A STUDY OF LANCELOT IN

THE WORKS OF SIR THOMAS MALORY
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by
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INTRODUCTION

The extreme paucity of historical fact regarding the life of Sir Thomas Malory of Warwickshire makes it unfair and, perhaps even dangerous, to assume that the work speaks for the man or vice versa. We do know that such a person completed his works "in the ninth year of the reign of Edward IV, i.e. between 4 March 1469 and 3 March 1470; and he was then in prison".¹ We are indebted to Professor G. Lyman Kittredge for the identity of the author with a Sir Thomas Malory in various records of the time and to Edward Hicks who compiled a slender biography from a few scattered details in legal records of litigation procedures against Sir Thomas.² But nothing definitive has as yet been discovered concerning Malory, the man, his sympathies and his antipathies.

The critical opinions of the moral purpose of Malory's presentation of the Arthurian romances have not been much more illuminating, though perhaps kinder, than the prudish, cynical blacklisting of the Renaissance writer, Roger Ascham, who said of Le Morte d'Arthur, as it was referred to at that time, that:

the whole pleasure of which book standeth in two special points, in open manslaughter and bold knavery. In which book those be counted the noblest knights that do kill men without any quarrel and commit foulest adulteries by subtlest shifts; as Sir Lancelot with the wife of King Arthur, his


²For an account of the historical facts, so far known, concerning Sir Thomas Malory see Edward Hicks, Sir Thomas Malory: His Turbulent Career (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938).
master... This is good stuff for wise men to laugh at or honest men to take pleasure at. Yet I know when God's Bible was banished the court and Horace Asthme received into the prince's chambers.  

Aschan's view is, of course, no more viable than its extreme antithesis which William Caxton expressed in The Boke of the Ordre of Chivalry. F. J. C. Hearnehaw says Caxton 'idealistically envisioned man's salvation incarnated in chivalry: "Caxton... maintaines that knighthood was the earliest device of the Divine Being for the recovery of mankind from the ruin of the Fall." Perhaps it is this idealistic whitewashing of an institution that had both vices and virtues which led Caxton to assume an obligation to direct the reader to Balacr's moral purpose: But al is myton for our doctryne, and for to beneare that we fall not to vyece no symne, but t'emanstre and folowe vertu, by whych we may cons and atteyne to good name and renume in this lyf, and after thyng shorte and transtoyrwo lyf to come unto everlastyng blissynce in heven.  

That a work can be negative in content but be positive in moral purpose is certainly possible. However, Balacr's unrelenting praise of Lancelot complicates the simple intent that Caxton extracts. Although modern criticism is more perceptive, the moralizing sediment, which Caxton, Aschan and others have deposited in the stream of literary criticism, lingering.

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Those who do not concentrate on the author's moral purpose direct all their efforts towards demonstrating the undiscovered artistic merits inherent in the work or works, depending on whether one holds to the theory of structural and thematic unity which Caxton's title pretends to demonstrate or whether one sees, as Vinaver does, separate romances, illustrating a growth in narrative technique and style. In my thesis, I will, undoubtedly, rely on the findings of others and will make use, probably to the consternation of the authors, of their arguments to demonstrate altogether different conclusions.

My thesis is primarily a study of Malory's Lancelot. The organizing principle in my study of this character expresses itself in a division into three distinct roles, the warrior and man of arms, the Grail seeker, and the lover of the queen; these three roles correspond to three aspects of man, but more specifically, of a medieval knight, his deeds, his religion, and his affections. I say these three roles are distinct, and remain so, for Lancelot, because he cannot harmonize them. I intend to demonstrate, according to my understanding of Malory's Lancelot, why his hero cannot harmonize the innate antitheses of each role but must make a choice. Malory, in forming his own conception of Lancelot, begins with a basic character premise which is dictated by the fact that, as a knight, Lancelot is a man of action, rooted in the active world of chivalry. In his response to his three roles, Lancelot demonstrates a consistent pattern of behavior which reveals his limitations that innately grow out of the character premise and determine his final actions. Where necessary,
my study will include a comparison of Lancelot's French prototypes. In this respect, I intend to show that Halory inclines by temperament and heritage towards the English epic rather than the French courtly tradition. Ultimately, this fact will explain the basic character promise of Lancelot's liaison with the active world.

The sections of the romances which I will make use of, the Lucius campaign, in "The Tale of The Noble King Arthur", "The Noble Tale of Sir Iarnealot du Lake", "The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney", "The Tale of the Sankgreal", "The Book of Sir Iarnealot and Queen Guinevere", and "The Most Piteous Tale of the Nortre Arthure Samson Guardon", plus other relevant sections, are unified only in their contribution to a consistent conception of Lancelot. This does not mean, however, that the character of Lancelot unifies Halory's works structurally. The inaccessibility of original manuscripts makes an argument for either the structural unity or the independence of Halory's romances beyond the scope of this essay. For example, there are ten known manuscripts of the French Prose Tristan \(^1\) which contain the episode of Lancelot's madness. To determine the place of just

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\(^1\) Halory, Ibid., p. 1524. Vinaver, in his commentary on the sources for the "Lancelot and Elaine" section which includes Lancelot's madness, points out that: "The relevant section of the French Prose Tristan is a borrowing from the Prose Lancelot. It survives in no fewer than ten known manuscripts of the Tristan romance, viz.: B. v. ex. 97, 99, 100, 349, 738, Chantilly 616 and 618, Vienna 2542, Brit. Mus. Add. 3674 and Pierpont Morgan 41. Of these the following seem to be nearest to Halory's version: B. v. ex. 99 (ff. 500-47), Chantilly 616 (ff. 351-405), Chantilly 618 (ff. 415-30), Vienna 2542 (ff. 336-32) and Pierpont Morgan 41 (ff. 125-50). For my present purpose I have used the HSS, of this group -- B. v. ex. 99 and Vienna 2542 -- as well as Add. 3674 as printed by Sommer in vol. V of Modern Philology." It is fairly obvious that thorough research of the kind that Vinaver has made is absolutely essential in determining which manuscripts most closely resemble Halory's version. Problems such as the continuity of the narrative will affect the accurate determination of the place of this section in Halory's works. Discrepancies can be avoided by narrowing down to as few manuscripts as possible which show the similarities with Halory's version.
this one section in Malory's whole works would necessitate a thorough knowledge of original documents. Where possible, I will point out those studies that justify the place of the Lancelot sections in Malory's works. My examination of what I believe is a consistently developed character may unintentionally contribute to the theory of structural unity. There is, at any rate, no reason why unity of characterization, as I will demonstrate, cannot exist without structural unity in the works.

It is my intention, as well, to show that the development of Lancelot's character begins to take a definite direction which involves a conflict, typically medieval in its rigid dichotomy, between the active and the contemplative ways of life. Since Malory lived in a time when there were marked divisions between the religious and secular life, and, since he was a knight, he must have been aware of the uncompromising demands of each way of life. The hero's final choice of the contemplative world was, of course, an unalterable fact which Malory found in his sources. The events that lead up to that choice are significant. In Lancelot's final rejection of the active world, a certain pragmatic philosophy is at work. I intend to show that his final decision grew naturally and necessarily out of Lancelot's experiences in the three roles I have outlined.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

LANCELOT THE MAN OF ARMS 1

CHAPTER TWO

LANCELOT THE GRAIL SEEKER 37

CHAPTER THREE

LANCELOT THE LOVER OF THE QUEEN 63
LANCELOT THE MAN OF ARMS

It is generally believed that Malory wrote his account of "King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius" before any of his other romances.¹ This supposition is all the more significant in view of the fact that Malory's source was an English poem, the alliterative Morte Arthure, rather than a French romance.² The above fact tends to amplify the impression that Malory's attitude to chivalry has characteristics of English heroism rather than French courtliness. This is the view that the editor of Malory's works holds.

That Malory's whole conception of his theme was formed under the influence of the English epic of Arthur now seems certain, and it is a new and helpful sidelight on the continuity of the English tradition that by the time Malory came to 'reduce' his French books into English his attitude to Arthurian knighthood had been fixed in his mind by his reading of native poetry.³

While agreeing with Vinaver's interpretation, I would extend it to Malory's conception of his hero, Lancelot. However, one cannot dismiss the possibility that Malory may have been familiar with the French Arthurian romances prior to writing his account of the Roman war. Mary E. Diehm proposes Vinaver's view that Malory had no contact with the French romances prior to writing his tale.⁴ Miss Diehm is particularly concerned with

¹Malory, Ibid., Introduction, IV.
²Ibid., p. 1356.
³Ibid., Introduction, lviii. Vinaver has identified the source.
what she calls Lancelot's restoration to fame. Since Lancelot appears so infrequently in the English romances and has such a minor role in the alliterative Nort Areture, Miss Dickmann argues that Malory must have encountered his hero in the French cyclic romances. Otherwise, it is difficult to account for Malory's grandios treatment of a figure whose importance is so minimal in the Nort Areture. Furthermore, Tristram plays no part in the English poem but Malory mentions him twice in the "Tale of Arthur and the Emperor Iacius". At the beginning of the tale, in what seems to be a link with the ending of "The Tale of King Arthur", Malory announces, in the explicit, Tristram's arrival at court. More noteworthy is Malory's remark that Lancelot "was pasingyn wrothe"¹ because Tristram stayed home from the war to be with Isode. According to R. H. Wilson², as well as Miss Dickmann, this is Malory's invention to explain Tristram's absence from the war, in place of having to invent exploits for him. Wilson proposes that it is also proof of Malory's knowledge of the Lancelot and Guinevere love story. Lancelot's anger, he suggests, arises from his envy of Tristram. Lancelot would prefer to remain with Guinevere.

Since the Nort Areture makes no reference, whatsoever, to Lancelot's love for Guinevere, where did Malory, if Wilson is correct, get his information? At any rate, this reference to Lancelot's "wrothe" seems to be singularly unjustifiable without such a supposition. Evidence of Malory's invented ending to the tale also supports, according to Wilson, the contention that


²Robert H. Wilson, "Malory's Early Knowledge of Arthurian Romance", Western Studies in English, XXIX (1950), 33-50. Wilson's article, like Dickmann's, proves the opposite point of view to Vinaver.
Halory had, before commencing his works, a knowledge of the French sources. Claudas does not appear in the Nortc Arturc; nor does Arthur advise Lancelot and terms to return to their fatherland to look after the lands which once belonged to Claudas.

If we accept the view of these two scholars, we can account for the elevation of Lancelot from such a conspicuously minor role in the Nortc to such overwhelming heroic stature in the works of Halory. In the alliterative Nortc, Lancelot makes no more than six appearances, much of the action being performed by Sir Cador. Halory has chosen for Lancelot's first appearance the background of full scale war. In this way, he can recreate his hero as a fighting man of heroic prowess, making him a model of feudal chivalry. This is the basic character premise which Halory consistently maintains in Lancelot's other roles, both the attempted contemplative role as a Chal seeker and the much more successful amorous role of lover of the queen. These roles I will discuss in the following two chapters. Moreover, in the transition from war to peace, from battle to mock battle or tournament, the same principles of courtesy and heroism operate. Whether fighting for the king or for Guinevere, Lancelot demonstrates a peculiarly English epic spirit rather than French courtliness. Sidney Painter in commenting on chivalry, refers to its uncompromising competitive spirit.

Processe, the ability to beat the other man in battle, those qualities become the fundamental chivalric virtues. The knight who lacked prowess, who was not a competent warrior, was of little use to his lord, the Church, or a lady. To call a nobleman a prudence, a man of prowess, was to pay him the highest compliment known to the Middle Ages.\(^2\)

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Malory alters certain aspects of his source in establishing his own idea of Lancelot's character. He attributes specific heroic actions to him that others perform in the Morte, and, generally, deprives other warriors of honours in order to bestow them on Lancelot. As Miss Diamoam has already pointed out, Malory condenses Lancelot's epic battle boast in the Morte. In this poem, Lancelot appears bold and self-assured. The author of the poem reveals less imagination than Malory in assigning to Lancelot the typical battle boast which is characterized by vanity and presumption. The result is a more stereotyped Lancelot, undistinguished from the other warriors. Lancelot says:

Nowe may loose menne have love to say whett these lykes,
I sall be at journes with gentille knyghtes,
Or a jayhy stede fulle jolyly graythide,
Or any journes he goon to joute with hyn selfens,
Engage alle his guainten genyvers and other,
Slyke him styfyle ye fro his stade, with strengthe of nyne homyys.2

Although Malory's Lancelot is younger in years and, presumably, in experience, for he and his cousin "ar but late made knyghtes"3, he appears older and wiser. He makes a much more practical and generous promise of military assistance to the king despite the possibility of jeopardizing his own lands:

Then lepes in yong sir Lancelot de leake with a lyght harte and seyde un-to kyng Arthure, "Though ye lordis marche nyghe thynne enemies, yet shall I make nyne even aftir my pover that of good men of armes aftir my blode thus many I shall bryngye with me: twenty thousand helmes in lanyrnes attired that shall never sayle you stilles sere lyves lybyth."4

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4Ibid., 39, 39-390, 5.
Lancelot, in the Morte, promises to strike down the emperor, "to juste with hym selfe". Malory's Lancelot is not so presumptuous but, nevertheless, accomplishes the same heroic task:

And then he rushed forth unto sir Lucyus and smote hym on the helme with his sword, that he felle to the erthe; and syth he rode thrise over hym on a rowe, and so toke the baner of Rome and rode with hit away unto Arthure hymself.

By a slight change in the interpretation of a relatively obscure warrior, and without discarding the fundamental epic commonplace, the promise of combat to the death, Malory allows for a plausible development of his hero.

Malory keeps Lancelot in the forefront of the battle. He makes him the leader rather than Cador, as in the Morte. Expedient action depends on clever military strategy. It is Lancelot, rather than Cador of Cornwall, who gives the warning of a possible ambush. Lancelot takes direct action to reconnoiter:

'Now, lordis,' sayde sir Launcelot, 'I pray you, herkyns me a whyle. I drede that in this woody be leyde afore us many of oure enemyes. Therefore be myne advyse sende we three good knyghtes.'

