforces our certainty of

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[2] See Kato's list for "savour," "savoure," and "savoures" (1014).

Lancelot's salvation.

The supremacy of the virtue of faith leads to the topic of faith and combat. As Kelly

has shown, Lancelot's desire to atone for his feeling of culpability in the destruction of

Arthur's kingdom prevents him from further pursuit of the martial life as he must

"renounce his worldly identity" ("Penitence" 127). Yet a reference to combat remains in

Le Morte Darthur, significantly Malory's final addition to his sources. At the end of

Malory's work, we learn that Bors, Ector, Blamour, and Bleoberis

> wente into the Holy Lande, thereas Jesu Cryst was quycke and deed. And anone as
> they had stablyssed theyr londes, for the book saith, so syr Launcelot commaunded
> them for to do or ever he passyd oute of thy world, there these foure knyghtes dyd
> *many bataylles* upon the myscreantes, or Turkes. And there they dyed upon a Good
> Fryday for Goddes sake.[3] (1260.9-15 emphasis added)

Malory's syntax makes it unclear whether Lancelot's command to these four knights is

the ordering of their lands, their participation in crusade, or both. I suggest that because

their trip to the Holy Land and their "many bataylles" occur on either side of Lancelot's

final command to them, the context implies Lancelot's command includes crusade.

Further, their deaths "upon a Good Fryday for Goddes sake" does not clarify whether

these deaths occur in battle, but the context again suggests that such is the case.

Not only do Lull, Charny, and Bouvet all agree that faith is the highest knightly

virtue; they also couple that virtue with the defense of the church. Charny, in particular,

reserves the highest honor "for those who perform deeds of arms more to gain God's

grace and for the salvation of the soul than for glory in this world, their noble souls will

be set in paradise to all eternity and their persons will be for ever honored and well

remembered" (177). Given the circumstances surrounding Lancelot's death and its

allusions to the Grail, and given Charny's claim that those dying on crusade will have

"their noble souls will be set in paradise to all eternity," *Le Morte Darthur* ends not in

tragedy but apotheosis.

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[3] "The reference to the French book is meant to conceal a departure from it. In no French
version do Arthur's knights appear as crusaders fighting "myscreauntes or Turkes"
(Vinaver 1663).

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