When Cador's son, Berel, is killed, it is Lancelot who exhorts the warrior to replace tears with vengeful action: 'Sir,' sayde sir Launcelot, 'meve you nat to sore, but take your spear in your honde and we shall you not fayle.' This appears to be Malory's invention. In the Morte Arthure, Cador grieves but through his own volition takes to vengeful action: "He salle hafe corne bote, so me Christe helpe; /Or I kaire of this coste, we salle encontre ones!" The warrior's exhortation, boldly given, to assuage grief with
action, to replace the tears with the sword, is common in the English heroic poetry of the ninth century during the final years of the Danish invasions. The Battle of Halden is an excellent example. When the Thane of Aethelred, their prince, falls in battle, the warriors, Offa, Leofstanu and Dunene encourage each other to grieve not but to stand firm and fight:

Offa gemêld...hû ðeoden lid,
ecorl on coxan, Es is calum Pearf
hæt ðe æfhwyle ðére neylde
wìgan tói wiige, Dæ hwilc þé hû wipen mege
habban ond hældan, hærdne móca,
gar ond gûd swurd.¹

The valour is in the sword. In freely inventing Lancelot’s exhortation to action, Malory appears to be intentionally reflecting his English heroic tradition in his ideal conception of chivalry. Whether or not defeat is imminent, the heroic hero must never fail in battle.²


² The heroic hero is a term Gertrude Levy uses in her study of the epic hero in C. R. Levy, The Sword from the Rock: An Investigation into the Origins of Epic Literature and the Development of the Hero (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p. 222. Although scholars make a distinction between the heroic and the epic works, Levy would place a poem of heroic warfare, providing there is great conflict, which implies equally lofty actions, in the category of an epic. She distinguishes an epic poem from other types of narrative by its combination of the mythical, the legendary, the historical and the contemporary. At a glance, it is obvious that Malory’s prose, by that definition contains all of these requirements. The Arthurian romances contain the legendary and the historical in the figure of Arthur who is recorded in the Chronicles of Geoffrey of Monmouth. The romances are mythical in their attempt to establish the origins of the British kings. Malory’s romances embody the contemporary chivalric ideals of the fifteenth century which have their origins in the Crusades. I am not suggesting that Malory’s romances are exclusively epic. However, by virtue of their emphasis on great chivalric action, performed with the maxima preceda, a certain heroic energy, perhaps much more refined than the heroics of a vauntor or a Dane, Lancelot’s conflicting loyalties to his king and to his lady can be described as epic. Levy classifies
Malory shows his love of vigorous action of knights in physical combat, by descriptions filled with colour, sound and movement. Often such feats of arms resemble the military tactics in medieval handbooks on chivalry. Most schools of chivalry, according to a fifteenth century writer, Christine de Pisan, would stress swiftness, strength and intelligence as the fundamentals of warfare. Knights should be taught, Christine says:

tours of swiftness to caste & fyghts with bothe theyre armes and the maneure how they shall glaunce or withdrawe themselve from the strokes that in travers or sydying may come/to lepen over trenches or dyches/to lance or cast sperys & cartes and the wyse to cover & save hem self with theyre sheldes...unto them they shewed also how in castyng of sperys or cartes...

The exacting skill in the use of armes, the casting of speary and dart, or the use of the sword in closer contact distinguishes the man of prowess, the proudeone. Cador, Lancelot and Boza, "good men of armes", demonstrate expert transition in the use of the speary and the sword:

Then sir Cador, sir Lancelot, and sir Boza, the good men of armes, thse thre feawtyn their sperys and throwste into the mydyeys and ran throughe the grette caste toysse other thre tyms, and whan their sperys wer brekyn they strange oute their swordis and close of noble men of armes no than an hondred, and than they rode aynon to their ferys.

Malory transcribes from the Morte many similar passages of physical combat, giving them, where possible, to his favorite knights. This description

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from the North, for example, involves only Cader but Galore includes Lance-
lot. The objective of such process is, of course, in full scale battle,
such as the Roman war, to destroy the opponent. In mock battle, such as
the tournament and joust, the objective is simply to down the opponent.
There are many ways of unhorsing an enemy. Generally, the knight follows
this by unhorsing a fallen comrade. Arthur deliberately destroys a knight
of the opposing army in order to unhorse Ban in his battle with the eleven
kings,

And as kyng Arthure loked basyde hym he sawe a knyght that was passyonably
well horse; And there with kyng Arthure ran to hym and smote hym on the
helme, that hym swordes wente unto his teeth, and the knyght sanke downe
to the erthe dede. And ancom kyng Arthure toke hym horse by the raynes
and ladde hym unto kynges ban.1

Herotic action is not an end in itself; nor does devotion to the
king constitute the knight's sole motivation. Rather, his is a way of life
that involves the self-idolatrous quest for glory in the assiduous concern
for his personal honour. Honour might be translated into Galore's terms
as "worship", the admiration of the knight's sovereign, his fellow chevaliers,
and his lady. Guinevere will become for Lancelot the symbol of such "wor-
ship". The climax of chivalric activity is for Galore, then, this con-
cept of "worship". In the Roman war, "worship", in Galore's context, is
partially a corporate reward involving the honour of the brotherhood of
knights. An allegation of individual cowardice would affect the honour
of the entire corpus of knights. Arthur gives Lancelot command of the
transportation of prisoners to Paris as well as authority over the other
knight: "I pray the, sir, as thou lovels me, take heed to these other
knights and boldly lade, these prisoners unto parys tome there for to

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1Ibid., "The Tale of King Arthur", 31, 6-11.
be kept surely as they we love well have, and of my resceene behalle, mostly
I affye the in me, as Jesu me helpe. It is noteworthy that Malory once
again bestow the honour on Lancelot as the Morte excludes him from the
undertaking. There is, subsequently, as Arthur predicted, an ambush of sixty
thousand men lying in wait. Having only 500 knights, Arthur's men are great-
ly outnumbered. Lancelot, the zealous warder of the corporate honour as
well as the personal, feels obligated to protect the venerable tradition of
knighthood:

'Nay, be my fayth,' says Sir Lancelot, 'to turne is no tyme, for here is
all oude myghtes of grete worship that were never shamed. And as for me
and my cousyns of my bloodes, we ar bat late made myghtes, yett wolde we be
loth to lose the worship that oure eldrys have deservey.'

Lancelot regards knighthood as a continuing test in upholding the traditions
of past honour and in assuring future glory. Malory's knighthood becomes
a heroic morality of honour, equivalent to the "Homeric ethic: the love
of glory". Malory honours Lancelot's actions in the Lucius campaign with

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1Ibid., "Of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius", 212, 11-15.

2Ibid., 213, 31-35.

Homeric idea of chivalry. It is noteworthy that the chivalric ideals of the
Middle Ages so closely approximate those of Homer's knights in ancient
Greece. Knighthood from classical times has always been associated with
the nobility. The fighting men form a distinct "aristocracy of warriors", as
Caxton stressed the link between the aristocracy and chivalry in the
Epilogue to his translation of Ramon Lull's Libro del Ordre de Cavalleria.
Caxton says: "This book is not requisite to every comyn man to have, but
to noble gentylmen that by their vertu entende to come and entere in to the
noble ordre of chivalry." Ramon Lull, The Book of the Ordre of Chivalry,
1926), p. 59. Caxton also dedicates Malory's Morte Harthur to "all noble
Likewise, Malory stresses Lancelot's aristocratic heritage: "Sir" Lancelot.
an encomium that is absent from the *Norte Arthr" as is Lancelot's name in this connection:

And sir Lancelot did no grosse deysys of armies that day that sir Gader and all the Romyns had naeryle of his nyght, for there was nother knyght, cayser, nother knyght that day nyght stonde bys ey buffete. Therefore was he honoured dayes of his lyfe, for never euer on that day was he proved so well, for he and sir Dore and sir Hyonel was bat late afore at an hyghe forto made all thos knyghtes.¹

In fact, the *Norte Arthr" beastes a similar tribute of life-long honour on Gaswine in a later section of the poem: "One sirchipfulle vardayne es vele eschevyde, / ffor he has onene to-daye sirchip for evere."²

This suggestion of life-long honour and the use of the word, "sirship", in the *Norte Arthr" indicates that Malory transferred the praise to Lancelot, as he has already done with specific heroic actions. Gaswine is definitely the hero in the latter part of the alliterative poem which concerns the death of Arthur. Gaswine also appears in Malory's Roman war account. However, Malory's interpretation of his role is different. Arthur commands Gaswine, among other knyghtes, to vyllyage every terroryty in order to furnish food for his subiects:

And thysere shall then go to forcry that foresteres, and with the shall go sir Gaswine, and six Wylshere with sir Valchary, two noryshipful knyghtes, with all the nysesete men of the Heste machina.³

In this adventure, Gawain is not distinguished from the other knights. His leadership qualities do not stand out as do Lancelot's. Malory has purposely not given him any special role. Therefore, he does not give him a praise equivalent to the honour bestowed upon Lancelot. Malory passes over Gawain's greatness in the Nortc Arthur in favour of his intended hero.

Although Lancelot has acted in defense of the corporate honour of knighthood, Arthur rebukes him for foolhardiness:

'Youre crouge and youre hardynesse nerehans had you destroyed, for and ye had turned agayne ye had loste no worship, for I calle hit but foly to abyde whan knyghtes bene overmocched.'¹

Arthur's rebuke is met with defiance from Bors, Clegis and Lancelot: 'the shame sholde ever have bene owres.'² Lancelot's reply is in keeping with contemporary English chivalric ideas. Christine de Pisan quotes from a popular medieval treatise on the art of war. Its author Vegetius:

'saieth that nom ce grete shawe ther nys than to departe the fieldes in presence of his eneyes or evere they madle together/ wythout that it be by accorda made betwyx betothe partys/ For in thys appere twy thingis that be not honoureable/ that one in/ that semyth hym to be afurde and that cowardines neowith hym thereto.'³

It was also customary in the Old English heroic poems such as The Battle of Maldon to fight to the death. The poem praises the actions of Aelfere and Hacco:

>Aelfere ond Hacco merege twegen;
þæ noldon ond þæm forde ðæam gewyrcan,
ac hí festlice wið ðú fynd weardon
þæ hyle þe hi æþna wealdan mæten.⁴

⁴Malory, Ibid., 217, 23-27.
²Loc., Cit., 26-29.
³Pisan, On, Cit., p. 66.
⁴Wyatt, On, Cit., 80-83.
Although Malory may, as Vinaver suggests, prefer wisdom to valour in this instance, his praise is, nonetheless, for Lancelot's heroic action. The episode establishes his hero as a devout exponent of the lofty chivalric ethic of honour. Aristotle assigned to honour a moral value: "the greatest of external goods." In many ways, honour has the same value for Malory. Lancelot first thinks of the shame of defeat not of the lives that will be lost. He exerts himself to the utmost for the abstract chivalric ideal of "worship", his own "worship" and that of a deserving knighthood.

"The Noble Tale of Sir Lancelot du Lake" follows immediately after the Roman war in Malory's works. By the end of the war with Iacius, Lancelot was an accomplished man of arms in fulfillment of Merlin's prophecy that "This same chyldic shall be the moste man of worshop of the woorld." The opening of the tale confirms the continual testing of Lancelot's prowess.

But in especiall hit was provyd on sir Lancelot de Lake, for in all tumenantes, justys, and dedys of armys, both for lyff and deth, he passed all other knyghtes, and at no tyme was he crixcom but yf hit were by treson other inechnement. So this sir Lancelot enserced so neruaylosly in worshop and honoure, therefore he is the fyrste knyght that the Freynah booke makyth mention of after kyng Arthure com from Rome. Wherefore


3For a thorough discussion of the place of this tale in Malory's works see Gilbert R. Davis, "Malory's Tale of Sir Lancelot and the Question of Unity in 'The Morte Darthur'". Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters, XLIX (1964), 585-90.

Guenevere had him in great favour above all other krayties, and so he loved the queene agayn above all other ladies dayes of his lyff, and for him he did many dedys of arays and saved her from the fyre thorow his noble chivalry.  

These opening lines establish three important facts. First, in keeping with Malory's concept of his hero, Lancelot's failure will never be caused by his own default. Only treason or magic can "overcom" him. The reference to Lancelot's susceptibility to treason or magic is prophetic since the four queens in the ensuing narrative imprison him by casting him under a spell. Much later the prophetic warning of treason is fulfilled in Aggravain's and Nondere's deception which exposes Lancelot's and Guenevere's love. Two important points concern the function of chivalry. An alteration in its function consequently affects Lancelot, who represents the guardian of the chivalric ideals. In the first place, a shift in the chivalric context takes place. Peace, and the attendant stability, inevitably succeed war. Chivalry becomes somewhat displaced. The second point involves a change in Lancelot's motivation for his deeds of prowess while he still serves as a model of chivalric virtues. Guenevere has singled him out for his brilliant feats and he, in turn, looks to her for favour, her "worshyp", as reward for his chivalric endeavours. This is the first definite indication that Lancelot is conducting all his efforts on her behalf as well as in the cause of knighthood and service to the king. Ludlamsky argues that this is a significant step in the sequential development of the lovers' relationship and hence a major factor in the theory of unity.  

1This, "The Noble Tale of Sir Lancelot du Lake", 253, 8-19.

although this may be important, it seems inevitable that with the shift in context from war to peace and from actual battle to mock-battle that
Franksdienst¹, service of ladies, should succeed feudal service to king and country.

Since the absence of war somewhat dislocated the chivalric hero, the
tournament became the imago martis², in an attempt to perpetuate the chival-
ric ideals of courtesy, prowess, generosity and courage, the latter being
the sines qua non³. Chivalric literature usually concerns a nostalgic re-
vival of a more perfect time before knighthood had lost its usefulness.
Makery was undoubtedly very much influenced by the contemporary revival of
the tournament. Such a revival would, it was hoped, preserve the illusion
of reality in the clash of arms. Makery seems to have deplored the lapses
of knightly exercises. His work attempts, as Viney suggests, "to com-
memorate in terms of imaginary knight-errantry some of the great declining
traditions of his own age".⁴ Perhaps Makery looked back nostalgically,
as Ferguson believes, to the time of Henry V, "a time when English fortunes
prospered under a truly knightly king".⁵ Hence, Makery's work exalts the

¹A. B. Ferguson, The Indian Summer of English Chivalry: Studies in the De-
and Transformation of Chivalric Idealism (Durham, N. C.: Duke University

²Ibid., p. 18.

³A. T. Ryland, "Medieval Courtesy Books and the Prose Romances of Chivalry",
in Chivalry: A Series of Studies to Illustrate its Historical Significance
and Civilizing Influence, ed., Edgar Prentice (New York: Alfred A. Knopf,


⁵Ferguson, Op. Cit., p. 44.
High Order of Chivalry as a code of practical and indefatigable heroism that is essential to virtuous living. For this reason, the mock-battle or tourna-
ment has the same purpose in Gallow's literature as in his own age.

The reasons behind the perpetuation of chivalric ideals in mock-
battle resemble those which led to the practice of Homeric games. 1 In Caxton's translation of The Book of the Ordre of Chivalry, the author, Ramon Lull demands that:

knights ought to take courses to juste and to go to tournyes/ to holde open table... For in doyng these thynge the knyghtes exercyse them to armes/ for to myntone theours of knythes. Thys to raisse & to love the cust-
ion of that which the knyght is most apperaiced to use his office is but despying of thynge. 2

Consequently, to withdraw from the world of action is a sin against the High Order of Knighthood. The desire to proliferate the lofty chivalric ideals issues, in part, from a fear of human nature. In the absence of action,
the knight is prey to the sin of sloth. Such a moral concern probably springs from the indissoluble bond between the Church and knighthood during the Crus-
sades. Modern scholars, such as A. B. Ferguson, following Caxton, resort to

1G. H. Beura, Heroic Poetry (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1952), pp. 50-52. The author examines the types of athletic games and pursuits undertaken by Homeric knights in the absence of war. See also H. I. Marrou, Op. Cit., p. 26, for reference to the study of pharmacopoeia as a substitute occupation. Gallo's knights presumably know some basic medicinal practices as the author frequently says the knights know how to "serue wounds". R. S. Loomis' article, "Arthurian Influence on Sport and Spectacle", in Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History, ed. R. S. Loomis (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 553-559, examines the effects of the adulation of chivalric heroes on the tournaments and jousts of Gallo's era. Often the royalty would adopt, for example, the names and coats of arms of characters in Arthurian romance.

See also Ruth H. Cline, "The Influence of Romances on Tournaments of the Middle Ages", Speculum, XX (1945), 205-211.

Lail as a foremost authority on chivalric concepts. Ferguson points to Lail's caution to knights, in 'The Book of Raoloeae', "to avoid sensuality, the love of ease and of the flesh which saps the physical as well as the moral stamina of the knight".¹

Malory, undoubtedly, uses the tournament and the joust to maintain the image of Lancelot as the great warrior, the man of prowess. However, equally important is the opportunity to present Lancelot as the model of chivalric virtues such as magnanimity, courage and courtesy, as well as skill in arms. Lancelot's first brilliant success follows his imprisonment. Bagderagus' daughter liberates Lancelot from the four queens; in return, he helps Bagderagus recover his "cernalyn" or restore his honor. The king of the land of Gore had been defeated in a previous tournament with King Arthur. Lancelot slays down all three of Arthur's knights, Calabantine, Pandred, and Bedore in helping Bagderagus. Frequently, Malory describes Lancelot's strength by a reference to the number of knights he dislodges with one spear: "or ever that speare brake he bare deme to the erthe cyslawe knightes".² As Vinaver points out, Malory, unlike the French sources, specifies the number of helms in the tournament; 130 belong to the King of North Wales and 80 belong to Bagderagus. Malory's intention once again is to exalt Lancelot's courage and prowess by presenting the tournament as drastically ill-matched.³

Nemeresh's essay on chivalry classes generosity as one of the primary knightly virtues.⁴ Lancelot is generous in his concern for Bagderagus'

³Ibid., p. 3017. Vinaver points out that these figures are absent from the French sources.
honour. It is well to remember at this point Lancelot's more than personal devotion to the honour of the brotherhood of knights. Malory has carried through this same characteristic of Lancelot into peace as well as war.

The past honour of knighthood depended on the decision Lancelot made in the Roman war to face rather than flee the enemy. As a result of Lancelot's efforts, Bagdemagus won "the gre." Likewise, in the "Tale of Sir Garth", Lancelot refuses Arthur's request to joust with Garth in the tournament at the Castle Forelous. Lancelot believes it is unfair to joust with a knight when he is tired. Lancelot says:

"I may well fancy in myn herte fer to forbere hym as at this tyme, for he hath traveyle inore this day. And whan a good knyght doth so well upon som day, hit is no good knyghtes parte to lette hym of his worship, and namelie whan he seyth a good knyghte hath done so grote labur. . . . And therefore, sayde sir Lancelot, 'as for me, this day he shall have the honoure: though hit lay in my power to put hym frome hit, yet woldes I nat.'"

To deprive another knight of his worship is a serious transgression against the knightly code. Lancelot determines even to go against his king in this matter. Lancelot holds to an absolute standard of perfection which places the chivalric code above his sovereign's demands. A similar situation has existed in the Roman war when Lancelot put honour ahead of Arthur's good counsel. An additional proof of this is his refusal to accept the prize in the tournament at the Castle of Baldones. Lancelot believed the prize rightfully belonged to Tristram who began first and held out longest. How-

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2Ibid., 268, 28-289, 8.
ever, despite his wishes to the contrary, Lancelot is given the prize:
And because Sir Lancelot abode and was the laste in the fylde, the prize
was Eyvyn hym. But Sir Lancelot nather for lyngue, quene, nather knaught,
valde thereoff. 1

Instinctively, Lancelot knows what is virtuous action, love, respect and
fairness in dealing with one's brothers in knighthood. The High Order of
Chivalry is defined solely in Lancelot's terms.

If Lancelot consistently displays virtuous actions in combat, other
knights do not. Lancelot's code of behaviour, as a fighting man, whether
in battle or in tournament or personal feats of arms, involves such elevated
personal ethics that other knights have difficulty emulating him. In a
sense, Lancelot's code of knighthood does not leave room for human weaknesses
such as envy, cowardice or discourtesy. Malory makes use of the contrast-
ing unrighteous actions of Palomides, for example, in the tournament at
Lonsep, to reinforce his conception of his hero as the knight of greatest
heroic action and chivalric ideals. Palomides strikes down Lancelot's
horse during the tournament. The other knights are horrified "and seyde
hlyt was unrighteously done in a tournamente to hym, an horse wyllfully,
othir elyse that had bene done in plane latayle lyff for lyff". 2 To the man of
arms, the horse and sword are his most valuable possessions for on these his
life depends. The tournament simulates actual warfare; therefore, knights
should behave in the same way as they would on the battlefield. The gra-
vity of Palomides' transgression against the code of knighthood can be

1Ibid., "The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones", 533, 29-32.

2Ibid., 759, 14-16. Since this reaction of the other knights is not in
Malory's source, according to Vinaver, Ibid., p. 1452, it appears that Malory
made this addition to emphasise the unrighteous conduct of Palomides.
measured by contemporary fifteenth century regulations governing tournaments. According to the constable of England, John Tiptoffe:

It [tournament] was a sport, moreover, in which it was intended that no animal should suffer either death or pain; even the accidental wounding of the horse was visited with a penalty, "who so striketh a horse shall have no prize" (according to the Ordinances, Statutes and Rules, made by John, Lord Tiptoffe, Earl of Worcester, Constable of England, by the king's commandment, at Windsor, 29 day of May, anno sexto Edwandi Quarti).\(^1\)

Whether Malory was familiar with such regulations or not is impossible to determine. One can only suppose. However, having been a knight and having served under the famous Earl of March, Richard Beauchamp, the model knight and "father of courtesy",\(^2\) Malory would no doubt have been exposed to such a view. Perhaps this explains the addition to his sources of the other knights' vehement rejection of such a treasonous act. Needless to say, when Palomides asks mercy, Lancelot grants his request. By his magnificent chivalry, Malory's hero, once again, serves as a model of chivalric perfection. Palomides, recognizing his injustice, promises to be "sir Lancelotto knight whyles that I lyve".\(^3\) These significant additions do much to further Malory's conception of Lancelot as "the noblyst of the world of knyghtes".\(^4\)

Virtuous living springs from and is the ultimate objective of heroic action in Malory's chivalric context. Lancelot establishes this context. The ideals of knighthood, by the definition of chivalry, can only be

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\(^{4}\) Ibid., "Icoda the Pain", 108, 1-2.
perpetuated in a life of action. The motivation for action which leads to
virtuous living is, for Lancelot, paradoxical since it involves the im-
morality of his adulterous love for Guinevere. However, as I have attempted
to show, in time of war, Lancelot's consistently loyal and virtuous action
issued primarily from nationalistic sentiments. Love for his sovereign
and his country inspired his resistance of the enemy invasion. Peace time
inspires the pursuit of knight-errantry in the continuing test of one's
process. The knight's keen sense of competition is fulfilled in the tourna-
ment. It seems appropriate, given what we know of the chronological develop-
ment in Malory, to assume that Lancelot's allegiance to Guinevere should
take precedence over his former allegiance to his feudal sovereign.

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1 I merely allude to Lancelot's relationship with the queen, as I will deal
with this aspect more fully in my third chapter. However, I think it is
appropriate to mention at this time the medieval distinction between im-
priety and immorality. Impiety and immorality were inevitably not the same
thing; they were treated as offenses differing greatly in gravity and were
punished accordingly. Piety meant strict acknowledgement of the authority
of the Church and religion. According to F. Harri Carnish, Chivalry (Lon-
don: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Limited, 1901), p. 15, piety may only be a public
observance of form. As long as the institution of knighthood defended the
Church against its enemies, the pagans or saracens, it was fulfilling its
obligation to piety. What the knights did in their private lives was not;
of course, always determinable. Carnish says that the Templars, an in-
stitution of knights established in 1118, was guilty of both impiety and
immorality but was crushed for the former offense. "the least religious
acknowledged the authority of religion and it was the imputation of im-
piety rather than of immorality which destroyed the Templars; for impiety
was in those days a worse imputation than immorality". Malory's knight-
hero, during the Grail Quest, may be charged with immorality since, in his
heart, he still loved Guinevere. However, in his strict ritual observance,
the attendance at mass, fasting, penance etc., he could be exonerated from
a charge of impiety. Probably from the Church's standpoint, this was more
acceptable. Lancelot appears not to hold piety and morality as corollaries
of the religious life. Morality as Malory sees it may well be good works,
in particular, the strong helping the weak. The hermit tells Lancelot he
should undertake "myghtely dedys and vertuous lyyng", Ibid., "The Quest
of the Holy Grail", 591, 31-32. The two things are obviously equated.
Lancelot later promises "to se myghthode and to do faylys of array", 
Ibid., 999, 2-3, which he has done before the quest.
The personal quest is, likewise, a continuing test of the precepts...

In compliance with Lull's injunction to avoid sloth, Lancelot goes in search of adventures. After having "rested hym longe with play and game...he thought hymself to prove in strange adventures." 1 Perhaps this is also the reason Lancelot withholds his name from Sir Barnardo of Astolat. The revelation of his name seems to be dependent upon his future success in the jousts with Arthur's knights: "And if God gyff me grace to speke well at the justis I shall come ayayne and tell you my name." 2 Lancelot proves his prowess solely by the number of successful adventures he undertakes and completes. The whole of "The Noble Tale of Sir Lancelot du Lake" is devoted to describing these adventures.

There are indications that this tale should follow the Roman war in Malory's works. 3 The opening sentence refers to the time sequence: "Sone after that kyng Arthur was con from Rome into Engeland, than all the knyghtys of the Rounde Table resorted unto the kyng and made many joustys and turnementes." 4 Of all the knights who attempt to win worship, "in especiall hit was provyd on six Lancelot de Lake." 5 These lines not

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3 See Gilbert R. Davis, "Malory's "Tale of Sir Lancelot" and the Question of Unity in the Worte Durthar", Op. Cit.; Davis cites positive points in the argument for the structural position of this tale. Unlike Davis, I am not concerned with the structural unity of Malory's works, however. Insofar as Lancelot consistently demonstrates Malory's chivalric ideals, there may be a case for unity, at least unity in characterization and theme.

5 Ibid., 254, 8.
only give some semblance of sequential development but they also demonstrate theoretically, in the continual test of chivalry, the organic transition from battle to tournament in the absence of war.

Of all Galore's knights, Lancelot symbolizes the common goal that establishes the Round Table. Lancelot's adventures carried out courageously and skillfully set the standard for the other knights-except, Malory selects certain incidents from different parts of the Prose Lancelot. Many episodes are excluded that involve other knights in the French source. For example the Tanquyn or "Terrican" episode in the old French, extending from pp. 87-209 in the Vulgate, is interrupted by various adventures which Malory ignores. He adds dialogue and changes certain plot features of his source in order to present Lancelot as a knight who is, first and foremost, a man of arms. Lancelot's personal heroism in the defense of his Round Table brotherhood seems to be the natural outcome of the skill he acquired on the battlefield in the Roman war. The sequential arrangement of the two tales gives the impression of growth in Lancelot's character and prepares for the more complex character of the Grail and Guinevere sections.

A conversation between Lancelot and a damsel regarding the respective virtues of the anecous life and the adventurous life has provoked a great deal of comment among scholars. The question the damsel asks and Lancelot's reply are central to Malory's conception of the chivalric hero as the man of arms. This is a much disputed passage which Visenor believes to be the most original part of the "Tale of Lancelot." 


2 Ibid., V, 87-209.

conflict over Lancelot's intention. Did he wish to conceal his relationship with Guenevere by saying he preferred the pursuit of arms? Lancelot's conversation seems to point conclusively to Malory's attitude to love and arms and, ultimately, to his conception of his hero. I think the most valid meaning is the most obvious in these lines:

But for to be a wedded man, I thinke hit nat, for than I muste couche with hir and love arrayes and tornementis, latelys and adventures.

Lancelot has not denied that Guenevere has inspired his deeds of arms; in fact, what he says specifically defines their relationship. It is an exchange, of his worldly renown for her public acclaim. They are united in their common concern for Lancelot's terrestrial glory in the active world.

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1 See Robert K. Luminansky, "The Relationship of Lancelot and Guenevere in Malory's 'Tale of Lancelot'," Modern Language Notes, LXVIII (1953), 86-91, for a discussion of the meaning of this passage in Malory. See also Luminansky, "Malory's 'Tale of Lancelot and Guenevere' as Suspense," Medieval Studies, XX (1957), 168-182. Luminansky maintains that Guenevere has not yet granted Lancelot her love; therefore Lancelot can truthfully deny all rumors. However, the fact that Lancelot, four pages later in Malory, sends his conquered knights to Guenevere is an open confession that he performs his deeds of prowess as her faithful knight, solely for the sake of her worship of him (274, 7-1). As soon as one assumes, as Luminansky does, that there is a development in the Lancelot-Guenevere relationship, it is necessary to deny the seriousness of Lancelot's remarks and, therefore, propose other reasons than the most obvious for his sentiments.

Gilbert R. Davis, Op. Cit., p. 523, believes that Lancelot is not sincere when he says that marriage would threaten his status as a knight-errant seeking adventures: "Indeed, the subterfuges which he is forced to employ in order to keep the affair with Guenevere secret do almost as much to demoralize his character as his knightly deeds of arms do to heighten it." To deny Lancelot's statement that he is primarily a man of arms or adventure is to vitiate Malory's whole conception of his chivalric hero. I agree with Vinaver, in Malory, Op. Cit., p. 1808, that the presence of the question of marriage, a question which would never find its way into a French Courtly romance of Lancelot, is tantamount to artful ignorance of Lancelot's tradition on the part of Malory. However, to call Lancelot's denial of the amorous life for the active life a deception or a subterfuge is, in regard to Malory's basic character premise, to add insult to injury.

Guinevere reacts in a similar manner but reminds Lancelot more forcefully of his role as man of arms: "Do ye forthyke yowreself of yowre good dedes?"  

The lady's role is to encourage feats of arms. Bride feels she is no longer capable of inspiring action. The wedded life threatens the fighting man's status in the way that the single life does not. The amorous life inspires passivity in both Christian's account and in Malory. Chivalric ideals demand a certain Spartan discipline that excludes leisure. However, Ferguson points out that the inspiration to do noble deeds, inherent in love, and hence a justification for courtly love, has a certain social usefulness.

The doctrine of 'courtly love' was not entirely alien to the military-political aspect of the chivalric ideal, that the knight increased in prowess, and hence in social usefulness, as a result of the love he bore his lady was stated by chivalric writers with the utmost solemnity.  

Painter, in his book, French Chivalry, says that it was doubtful if a knight could be a true knight if he did not adore a lady. Lancelot, in the conversation with the damsel, expresses his commitment to the active life. He may also be simultaneously expressing his commitment to Guinevere as the symbol of that way of life. If we assume as Lumiansky does that there is a sequential development in their relationship and that, at this stage, the lovers had not made a formal avowal of their love, then, Lancelot would be justified in not directly stating his commitment to Guinevere.

However, in the capacity of a faithful servant to his sovereign's wife, he would not incur any suspicion if he truthfully confirmed that his adventures were undertaken for the glory of the queen. In the capacity of a loyal sub-

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ject, he would be obligated to both the king and the queen. But Lancelot
does not answer in this way. Furthermore, since Malory tells us, at the
commencement of the tale that Lancelot "loved the queen agayne above all
other ladies days of his lyff, and for hir he dud many dedys of armys".
Malory, then, must be defining chivalry more specifically through Lancelot's
statement of the antithetical nature of the adventurous and the amorous lives.

Lancelot fulfills his verbal commitment to the world of adventure
in his personal quest to liberate the knights of the Round Table. Tar-
quyn has imprisoned "three score and four"1 of Arthur's knights including
Lancelot's nephew, Lionel, and his own cousin, Ector. Although Lancelot
has slain Garados, Tarquyn's brother, at the Dolorous Tower, the giant's
punishment of the other knights is not justified. It, therefore, follows
that Lancelot has a personal obligation to liberate his fellow knights
from their persecutor:

And for sir Lancelottis sake I have slayne an hundred good knightes, and
as many I have mayned all utterly, that they myght never after helpes them-
self, and many have dyed in priso, And yette have I three score and four,
and all shal be deluyerde, so the voltes tellles me thy name, so se hit
that thou be nat sir Lancelot.2

In spite of the fact that Lancelot is the cause of their imprisonment,
his actual guilt being an extrinsic factor, the other knights remember in
gratitude, only their liberation. The incident assures Lancelot's fame.
It is second in greatness only to the Dolorous Tower incident. Lancelot's
generosity and courage become legendary in the Arthurian society and affect-

2Ibid., 266, 29-35.
the attitude of the other knights towards him. On the eve of Aggravayne’s treasonous plot against Lancelot, Gawain, remembering Lancelot’s kindness in rescuing him from Carados of the Dolorous Tower, attempts to dissuade the treachery by reminding his brothers of their mutual obligation to Lancelot:

Also, brother, six Aggravayne and six Hundred, in lyke wyse sir Launcelot rescued you bothe and three score and two from sir Tarquyne. And, therefore, brothir, methynkis suche noble dedis and kyndnes shulde be remembird.\(^1\)

I believe Malory’s conscious artistry is at work here. It is the author’s intention to keep his hero in the foreground even when he is not actively present. The chorus of other knights repeatedly echo and re-echo Lancelot’s goodness and his chivalric skills. In the long "Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones", for example, there are several emendations to the sources which are tantamount to a thematic confirmation of Lancelot’s greatness. When Mark needs a champion to fight Marhult in the crisis involving Cornwall’s truce to Ireland, the barons advise Mark to seek six Lancelot:

Then sone of the barons sayde to Kyng Mark and conceylyed him to sende to the courtes of Kyng Arturme for to seke six Launcelott du Lake that was at that tyme named for the nerevallyste knyghte of the worlde.\(^2\)

The case is only dismissed in respect of the fact that Marhult is a member of the Round Table and so would not fight with a knight of his own brotherhood. It is noteworthy that Malory’s French source does not name Lancelot as a possible champion.\(^3\) Tristram volunteers, presenting himself, for the first time at Mark’s court. In unprecedented situations knights fre-

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\(^1\) Ibid., "The Most Piteuous Tale of the Morte Arthur Samuel Gordon", 1162, 14-18.

\(^2\) Ibid., "The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones", 377, 6-12.

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 1457. It is Vinaver who points out Malory’s addition.
quently make comparisons with Lancelot. La Cote Mayle Taille comes as a stranger to Arthur’s court in search of knighthood. Galerie tells the other knights that they should have faith in him because:

"Owyn suche one was sir Lanncelot when he can fy rst into this courte, and full few of us knew from whens he can. And now is he proved the man of neste worship in the worlde, and all your courte and Rounde Table is by sir Lanncelot worshipped and amended, more than by any knytght lyvyngge."

Even in his absence, Lancelot is the objective standard for the behaviour of the knights of the Round Table. If Lancelot can rise from comparative obscurity to sudden fame, so also may other unknown knights.

Not only is Lancelot referred to as a standard of perfection, but the knights also execute actions in his name. On both thematic and plot levels, Malory makes Lancelot a figure integral to the whole of his works. The hero’s name becomes a talisman. Tristram, for example, ceases to fight with Lancelot’s kinsman, Bleoberis de Gany, in deference to the man he adores. Tristram’s courteous action emulates Lancelot’s:

"That is truth," sayde sir Trystanes, "sir Lanncelot ys called parcles of courte ssey and of knytghthssey and for his sake," sayde sir Trystanes, "I wyll not with my good ylle feyght no more with you, for the grete love I have to sir Lanncelot.""

Lancelot’s name likewise is repeated as a talismanic safeguard for future success in a venture. When Tristram is about to retrieve the shield from Bremis sans Pite, he promises the lady that "for sir Lanncelotys sake I shal gete you that chylde agayne othir he shal beate me." This excessive earthly worship of Lancelot verges on idolatry. The chorus of knights surrounding Lancelot in undertaking actions in his name, or imitating his behaviour, idolize him in the true Platonic sense of a model teacher, perhaps as a father of more than just the virtue of courtesy as was Richard Beauchamp to Malory.

1Ibid., "La Cote Mayle Taille", 459, 31-466, 3.
3Ibid., 465, 21-23.
Lancelot's behaviour is never totally selfless and Malory does not wish us to see it that way. It is not philanthropy but chivalry he is exalting. Lancelot, it is true, risks his life without question for his fellow knights. His self-interest is in the pursuit of glory, of "worshyp". As Malory has pointed out at the beginning of Lancelot's adventures, Guinevere's worship of Lancelot figures heavily in this. But virtue and glory are interdependent. This Malory makes clear. It is goodness that is worshipped. Guinevere, who is the guardian of Lancelot's worship, appropriately sums up Malory's belief:

"Than shall he never wyne worshyp," sayde the quene, for and byt happyn an enyous man onys to wyne worshyp, he shall be dishonoured therefor. And for this cause all men of worshyp hate an enyous man and well shewe hym no favoure, and he that ys curteys and kynde and jantill bath favoure in every place."

This is, in effect, a tribute to Lancelot after his admirable performance at the tournament at Lonszen. Herbert Read quotes a statement of the Spanish writer and philosopher Unamuno which illuminates the intrinsic connection between virtue and glory:

Heroic or saintly life has always followed in the wake of glory, temporal or eternal, earthly or celestial. Believe not those who tell you they seek to do good for its own sake, without hope of reward.

Personal glory, which motivates heroic actions is justifiable, for ultimately a larger number of people benefit.

Lancelot's relationship with the young protege, Gareth, is of great significance with regard to Lancelot's characterization, as well as

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1Ibid., 76s, 26-31.

to the plot structure. Lancelot is the father of Gareth's knighthood.

The similarities between this tale and "La Cote Male Bale" are striking.

In both, Lancelot's kindness and perception are exemplary. He recognizes
nobility in the young knight Gareth:

"Now may ye se," sayde sir Lancelot, "that he ys a noble knyght, for
to considdir his first batalye and his grevous wondre. And evyn forth-
withall, no wounded as he ys, hit ys perwasyde that he may endure thys
longe batalye with that good knyght."1

Lancelot's behaviour to Gareth is consistently generous as well: "And
in especiall sir Lancelot bade sir Kay leve his nocyng, "for I dare ley
my hede he shal prove a man of grote vorsuy."2 Kay's charlissnes
sharply contrasts with Lancelot's compassion. The consistent behaviour
of Lancelot in these two widely separated accounts shows an artistic
intention in Malory's character portrayal. One need only compare the
inconsistencies in Malory's treatment of Gawain to realize that the
author did not have enough interest in this character to smooth over some
of the discrepancies in order to create a consistently admirable figure.

Vinaver remarks on Malory's treatment of Gawain but fails to note the re-
markably contrasting technique he uses in dealing with the two knights:

While in the Merlin, the Lancelot, and the Mort Arty Cawain is a noble,
generous, and valiant knyght—indeed, a real embodiment of courtesy and
bravery—in the French Prose Tristan he appears as a vindictive criminal,
guilty of several offences and noted for his cruelty. Malory does not
attemp to reconcile these two conceptions of Cawain's character; he
blindly accepts the verdict of each of his sources and so produces a
picture full of inconsistencies and contradictions.3


3Ibid., p. 433.
The "Sir Garth of Orkney" section, not being from the Prose Tristan, allows Malory to be somewhat kinder to Gawain who proffers gold and clothing to the fledgling knight as does Lancelot. However, Malory seize the opportunity to remark on Lancelot's true nobility which no obligation of kinship inspires:

But as tochynge sir Gawyne, he had resoun to proffer hym lodginge, mete, and drynke, for that proffer con of his blodes, for he was nere kyn to hym than he yste off; but that sir Lancelot ded was of his grete jantylnesse and curtsey. ¹

It is Lancelot's "jantylnesse" that provokes the admiration of the whole of Arthur's knights: "all men wondere of the nobles of sir Lancelot". ²

One is reminded of these lines from "The Canterbury Tales" since Malory's "jantylnesse" seems to be so much the equivalent of Chaucer's "gentilesse":

Loke who that is moost vertuous alway,
Pryve and apart, and moost entendeth ay
To do the gentil dedes that he kan;
Taak hym for the grestt gentil man.
Crist wale no clayne of hym once gentyllesse,
Hat of oure oltres for hire old riches,
For though they yeve us al his heritag...
To noon of us hir vertuous lyvynge. ³

Lancelot's innate goodness emerges in his relationship with Garth.

W. Guerin in a study of the Garth tale says it functions in part as a complementary section to the development of Lancelot. The two knights are united by their adherence to what Chaucer and Malory call "vertuous

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²Ibid., 292, 22-23.

lyvyns’. Thereby, Guerin says:

Lancelot’s worth is made greater by fostering and befriending the young Beaumains. Their affinity and their oneness in ideals and in innate goodness increase in importance.¹

As Guerin remarks, this relationship increases in importance. However, the bond grows increasingly stronger between Gareth and Lancelot as the breach widens between the two brothers:

For there was no knyght that sir Gareth loved so well as he did sir Lancelot; and ever for the moiste party he wolde ever be in sir Lanchise-lotis company.

For euer after sir Garthe had assyged sir Casaynes condicions, he wythdrew himself fro his brother sir Casaynes felship, for he was euer vengeable, and there he hated he wolde be avenged with wurther: and that hated sir Garthe.²

In particular, Gareth holds the slaying of Lamerok against Gawain and his brothers:

‘But as for me,’ sayde sir Garthe, ‘I madde nil mot of their matres, and therefore there is none that lowth me of them. And for cause that I understande they be martheres of good knyghtes I lefte ther company, and wolde God I had bone byside sir Casayne whan that moaste noble knyght sir Lamerok was slayne’³

Gawain is capable of courteous and chivalrous behaviour but he is also guilty of the treacherous slaying of Lamerok. Gawain and his brothers:

sette uppon sir Lamerok in a pryvy place, and there they slew his horse. And so they fought with hym on foot more than three cawsys both before hym and behinde hym, and so sir Hendredes gaff hym his deathis wounds lyhynde hym at his bakke, and all to-here hym.⁴


⁴Ibid., cit., 22-26.
The inconsistencies in Gawain's character serve to reinforce just the opposite qualities of consistent virtue in Lancelot. For Lancelot slew Gareth and Cadernis by mistake and would have slain his own nephew to have avoided that mistake: "I wolde with as good a wyll have slayne my nevell, sir Bors de Canys, at that tyme."1

The most significant aspect of Lancelot's and Gareth's relationship is the dubbing of the younger knight into the Order of Knighthood. One of Gareth's requests of Arthur was that Lancelot should make him knight at the end of twelve months. During that time Gareth asked to prove himself as a knight-exempt in the adventure of the damsel, Lyonett.

And the other two gyffys he asked that day twelve-monthes, and that was that he wyght have the adventure of the damsel Lyonett; and the thirsde, that sir Lancelot shold make hym knyght whan he desyred hym.2

Unmistakably, Malory makes this fact the focal point of their relationship. Lancelot is the teacher, the model and the father of Gareth's knighthood. Not once does the younger knight forget that he received his knighthood from Lancelot. His unswerving loyalty rests on that fact. Frequently, he refers to his investiture as the primary cause of his actions. At the Great Tournament he shows his gratitude in a generous desire to help Lancelot: "I woll ryde unto my lorde sir Lancelot for to helpes hym whatsoever no betyde. For he ye the same man that made me knyght."3 In fact, Gareth, along with Gawain regards the envy and treason of their brothers as a greater threat to the Round Table than the love affair: "the noble folkeslyp of the Round Table shall be disparsbeled."4 This is a sentiment which the king

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3Ibid., "The Book of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinesvere", 1110, 32-34.
shares:

the kyng was fulle lothe that such a noyse shulde be uppon sir launcelot and his quene; for the kyng had a denyng of hit, but he wold nat here thereof, for sir launcelot had done so much for hym and for the quene so many tymes that wyto you well the kynges loved hym passyngly well.¹

Gareth refuses as well to act on his brothers condemnation of launcelot's behaviour with the quene: "for I shall never say evyll by that man that made me knayght."² Of course, Gareth's motivation differs from the king's. However the similar behaviour of Gareth and Arthur reveal where Malory's preferences lie. For Gareth, it is sanctity of his knighthood investiture. For Arthur, it is launcelot's generous deeds of arms. Obviously, the institution of knighthood has a moral code involving an honour and loyalty that is stronger than the theological virtue of chastity, and cannot be threatened by grievances in the strictly personal sphere. As Malory's earliest editor remarked in his translation of haven lull, "most breaches of the rules are considered sins against an abstract code (order) rather than against God or man".³

Perhaps the gravity of the ceremony of investiture and the binding nature of the dubbing linger as an inevitable carry over from the early feudal chivalry of the Crusades. The bond between knighthood and the Church influenced the ceremony of entrance into knighthood. In fact, "it simulated the ordination into the Priesthood",⁴ an originally barbaric

¹ Tbid., 1163, 22-25.
² Tbid., 1162, 26-29.
³ Lulli: Op. Cit., p. 33
investiture with arms in the feudal era was spiritualized under the Church's influence during the Crusades. The ritual involved the bade, symbolizing purification, the red, white and black garments, symbolic of self-sacrifice, innocence and death. A fast of twenty-four hours duration, an all night chapel vigil, confession, mass and a sermon followed. The sword was blessed by the bishop since it symbolized the active life of service and devotion of the knight. The accolade, the light touch with the sword, conferring knighthood, climaxed this religious prelude. This part of the ceremony, "In colloque qui significat l'Ordre de Chevalerie", became the most crucial point in the chevalric romances of the thirteenth century.\(^1\) Although the religious significance is absent from Malory's ceremony involving Lancelot and Gareth, the binding nature of the vow remains. Gareth's loyalty to Lancelot shows that he regards this act as significantly binding for the duration of his life. It was the desire of the novitiate knight, because of the great dignity of the office of conferring knighthood, that a man of outstanding perfection in arms, a man of "worship", in Malory's terms, should undertake the accolade or dubbing.

It would not be an exaggeration to conclude that the conception of Lancelot as the knight of the highest respect, generosity, and whose devotion to the Order of Knighthood is of paramount importance far exceeds what Vinaver and others generally hold to be Malory's concept of chivalry.\(^2\) The

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\(^1\) Jacob, ibid., p. 43. The above information concerning the knighthly ceremony is found in Jacob's essay, pp. 37-55.

figure of Lancelot somehow vastly expands the narrow injunction of Arthur
to his knights:

never to do outexage nothir, northir, and alwayes to file treason, and to
cyff mercy unto hym that asketh mercy, upon payne of forfite [of their]
worship and lordship of kyng Arthur for evermore; and alwayes to do
ladyes, damessels, and jantilwomen and nydes [socour] upon payne of dothe.
Also, that no man take no bataches in a wrongfull quarrell for no love
ne for no worldly goodis. So unto thyse were all kyghtis sworne of the
Table Rounde, both elde and yonge, and every yere so were the [y] sworne
at the hyghe fest of Penteceste.

In fact, the character of Lancelot is Malory's magnificent, nostalgic pecan
to a declining chivalry of his own time.

\[1\]\textit{Ibid.}, 120, 17-27.
LANCELOT THE GRAIL SEEKER

Malory's presentation of Lancelot, the fighting man, "the man of
of moste worship in the worlde"\(^1\), lacks depth without an examination of
Lancelot's role as a Grail seeker. A study of the development of the hero's
character shows that the Grail section is organically related to the rest
of Malory's works. Lancelot is basically a man of arms, and, as such,
remains attached to the world of chivalric activity. The character of
Lancelot lacks depth until the emergence of internal conflict in the Grail
section. In spite of the fact that the "Tale of the Sankgreal" is "the
least original"\(^2\) of Malory's works, it is a significant section in rounding
out Lancelot's character. Most scholars would agree that Lancelot is the
most interesting character of all the knights because of his inner, unre-
solved conflict. This aspect gives Lancelot a dimension of character, lack-
ing in Galahad. For this reason Lancelot, and not Galahad, is the chief
protagonist of the Grail quest. Percival and Bors demonstrate varying de-
grees of conflict. P. E. Tucker considers the Grail story as most clearly

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2 Ibid., p. 1535. One must keep in mind the difficulty of establishing the
extent of Malory's originality. Vinaver points out this pitfall which
arises in any attempt to compare Malory's Grail story with the editions
of extant manuscripts.
understood as a part of the story of Lancelot. However, his concentration on the "conflicting loyalties of love and chivalry" does not adequately explain the nature of Lancelot's conflict. These two terms are not really antithetical but are, in fact, correlative of each other.

Levy, in referring to the quest as an "epic of search", believes Lancelot holds the stage because of his interior conflict and, unlike Calahad, has epic dimensions for that reason. Conflict in Levy's definition is essential to epic. Lancelot's struggle to transcend the terrestrial world to enter the spiritual world "gives great richness to Lancelot's personality". 

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1 P. G. Tucker, "The Place of 'The Quest of the Holy Grail' in the North Bartlet", Modern Language Review, XLVIII (1953), 391-397. Tucker adamantly opposes the combination of knight-lover. He believes that Malory found the presentation of Lancelot as knight-lover distasteful in his French sources. Tucker says: "Malory is greatly troubled by the French conception of Lancelot as the supreme knight-lover. For Malory knighthood is simply a worthy and honorable status; it is his conception of the highest excellence in man, and he gives terms like 'chivalry' and 'honor' a moral significance." (p. 391) Tucker then proposes the theory of "pure knighthood". Lancelot, according to Tucker, shows on more than one occasion that he dislikes Guinevere. The hero's own words deny this: "I do batayle were hit right other wronge..." for to wynde worship and to cause me the better to be beloved." Malory, Op. Cit., 897, 16-21. Malory's belief in knighthood as an honorable status is certainly unequivocal. However, Tucker's redefinition of Malory's knighthood is neither more clarifying nor more accurate than other attempts to dissolve the equation of knight-lover in favour of a more austere, virgin knighthood. Tucker has fallen prey to Carton's moral intent previously mentioned.


3 Loc. Cit., p. 222.
tagonist of the Grail quest as well as a figure of structural unity:

The climax of structural unity, the climax of dramatic character, the epic grandeur of the poem reach their culmination, not in the vision of the Grail, not in the quest of Galahad, not in the triumph or death of Arthur but in the spiritual anguish of Sir Lancelot. ¹

Although I am not attempting to prove that Lancelot is a unifying figure from a structural point of view, certainly from the point of view of characterization, I find a definite unity. As I am attempting to demonstrate in my thesis, Malory consistently maintains an impression of heroic magnitude in his hero's struggles as Thornton corroborates.

In the French sources, chastity is the sole criterion for a vision of the Grail. Malory could hardly alter this in his sources; however, he reduced the stringency of this in a variety of ways. Namely, the hermit, appears in Malory at Arthur's court at the commencement of the quest and stipulates that "none in thyse queste lode lady mother jantilluomman with hyse, for hit ys nat to do in so hyche a servysse as they laboure in. For I wanne you playne, he that ys nat clesse of hyse symes he shall nat as the mysteries of cese Lorde Jesu Criste".² In both Malory and the French, women are linked with the temptation to causal sin. In a section which Vinaver entitles "The Mirocles", a hermit tells Gawain that Galahad's success comes from his chastity; he is "a mayde and symned never, and that ys the cause he shall encvye where he goth".³

³ Ibid., 691, 33-35.
This section appears to correspond to a number of French sections including one entitled "Errours de Cavain", a section which appears to be the source of this statement about Calahad. However, the reference to Calahad's virginity does not appear at this time. ¹ Cavain desires to know why a monk called himself and Melay "serjans nuvés et desloix". ² The hermit replies in a long speech beginning "Sire, a droit fustes apoles nuvés serjans et desloix".³ Rather than praising Calahad's virginity the hermit refers to his refraining from homicide: "Calahad, li Bone Chevaliers, cil que vos als querant: car il les conquist sans acirre".⁴ The mention of chastity at this time may be Malory's convenient addition to reinforce the stereotyped image of Calahad as chaste. Again in the symbolic dream of the balls, both Calahad and Percival, "madyns and clene withoute spotte",⁵ are separated, by virtue of their chastity, from the other knights. The gulf between the world of the quest and Arthur's court is, in this way, widened. In the final section, entitled "The Miracle of Calahad", King Nordrain, blinded by the Grail, awaits Calahad's coming. He wishes to die in Calahad's arms because he is "a clene virgyn above al knyghtes, as the flowe of the lyly in whon virginito is signified".⁶ Calahad has never sinned.

¹The original text Malory used, not being extant, makes it uncertain to say whether this line referring to Calahad as a "mayde and ynned never" was absolutely not in the French.


³Ibid., 52, 11.

⁴Ibid., 54, 26-28.


⁶Ibid., 1025, 12-14.
carnally. Percival has been tempted and has resisted by a somewhat timely and miraculous reminder of his faith. 1 Boxe has sinned once and repented and abstained. All three knights are linked, in a descending order of perfection, by the virtue of chastity.

Although the French Queste implies, as Albert Pauphilet points out, that:

la vie morale est tout entière résumée par l'antithèse de la luxure et de la virginité... c'est ici le grand pervertisseur, l'ennemi. Point de salut sans l'abolition du désir sexuel, pas de pardon même pour une atteinte à la pureté de la chair, à moins d'une rude pénitence. 2

Malory's treatment of Lancelot changes this rigid theological stipulation of the French. Malory's use of the Grail quest must be understood in terms of his total conception of Lancelot as a knight and thus as a man of action, as well as the relationship between Guinevere and the world of action.

The character of Galahad is virtually an abstraction of the theological virtue of chastity. His role is, in contrast to Lancelot's, symbolical rather than actual. Malory's numerous references to Galahad as a model of chastity as well as the knowledge that he has never been tempted to sin leads one to speculate, as Pauphilet does, on the pre-ordination of Galahad and Percival and, hence, their exclusion from the real world of Arthur's court and knighthood: "La grâce vient à ceux qui ont eu d'abord la bonne volonté même n'est-elle pas déjà un don de Dieu, une première grâce?" 3 This possibility sets up an irreconcilable dichotomy between the contemplative, celestial world of the quest and the active chivalric world.

1Ibid., "Sir Percival", 916, 29-34.


3Ibid., p. 32.
of Arthur's court. Insofar as Galahad is a symbolical illustration of a divine law, he cannot sin. He is chosen by Divine Grace to achieve the sanctifying vision of the Grail quest. Lancelot senses Galahad's spiritual ascendancy over himself and the other knights and refrains from touching the sword in the rock. The removal of the sword presupposes the operation of divine will in the person attempting the feat. At Arthur's request:

Lancelot answered full soberly, 'Sir, hit ye not my sword; also I have no hardines to sette my hands thereto, for hit highteth not to hange be my syde. Also, who that assayth to take hit and saylih of that sword, he shall resseyve a wounde by that sworde that he shall not be longe hole affynte'.

Lancelot's humble reluctance to remove the sword contrasts sharply with Bagdemagus' presumption in bearing a shield which "behoivith unto no man but unto sir Calahad".

However, Calahad's pre-ordination does not seem to commence before the actual quest. Proof of this is his inability to unhorse Lancelot in the final tournament before the departure.

Then six Calahad dressed hym in myddys of the medow and began to broke speere weavelysly, that all men had wondir of hym, for he there surmounted all other knyghtes. For within a while he had defended many good knyghtes of the Table Rounde sauff all only twyne, that was sir Lancelot and sir Perceval.

The struggle is still within the terrestrial context of Arthur's court. The opponents are real and the combat is to demonstrate chivalric prowess. This last factor, like the pre-ordination of Calahad, does much to reinforce the dichotomy of the worldly and the spiritual and makes more difficult any attempt to evaluate the two. However, once the quest has commenced, the context changes. Calahad is then able to unhorse Lancelot.

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2) Ibid., "The miracles", 878, 26-27.
What Malory found in his sources was essentially a theological
treatise on Grace. ¹ Calahad is the perfection of human will, of Divine
Grace at work in man's soul. As such, the Grail quest is enacted on a level
above the ordinary physical experiences of the temporal world, the battle-
field, Arthur's court and its tournaments. The requirements of the Grail
knights are clear cut. The quest is, essentially, a confrontation between
Divine will and human will. The hermits are symbolical extensions of the
subordination of human to Divine will. The submission of man's will to God
is a fairly specific requirement which affords a mystical vision of the
Grail. Human will, man's enemy, is invisible, because it is subjective.
The Grail seeker, must, like the monastic hermit, struggle to conquer and
subdue the enemy within. Thornton makes a significant distinction between
the reality of religious wars against the Saracens in defense of the Church
and the less real, less defined enemy within man's nature. She draws a
comparison between Tasso's Crusaders in Jerusalem Liberata and Malory's
Grail seekers: "Tasso's knights are involved in a militant religious con-
fusion, warring against definite pagan enemies" while Malory's knights seek
a mystic ideal, and are thus "warring against subjective enemies, and, in
proportion as they vanquish these, they are victorious in their quest."²

In this confrontation of Divine and human will, virginity becomes
an outward sign of the resolution of the inner conflict, the harmonization
of man's will with God's in the achievement of a state of moral perfection.
Pauwhelet comments on this state of spiritual transcendence symbolized in

¹Ibid., p. 1539.
²Thornton, Op. Cit., p. 82.
the physical state of virginity: "La Queste tout entière apparaît donc
coumo une glorification de la virginité... ce qu'oil entend par ce mot c'est
daillers moines, une qualité physique qu'un état moral."\(^1\) It is in this
state that Calahad has achieved prior to the opening of the quest in both
Galory and the French sources. This is the interpretation Galory places on
his sources and does not attempt to alter. Galory grants Lancelot an aware-
ness of Calahad's priority in order that he may strive to emulate his son.
The damsel who comes to Arthur's court prior to the departure hints at the
conflicting doubt that will assail Lancelot when he aspires to follow Cala-
had: "Wherefore I make unto you a remembrance that ye shall not some from
henceforth the that ye be the best knyght of the world.,"\(^2\)

How does Lancelot fit, then, into a world of experience which seems
to exclude him from the start? He is a man used to the very real world of
physical combat in which chivalric process earned him the tangible rewards
of worship in the humanitarian pursuit of virtuous living. At Arthur's
court or on the battlefield he knew he was fighting against the enemies of
the High Order of Knighthood. He knew how to perform virtuous actions and
to whom to dedicate them. The quest forces him to compete with knights who
have a head start, such as Calahad and Percival, in an atmosphere in which:
"tous les attributs du Czal sont ceux mêmes de Dieu. Imméteriel, omni-
présent, entoué des êtes célestes, il a la toute-puissance et la grâce
miraculeuse".\(^3\)

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In clarifying the context in which Lancelot fulfills his role, Malory keeps present the link with the past greatness of Lancelot and, consequently, the very real world of Arthurian values. The equation of "knyghtly deys and vertuous lyvyng", Vinaver says, describes the duties of a good Christian on the Arthurian scale of values.\(^1\) As a man of arms, Lancelot has faithfully practised such virtues. Several references to Lancelot's greatness widen the breach between Arthur's world of chivalric self-assertion and the hermitic world of monastic self-denial. Lancelot can fail in a spiritual undertaking without endangering his former reputation. Generally, during the quest, a reminder to acknowledge God's beneficence in giving Lancelot superior powers accompanies the tribute to his past greatness: "ye ought to thank God more than any knyght lyvyng, for he hath caused you to have more worldly worship than any knyght that ye now lyvyng."\(^2\) In the history of Lancelot's lineage, in the section entitled "Sir Lamecelot", another hermit says: "And thou ought to thank God more than any other man lyvyng, for of a sinner earthly thou hast no pore as in knyghthode nother never shall have. But lytyll thank hast thou yeuyn to God for all the great vertuys that God hath lente the."\(^3\) One of these tributes of retrospective praise is Malory's addition,\(^4\) "Now have I warned

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\(^1\) Malory, Op. Cit., p. 1536. Vinaver says Malory substitutes the chivalric emphasis on good works, in the Arthurian scale of values, for the strictly theological duty to God in the French: "pour ce que vous fausses sergens a Nostre Creator et defensissies Saincte Eglise et que vous rendissies a Nostre Seigneur le tresor que vous ayes a garder, ce est Ja vie de vous (var. l'ame de vous)." The approach, in Malory, is as usual, more humanitarian. This substitution is particularly relevant to Malory's world of chivalry which embraces the defense of right living rather than the defense of the Church as in the Crusades.


\(^3\) Ibid., "Sir Lamecelot", 939, 14-18.

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 1523.
the of thy wayneglory and of thy pryde, that thou haste many tymes arred 
ayenste thy Maker. Beware of everlastynge payne, for of all erythly knyghtes 
I have neste pite of the, for I know well thou haste nat thy pere of any 
erythly symfull man."1 Obviously Malory believes success in the active world 
is independent of moral perfection. Praise and censurc go hand in hand 
and carry no injunction to sacrifice the former to remove the latter. 

These praises, however, bring with them the admonition to replace 
pride with humility. Lancelot, according to the hermits, has not fully 
acknowledged God as the source of all his prowess. The sin of pride, 
"bohunauce and pryde of the worlde"2 seems to be equally offensive as un-
chastity. In his first confession of his sin with Guinevere, Lancelot 
repents his desire for worldly worship and confesses that Guinevere was the 
cause of his skill in arms. The emphasis on the sin of pride tends to 
draw attention away from the sin of unchastity, "le grant pervertisseur"3, 
in the French Questa. Since virginity is almost the sole criterion for the 
Grail vision, this is all to the benefit of Lancelot. Guinevere is linked 
to the hero's sin of pride because she is the cause of his pride in chival-
ric prowess. Hence, Guinevere is a symbol of this vice which irrevocably 
steams from the world of action, the world of chivalry. 

In his encounter with the first hermit, Lancelot makes his confes-

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1 Ibid., "Sir Lancelot", 934, 19-23.
2 Ibid., 933, 32.
3 See p. 41 of my thesis.
sion of his unchastity with Guinevere. A comparison with the appropriate section in Malory's source, *La Queste del Saint Graal*, reveals that Malory put the stress on Guinevere's link with Lancelot's pride rather than with the sin of adultery or unchastity which he found in the source. Such an emphasis was more suitable to Malory's understanding of the character of Lancelot and the nature of his conflict. Lancelot's confession causes him grave anguish in the French *Queste*:

Et Lancelot pense un petit, com cil qui enques ne reconna l'aure de lui et de la reine, ne ne dira tant come il vive, ne trop grand amonestem a ce ne le reine. Si giste un seoir dou parfot dou cue et est tal aternes qu'il ne poust issir paroles de sa boucha. ¹

Malory's Lancelot suffers no such pain, although he is "full lothe to discover". ² Only when the hermit "li preuat la vie pardwable por le gevir et enver por le color" ³ did the French Lancelot confess. Malory's hero expresses no fear of eternal punishment in hell nor does the hermit persuade him with the promise of eternal life. Hence, the gravity of Lancelot's confession is somewhat lessened in Malory. Furthermore, Malory places the emphasis on the venial sin of pride rather than on the mortal sin of adultery. Lancelot in the French *Queste* recognizes immediately the seriousness of adultery: "je suis martin de pechii d'une noie dans que je ai ame toute ma vie, et ce est la reine Guerniere, la femme le roi Artus." ⁴ No mention is made of Arthur in Malory. Furthermore, Lancelot's shame issues from his realization that he held Guinevere as the prist movever of his suc-

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⁴Ibid., 66, 8-10.
cess rather than God: "For hir sake wolde I do batayle were hit ryght other wrong...nought I thanked never God of hit." 1

The French Queste and Malory differ notably with regard to Lancelot's penance. The hermit in the French makes Lancelot promise "que je ne meferois a vosstre creautre en fesant pechié mortel de la reine ne d'autre dame ne d'autre chose dont vos le doies corrosier". 2 Malory's hermit is less rigid in his command to Lancelot to foreake the queen "as much as ye may forber". 3 Malory's intention seems obvious. Rather than stress the sin of adultery which Charles Hoorman says Malory "had been preparing to indict all along" 4 he evades it. Whether he disapproved of it or not is unimportant for his purposes. Malory chose, in my opinion, to concentrate on Lancelot's pride which is linked to Guinevere. In this way, Malory stressed Lancelot's irrevocable tie with the active world. Lancelot is thus faced with conflicting ways of life. He attempts to substitute the intangible ascetic ideals of the contemplative solitude of the hermits for the more substantial values which the society of Arthur's court had engendered in him.

Malory's source, being a doctrinal statement on Divine Grace, expressed in the hermitic life of solitude, closely resembles Cistercian monasticism. Edmund Reiss thinks the Queste may have been written by a Cistercian monk:

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3 Malory, Ibid., 897, 26.
In its spiritual concepts the Queste seems to follow Augustinian ideas as seen particularly in the twelfth-century mystic, St. Bernard of Clairvaux and the work may have been written by a thirteenth-century Cistercian monk. 1 Pauphilet's study of the Queste explores the influence of Cistercian mysticism on medieval Christianity:

Ce qui intéresse le plus notre étude, c'était le principe même de la vie cistercienne, la prépondérance donnée dans la religion à la morale et dans la morale au pragmatisme. 2

The pragmatic approach to the life of moral perfection is in the chastisement of the flesh, fasting and prayer. Preservation of the monastic spirit can only lead to a renunciation of the material world as Pauphilet suggests. The monastic spirit "ne peuvent guère subsister que dans un esprit isolé et préservé par la vie contemplative". 3 The spiritual life which Arthur's knights seek demands renunciation of all worldly ties including natural affections. Calahad, whose will is already made perfect, does not struggle as do Bors and Percival. In the symbolical ship of Solomon, Bors and Percival tell Calahad they lack nothing but Lancelot's presence. Calahad answers "that may not be...but if hit pleased our lorde". 4 Calahad shows no desire himself for Lancelot's company. Instead he depends totally on God's will to determine Lancelot's worthiness to enter the ship of faith. Percival's sister symbolically renounces the world when she says she gave up the guilde made with her hair "whytle that she was a woman of the world". 5

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3 Ibid., p. 53.
5 Ibid., 995, 4.
At the news of his mother's death, Percival's dispassionate words imply his unquestioning acceptance of God's will: "now God have mercy on his soul...but all we must change the lyffe."¹ He hurries on to ask about Calahad whom he is seeking. Bors' choice of saving an unknown maiden's virginity rather than his brother's life presumably is more acceptable to God in terms of the significance of chastity to the quest. Bors prays to God to give him direction:

Than lyffe he up by sygnes and seyde wanynge, 'Fayre saute Lorde Jesus Crist, whose creature I am, kepe me six lyonell, my brothir, that thes knyghteis ale hym nat, and for pite of you and for nylde Maryes sake, I shall succour thys wayde.'²

Bors seems to have done the right thing according to the demands of the quest. His brother is saved by Divine providence. However, there is no reconciliation between the kinmen. A divine voice intervenes to save Bors from the necessity of killing Lionesal but their separation must be eternal: Bors is told to "beare fellowship no lenger with thy brothir".³

Similarly, Divine providence or the miracle of grace saves Percival from sin. As Percival is about to lie naked by the lady of the pavilion, "by adventure and grace he saw his sword by on the arthe naked, where in the posell was a rode crosse and the synne of the crucifixe...and then he made a synne in the forshed of hye. And therewith the pavylon turned up-se-done and than hit chonged unto a smokes and a blake clouds."⁴

By contrast, Lancelot's human struggle without the side of miraco-

¹Ibid., "Sir Perceval", 906, 7-8.
³Ibid., 974, 11-12.
⁴Ibid., "Sir Perceval", 918, 29-919, 1.
This other day, when we saw a part of the adventures of the Sangreal, I was in such joy of heart that I saw never man was (that was) earthly. And therefore I wrote well, when my body ye sted, my soul shall be in great joy to see the Alysed Trinity every day and the majesty of our Lorde Jesu Cryste.1

Galahad, in the Cistercian terms of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, knows this is a glimpse of the great joy of the beatific vision.

There is a very clear-cut distinction between the spiritual world of Divine contemplation and the earthly world of activity. Malory, like the majority of men of his time, would have been aware of this dichotomy. Lancelot's confrontation with the spiritual world and his heroic attempt to transcend earthly life makes one reject Vinaver's theory that Malory's Grail quest is a totally secular experience. Vinaver describes what he thinks is Malory's view of the Grail quest:

His attitude may be described without much risk of over-simplification as that of a man to whom the quest of the Grail was primarily an Arthurian adventure and who regarded the intrusion of the Grail upon Arthur's kingdom not as a means of contrasting earthly and divine chivalry and condemning the former, but as an opportunity offered to the knights of the Round Table to achieve still greater glory in this world...and so throughout the story Malory is primarily concerned with 'earthly worship', not with any higher purpose, and his one desire seems to be to secularize the Grail theme as much as the story will allow.2

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2Ibid., p. 1535. See also Charles Noorman, "Malory's Treatment of the Sangreal", Op. Cit., 495-509. Noorman also rejects Vinaver's theory of secularization, Noorman, unlike Vinaver, says Malory preserved the religious tone: "he always preserves the core of the French book's doctrinal statements, no matter how great his deletions." (p. 498) Like Noorman, I accept Malory's preservation of an essentially religious experience, the presentation of a spiritual existence, separate and distinct, from the world of Arthur's court. However, my reasons differ. Rather than contrast the two worlds for the sake of condemning the chivalric world of Arthur's court and Lancelot's relationship to Guinevere, I think Malory praises the heroic struggle and considers the failure as fortuitous because success would mean the exchange of the active role for the contemplative, a transition Malory could not accept. His whole conception of Lancelot as the ideal hero of the world of chivalry would deny any kind of substitution.
Rather than a secular experience, Malory makes very clear the uniqueness of the quest's intrinsic spiritual nature. Failure is always imminent. Bussel tells him "for ye were beforetime nearer than ye be now." 1

Hermit forbids him the vision of the Grail: "sake ye hit ye may well, but though hit were here ye shall have no power to see hit." 2 Lancelot has never before sought something so intangible and illusive as the contemplation of the Grail and, at the sense of his own unworthiness "sire launcelot began to wepe". 3 His genuine sincerity in wishing to replace his love for earthly things with a love for divine things makes the Grail more than a secular experience to win earthly worship.

Furthermore it is difficult to explain the immensity of Malory's chivalry from the moral values of the quest. Malory constantly presents the praise of Lancelot's chivalry as importunes to moral transgressions: "of a symer earthly thou has no power as in knyghthode nother never shall have". 4 Malory's unqualified praise of chivalry cannot be justified by resorting to distinctions between heavenly and earthly chivalry. The former can be nothing but the symbolical Christian soldier of St. Paul or St. Augustine. In the words of St. Paul "Let Christ Jesus be the armour that you wear" 5 we are reminded of the familiar "frore neveur des armes Nostre Seignon et voulait omenier la masse" 6 in the French Queste. What Tucker and other scholars refer to as "la chevaillierie terreine" and "la

2Ibid., 927, 12-13.
3Ibid., 925, 17.
4Ibid., 930, 15-16.
chivalerie célestial" do not represent antithetical concepts in Malory. 1

Heavenly chivalry can really as St. Paul points out be an abstract concept.
Pauphilet describes most convincingly the religious metaphor which can apply
to the secluded hermit or the monk in his cell:

On a vu le monde comme un champ de bataille, et tout homme pieux comme un
soldat. Le mysticisme a prêté à la Chrétienté une figure guerrière. L'humble
religieux qui dans le fond de sa cellule s'efforce à la sainteté par les
pratiques se compare magnifiquement aux héros d'épopée; lui aussi est un
combattant, un "chevalier", champion du plus grand roi du monde. Par la
vertu des mots, il transpose son propre personnage; porte-t-il le frot ou
l'armure? C'est tout un. 2

The enemy is an abstraction, invisible and unvanquishable and so requires all
one's effort to combat for all of one's life. The way of life presented in
the quest is the Cistercian life of prayer and fasting, implying total
separation of oneself from things terrestrial in order to concentrate on
things celestial. Terrestrial life in Malory is the active role of the
chevalier. It is unlike the chivalry of the Crusades which could be rightly
called "la chevaillerie célestial" because the knight actively defended
the Church, the symbol of God on earth. In that sense, the knights were
soldiers of Christ. Neither the French Queste nor Malory presents this
way of life.

In the French Queste, Pauphilet points out the condemnation of
chivalric prowess:

1 Tucker, Op. Cit., p. 64. Tucker says the good chivalry is the chivalry
of good deeds and virtuous living and is represented by the Grail. The
bad chivalry is lancelot's chivalry connected with Guinevere. Hence,
Tucker says Malory understood that the French Queste condemned chivalry
with courtly implications. This theory, aside from the obvious possibility
of the good and bad dichotomy, totally ignores the allegorical level of
meaning contained in the chivalric language of the monastic life devoted
to God.

La prouesse chevaleresque, exaltée dans tous les romans comme une vertu qui suffit à l’homme, est ici ouvertement reprise: "Car bien sachie que en cette queste ne vos peut vos tro chevalerie rien valoir, se li madez Reyens ne vos fet la voie en totes les aventures que vos troverez." 1

Perhaps the stern castigation of chivalry in the French *queste* can best be explained by the Church’s attitude to chivalry in the middle ages. In particular, the Church scorned the tournaments, "ces détestables fêtes", where knights "se combattait furieusement au peril des corps et des âmes." 2 The militant reality of knighthood, unless in the service of the Church, was totally at odds with the religious concept of peace. Furthermore, knighthood was a temptation to sin. Chivalric prowess in the "quest for glory...drifted only too often into the cardinal sin of pride. The chivalric idealization of fighting as the highest form of secular activity could never be wholly reconciled with the Christian ideal of a world at peace." 3

An examination of Lancelot’s successive experiences in his spiritual pilgrimage towards his inevitable failure at Corbenic to transcend the earthly life will reveal that his failure is neither a condemnation of chivalric prowess nor of Lancelot’s love. Malory, sufficiently aware of the medieval dichotomy between the earthly and the celestial, presents two incompatible absolutes. Romance by its very stress on action rather than dialectics is objective. We are not afforded a direct statement of Malory’s preference, either for the contemplative solitude of the hermits or the active life of the chevalier. There are certain symbolical events

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in both the French and the English. They are readily explainable in terms of Malory's dichotomy. Prior to his confession of the sin of pride in arms, inspired by his love for Guinevere, Lancelot, as well as Percival, is unhorsed by Calahad. It is helpful to recall that Calahad could not unhorse Lancelot nor Percival at Arthur's court. Such a defeat becomes symbolical in the context of the Grail. Percival had not yet found Calahad. He was still in the company of Lancelot and symbolically attached to the world until his castigation of the flesh in renunciation of the world and its temptations at the end of the Percival section. Hence in terms of the quest, this is a spiritual defeat. Calahad is in a sense more perfect because he is chaste. The event occurs prior to Lancelot's confession of his unchastity, thus he was still on the outside of the spiritual world of the quest. Likewise, Percival had not yet yet found Calahad and united with him in a common aim.

Lancelot loses his horse twice. As I pointed out in chapter one of this thesis, the horse and armour are symbolical extensions of the knight himself. They identify his role. Lancelot retrieves his own horse. In his horse and arms is his defense against failure in the active world, a defense that is, significantly, irrelevant in the spiritual context of the Grail. This defense in his active role is directed toward the maintenance of his reputation as a man of great prowess. Thus his horse becomes a symbol of pride. Pauphilet confirms this:

L'orgueil, à plusieurs reprises, est signifié par un grand cheval... un tel symbole, bien qu'il ne paraîsse pas avoir été employé par l'iconographie, n'était pas inconnu des clercs. 2


2 Pauphilet, On. Cm., p. 111.
While he is overcome before the holy vessel, another knight steals his horse. The loss of his horse is an injunction to humility. According to St. Bernard, this is the first stage, "le népris de soi et l'humilité: contemptus sui," in the conversion to the contemplative monasticism of the Cistercians. In terms of Lancelot's struggle, the loss of his horse then becomes a sign to him to relinquish the active life of chivalry. It is significant that the hermit refits Lancelot only after his humble confession of his pride and love for Guinevere. In this context, his horse and arms become the symbolical armour of God.

Lancelot loses his horse a second time at the River Mortaysa prior to his entrance of the Ship of Faith and his reunion with Galahad. His reaction suggests his will is in accord with God's: "and then he toke hys helme and hys sholdir, and thanked God of hys adventure." He takes a passive role, lies down to sleep, and depends on divine help:

Now seyth the tale that whan sir Lancelot was com to the watir of Mortays as hit ye reherced before, he was in grete perall. And so he leyde hyn doun and alepte, and toke the adventure that God wolde sende hym. So whan he was aslepe there cam a vision uto hym that seyde,

"Sir Lancelot, aryse up and take thyns armour, and entire into the firste shippe that thou shalt fynde!"

Lancelot, in the company of Percival's sister, sojourns temporarily in the ship. This is a period of contemplation, Lancelot focuses all his attention

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3. Ibid., 935, 3-4.
on God. This temporary spiritual victory explains Lancelot's nourishment by the Grace of Our Lord. His faith in Divine providence expels all his fears for his physical needs. Such a state of contemplation can only result from a complete rupture with the world, Malory says:

If ye wold ask how he lyved, for he that fedde the people of Israel with manna in deserte, so was he fedde: for every day, when he had seyde his prayers, he was susteyned with the grace of the Holy Gost.¹

This is, however, only a lull in the storm. Lancelot cannot remain inactive for long. Once he has achieved such harmony with the Divine, his limitations, derived from his indoctrination in worldly activity, reveal themselves. The spiritual food of contemplation cannot nourish him enough and "so on a nyght² he went to play hym by the natire syde, for he was somewhat very of the shippe".² Persistent effort which the hermits embrace is necessary to retain the state of grace and total fusion of the will with God. In the French, Lancelot does not leave the ship: "Ensi fu Lancelot un moys et plus on la nef, que enques n'en issi".³ He filled his time with prayer and the sweetness of Grace: "toutes les hores que Lancelot avoit fete ceste priere, si se trovoit si plain et si resasi et si garmi de la grace deus Saint Esprit, qu'il li et bien avis qu'il est geste de toutes les bones viandes deu monde".⁴ Perhaps Malory made this significant change to demonstrate the power over Lancelot of the active world of physical experiences and events. Lancelot cannot be, in effect, dead to the world as is Percival's sister.

¹Ibid., 1011, 27-30.
²Ibid., 1011, 31-1012, 2.
⁴Ibid., 249, 32 - 250, 3.
Two other events seem to suggest the same inability to separate the spiritual nature from the physical properties of an experience. One of these, the tournament of the white and black knights, reveals a pattern of instinctive behaviour of the hero. The spontaneous reliance on action is incongruous in the context of the quest. Lancelot helps "the wayker party in increasing of his shevalry". ¹ I agree with Tucker that the tournament demonstrates Lancelot's pride in chivalric prowess² and, hence, his attachment to the world. However, in spite of his heroic attempts to conform to the monastic ways, he still does not see that degrees of chivalric prowess are independent from degrees of morality: "for never or now was I never at turnaments no at justes but I had the beste. And now I am shamed, and am sure that I am more symfuller than ever I was."³ Lancelot confuses chivalric failure with moral failure. A damsel rightly accuses Lancelot of "bohbaunce and pryde of the worlde".⁴ Again, the incident suggests his dependence on arms rather than trust in the lord. His will is not in perfect accord with God's as it was during his month on the ship. Otherwise,


² Reference to Tucker found in Charles Hoorman, Op. Cit., p. 502. Hoorman says essentially the same thing. In disagreeing with Tucker's black and white dichotomy of good and bad chivalry, he says: "I would prefer to see Lancelot wavering not between two degrees of chivalry but between his own avowed conception of chivalry as a secular ideal (and this would include his love for Guenevere) and a religious ideal which itself transcends chivalry." This does not mean, however, that the Grail is a secular adventure.


⁴ Ibid., 933, 31.
he would have comprehended the spiritual victory implied: "Blessed be God that ye be now of our fellowship, for we shall hold ye in our presence."  

The events at the Castle Corbenic dictate the climax of Lancelot's pilgrimage. Lancelot nullifies his achievement on the ship; his contemplative state afforded full trust in Divine providence. In a second action reminiscent of his behaviour at the tournament, he instinctively resorts to arms to defend himself from a lion at the gate of the Grail Castle. His inability to bridge the gap between the physical and spiritual worlds seals his failure even before he enters the Grail Chamber. In a sense, he unconsciously rejects Divine Grace. A voice says to him:

*O, man of evylye feyth and pouwe hylewe! Wherefore trustist thou more on thy harsenesse than in thy Maker? For He myght more avayle the than thyne armour, in what servyse that thou arte sette in."

The mystical vision in the Grail castle is the culminating of his truly heroic attempt, given the limitations of his human nature. As Lancelot watches:

hit seneed that he was at the sakerynge of the masse. And hit seneed to sir Lamecelot that above the prystis hondys were three men, whereof the two put the yongyte by lykes of the prystes hondys; and so he lyffe <hympt up ryght hygle>, and hit seneed to shew so to the peple."

Lancelot's reaction to this vision, like helping the weaker party in the tournament, is purely an instinctive chivalric action, issuing from a sincere desire to help. Lancelot stepped forward in good faith. He imagines the priest to stumble with the burden:

And then sir Lamecelot seryed nat a litle, for hym thought the pryste was so grevlye changed of the vygoue that hym seneed that he sholde faile to the orth, And when he saw none aboute hym that wolde helpes hym, than can

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3 Ibid., 1015, 29-33.
he to the dore a grote pace and seyde,
  'Payre Padre, Jesu Gyste, ne take hit for no synne if I helpe
the good man whych hath grote need of helps. 1

Whitehead calls this aspiration towards the mystical vision in the French
Queste "an audacity, a refusal to remain within the bounds of obedience, a
sort of violence done to heaven". 2 Edmund Reiss also considers this pre-
sumptuous pride. 3 I think this is to misunderstand Malory's conception of
Lancelot and his struggle. Lancelot's difficulty resembles the difficulty
of the communicant in imagining the spiritual transformation of the bread
and wine to the body and blood of Christ. This is a perfectly understandable
spiritual blindness. Lancelot's attempt to help the priest, I interpret,
as his inability to transcend the accidentals, the physical properties
of a religious experience and see only the essential, intangible, mystical
qualities of a spiritual communication.

Rather than condemn Lancelot, Malory sympathises profoundly with
his failure. The fact that Malory stresses the breach between the active
and contemplative worlds as an irrevocable separation rather than the union
of the two through a compromise is an indication of his understanding
rather than his criticism. The primary motivation is love of the Creator
in the contemplative world while the motivation is love of the creature in
the chivalric world of activity. Lancelot can express his love most effect-
ively in virtuous action on behalf of his fellowman. The way of the Grail
quest required separation from the body and from human ties. In Malory, the

1Ibid., 1015, 35-1016, 6.


love of the creature is a reflection of the love of the Creator. The two
cannot be, for Malory, mutually exclusive.

Lancelot’s acceptance of the separation of spiritual and earthly
directions seems to be Malory’s as well. Lancelot’s spiritual limitations
restrict his imagination. He cannot see beyond what he has seen with
his earthly eyes:

‘Now I thanks God,’ sayde sir Lancelot, ‘for hya grete mercy of that I
have done, for hit suffisith me. For, as I suppose, no man in thys worlds
have lyved bettr than I have done to encyve that I have done,’

In the French Queste, Lancelot makes no such assertion of gratitude to God
for what he has seen; “par ceste parole n’en veut Lancelot riens lessier,
ains prist la hers et la vesta” One is presuming a limitation in the
author to hold the view that:

To Malory it must have seemed strange that Lancelot, after the intense
penance to which he submits in the French version, should so easily be
denied the achievement of Calahad.

This seems to me to be a total misunderstanding of Malory’s attitude to the
quest. Complete success for Lancelot would mean the triumph of the con-
templative, monastic life over the active world of chivalry. As a corol-
ary, such a victory would carry with it the death of chivalry since
Lancelot is the most perfect knight that Arthur’s society can produce.
Malory’s work is, in a sense, an attempt to revive chivalry in the charac-
ter of Lancelot and hence Lancelot’s withdrawal from the world would defeat
that purpose.

LANCELLOT THE LOVER OF THE QUEEN

"The Book of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere", with the exception of the "Lancelot and Elaine" section of the Tristan story, is the fullest expression in Malory of the love affair of Lancelot and the queen. Malory's previous character build-up of his hero becomes the prelude to the explicit demonstration of Guinevere as Lancelot's machina mentis, in the active world. Malory's character perspective is always sharply defined, his intention clear. His interest is in the causal relationship between Lancelot's heroism and his motivating spirit, Guinevere, rather than in a meticulous psychological analysis of the torments of love. This in part explains Malory's radical departure from his French sources in the treatment of Lancelot as lover. Malory focuses his attention on Lancelot as he has done in his previous books, simultaneously acknowledging influence where it is due. Guinevere is behind the curtains, pulling the strings but it is the heroic action, the consummate chevalric process that Malory concentrates on.

In accordance with his plan, Malory alters the idolatrous, mystical cult of the religion of love in the French sources to a pragmatic devotion, expressed in vigorous and decisive action. The French acquiescence to flagrant sentiment is a reflection of what Herbert Read would call "romantic perversion". Read's severe criticism of English romantic treatments of Arthurian tales, in some respects, could apply to Malory's French sources:

1 A term which Etienne Gilson uses in his discussion of the contemplative life, already footnoted on p. 51 of the second chapter of this thesis.

the travesties of Tennyson and Morris, and above all the effeminate and
etiolated ornaments of Aubrey Beardsley, have been disastrous. They bathed
the stark atmosphere in an atmosphere of milk and honey; they turn romance
into romanticism, muscular prose into watery verse. Such pretenders shrink
from the vigorous realism of Malory. To romanticize and sentimentalize the
"Norte Darthur" is to sacrifice its finest essence, which is action and
intact honour displayed in the midst of all worldly perils, cowardice,
murder, hate and sin.¹

Lancelot's honorable actions pluck the fruit of terrestrial glory. This is
Malory's concern in keeping with Lancelot's status as a man of arms. Malory
avoids the excessive anatory preoccupation of the sources and his "revi-
valists", Keats, Tennyson, Morris and White. The result is a more tragic
perspective shaped by the sentiment of glory. Malory never forsakes the
glorification of his hero as a man of action yet he keeps the contemplative
life which the quest offers in the background. Although Lancelot's great-
ness may be tested in the final, decisive events, his heroic stature does
not crumble. His glorification remains independent of historical, religious
and ethical responsibilities.

A man is worth as much as his "worship" in Malory. This worship
which Read calls glory, the honour due one, is the mainspring of action,
and, in particular, the virtuous actions of Lancelot. In words that are
reminiscent of his confession to the hermit, Lancelot speaks of his initia-
tion into the active world with Guinevere's aid and his acknowledgement
that she is the sole possessor and dispenser of his worship:

'My lorde,' sayde sir Lancelot, 'nytte you well y ought of ryght ever to
be in your quarrell and in my lades the quarrells quarrell to do hatayle,
for ye are the man that gaue me the hygh Order of Knyghthode, and that day

¹Ibid., p. 457.
my lady, you're queen, do me worship. And ellis had I been shamed, for
that same day that ye made me knight, throw my hastynes I loste my sword,
and my lady, you're queen, founds hit, and lapped hit in her trayne, and
gave me my sword when I had none thereto; and ellis had I been shamed amonget
all knyghtes. And therefore, my londe Arthure, I prouysed her at that day
ever to be her knight in ryght othir in wronge."

Guinevere is more than just a courtly lady who imperiously demands adula-
tion. She is intimately connected with Lancelot's investiture into knighth-
ood. Arthur admits Lancelot to the High Order of Knighthood but this is
only a symbolical ceremony which becomes real when Guinevere gives him the
means, his sword, to achieve chivalric process. The chivalric ideal becomes
the accomplished fact through Guinevere's intervention. She is the preser-
ver of Lancelot's honour as well, as he recognizes when he says "ellis had
I been shamed". The bond created between the lovers is as binding as the
bond between Gareth and Lancelot at the time that Lancelot dubbed the
younger knight.

Before proceeding with a discussion of the relationship between
Lancelot and Guinevere, it is necessary to digress somewhat. Inevitably,

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In the commentary to the text of Malory, Ibid., p. 1599, Vinaver compares
this episode to the Lancelot proper in Sommev, On., Cit., III, 128. He
concludes that there is no parallel to this paragraph in either the Hot
Artu or the Lancelot proper but says that Malory must have read the latter.
Vinaver draws attetion to important differences in Malory's version. On
the day Arthur knights Lancelot, he sends the young knight to help a
wounded knight but forgets to give him his sword. Lancelot then does bat-
tle for the lady of Noissant and sends his defeated opponents, as he has done
previously, to Guinevere. The queen sends Lancelot a sword. Up to this
point, Vinaver indicates, one can account for Malory's version; "This
would account for all Malory says with the exception of the words "lapped
hit in her trayne". The remark "and ellis had I been shamed amonget all
knyghtes" say well have occurred in the French. If it did, its purpose
must have been to show that Lancelot's investiture would have been incom-
plete without the Queen's present: it was only when he received the sword
she had sent him that from being a 'valles' he became a knight: "et dist
que ore est il chevalier, Dica nunc et se deme, et por che ia a spele li
contes valles dusques chi" (Ibid., p. 137)."

Malory has been considered, for better or for worse, in the light of the so-called "courtly love" literature. Any discussion of Malory's love affair must give some attention to critical opinion in this area. Furthermore, in maintaining the theory of Malory's consistency in Lancelot's characterization, a fact which Vinaver denies, I must inevitably examine this controversial subject. While Vinaver will concede that Malory's characterization of Lancelot differs in spirit quite remarkably from the French, he does not believe that the Lancelot of the Guinevere sections is the same Lancelot of the Lucius campaign or the Grail quest. Malory's "consistent preference" for Lancelot, according to Vinaver, "does not necessarily produce consistent characterization, and it is not surprising, therefore that the Lancelot of the "Tale of Arthur and Lucius" is not the Lancelot of later tales."¹ In my opinion, the simple character of the Roman war has become more complex. The emergence of internal conflict in the Grail quest was proof of this. A similar action is taking place in the last books. Lancelot's motivation for action, and not his character, has altered as a result of his additional role as the queen's lover. Frustration² supersedes service to the king and country. This is, again, a question of a shift in context. As the tournament replaced battle in time of peace, devotion to the lady, in the new dimension of knight-lover, replaces the obligation to the king and country imposed by the stringency of war. Lancelot sends his conquered knights to Guinevere in much the same way as a knight sends tribute to his feudal lord.

¹Ibid., p. 1371.

"Courtly love"¹ is a French phenomenon grafted on to the parent stock of a feudal knighthood. It exercised, as did the religious influence of the Crusades, a civilizing influence on what was an essentially militant, if not, barbaric, knighthood.² The Norman Conquest of Britain, and the resultant literary influences, brought the courtly aspect of knighthood to the English epic tradition: "the Old Epic gave place to the more polished courtliness of the novels inspired by Chrétien de Troyes and of the Arthurian Romances."³ The concept of "gallantry", service to the lady, originated with the nobility. Under the influence of the troubadours, and, in particular, Bernard de Ventadorn, whose songs simulated the love relationship of knight and lady, arose the idea of courtly chivalry. Painter says that:

By developing the idea that a noble could not be a perfect knight unless he loved a lady the troubadours laid the foundations of courtly chivalry.⁴

Hence it is the French influence that gave rise to this change in English chivalry. This is what Malory, coming from an English tradition, encountered in his French sources.

However, it is not so easy to assume the existence of a practical code or system of medieval love conventions. Of this there is much disagreement. The basis, historians find, in a treatise entitled, De Amore, of

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²Heaney, Op. Cit., p. 5. Heaney points to the reign of Stephen, before the religious and courtly influence when knighthood was a combination of treachery, disobedience to kings, impiety and profanity and brutality to women.


Andreas Capellanus, a chaplain at the same court as Chrétien, some scholars accept Andreas' treatise as historical evidence of courts of love which supposedly settled amatory questions. Generally such critics concentrate on the corrupting influence of "courtly love". D. W. Robertson questions the validity of this proof: "there is little agreement among scholars as to the nature of this love, and still less agreement concerning its origin." The satirical nature of the dialogues in Andreas' treatise and his repudiation of love in the De Reprobatione tend to support Robertson's contention.

R. Briffaut provides the most conclusive proof of the origin of the courtly love attitude, which he calls "gallantry", and of its dialectical rather than practical expression. The author scorns, somewhat, the suggestion that actual judgements were passed on cases of love:

Nothing could be at wider variance with courtly principles than to pass judgement on individual cases or even to refer in such a connection to any person by name. But it would, nevertheless, be fully in the spirit of twelfth-century gallantry toベスト such an appellation on fashionable gatherings emitted by tuneful flattery of the poets and jongleurs, and presided over by ladies who were quite prepared to voice their judgements on the versèes descanted and on the "questions of love" therein raised. It was in the salons of these bluestockings born before their time that "courtly" poetry originated at the house of Aline de Aquitaine at Poitiers, at Ventadorn.

1 John F. Benton, "The Court of Champagne as a Literary Centre", Speculum, XXXVI (1961), 551-591. Benton questions the proof of courts of love and even throws some doubt on the belief that Andreas had been Marie's chaplain.


The inability to prove that such a system was practiced in the Middle Ages does not in any way invalidate the use of the term "courtly love", to describe the elaborate conventions which both the Prose Lancelot and Chrétien's romance embody.¹ Denory's Candidean lecture, The Heresy of Courtly Love, despite the theological emphasis, confirms the literary connection between the theory and the model:

The De Amore, the official treatise of Courtly Love, is Courtly Love in theory; the "Lancelot", Courtly Love in practice. The matter that Chrétien received from Marie de Champagne and which he incorporated at her behest into the "Lancelot" coincides with the matter of the De Amore; the extra-conjugal nature of love and the service of love as the means of ennoblement in the eyes of the beloved.²

The fact that Malory has adopted the "matter" of the Courtly Love system from the French sources is unquestionable. An adulterous relationship between Lancelot and the queen, the ennobling force of their love and Lancelot's devoted service to Guinevere form the content of Malory's tale. Lancelot testifies to his faith: "I never sayled you in ryght nor in wronge syttyn the fyrste day kyng Arthure made me knyght."³ However, a comparision

¹Jean Frapper, "The Vulgate Cycle", in Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History, ed., R. S. Loomis (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 297. Frapper confirms that Chrétien's tale is the source for the French Prose Lancelot as well as the Lancelot of Ulrich von Zatzikhoven. Although there are fifty years between the verse and prose accounts, the latter still shows the courtly influence which Malory altered.

²Denory, Op. Cit., p. 53. Denory points out the opposition of such a system to medieval religious conceptions. The system is immoral because it assumes a double truth, one operative for natural man, subject to the laws of human nature and reason, and one operative for supernatural man, subject to the Divine laws. This effects an irreconcilable antipathy between reason and faith. The dichotomy is a rational and wholly human explanation of the double relationship of Lancelot to the Grail and to Guinevere. As a supernatural creature with a certain amount of faith, Lancelot tried to be subject to the laws of God, which were incompatible with the laws of his own nature, expressed in his love for Guinevere. He could not bridge the gap between natural and divine laws necessary to see the revelation of the Grail.

son of Malory's Lancelot with either the prose or the verse sources will
demonstrate that he did not adopt the "sen".¹ It is the spirit of esoteri-
cism in Courtly Love conventions to which Malory objected. The idolatrous
cult of the religion of love, overburdened with mythological love allegory,
dialectical discussion and psychological casuistry makes the "scholasticism"²
of love an end in itself. Such a treatment of love seems to be more native
to the French temperament, nurtured by the Troubadour heritage, than to
the more pragmatic temperament of the English as Herbert Read has suggested.

My observations lead me to conclude with R. T. Davies that:

There is no reason to believe that he Malory set out from the beginning
to embody in his imagined world a well-developed philosophy or code of
love, and certainly nothing like what is found in the French sources.³

If Malory had accepted such a heretical religion of love, the adulation of
Venus over the Virgin Mary, he would undoubtedly have had to condemn Lance-
lot outright as did the French Queste. Instead, he shifts the emphasis
and concentrates on Lancelot's love as a motivation for virtuous action and
courteous behaviour as well as a means to chivalric perfection. Lancelot's
conflict, as well, goes beyond the realm of morality to embrace the whole

¹ Christian von Troyes, Der Karrenritter (Lancelot) Und Das Wilhelmsleben
(Guillaume d'Angléterre), ed., Wendelin Forster, Sammlung Abhandlungen
(2nd ed., Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1965), IV, 2. In the course of this chapter,
all page and line references will be to Forster's edition. Christian uses
these two terms "sen" and "matiere", to distinguish the author's treatment
from the basic narrative material given to him by the Countesse: "Commence
Christian ses livres; Matiere et san l'an done et livre/ En Conte, et
le s'antinett,/ De pensar si que rien n'1 not/ Pors sa maine et s'antance;/
Des ou conance sa raison." (25-30)

² Briffault, Op. Cit., p. 97. Briffault uses this term in describing the
effects of "courty Love" adherents to invest their doctrine with all the
formality, seriousness and mysticism of theologians.

³ R. T. Davies, "The Worshipful Way in Malory", in Patterns of Love and Com-
P. 152.
question of the choice between two medieval absolutes, the contemplative
and the active worlds and which one affords better a means to virtuous
living. Hence Malory does not adopt the simple posture that some of his
critics such as Moorman would lead us to believe and unequivocally condemn,
on moral grounds, the Lancelot-Guinevere relationship.¹

It is in "The Book of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere" that Lance-
lot becomes the avowed champion of Guinevere. Because she is intimately
connected with his investiture into knighthood, his honour demands that he
protect her. He fights Madore de la Porte when Guinevere is falsely accused
of poisoning Sir Patrice. Likewise, he rescues her from Kellyagaine and
does battle with him for her sake even though she is not innocent since she
had betrayed the king with Lancelot. Lancelot's protection of Guinevere in-
volves his honour in the same way that Gaeth protects Lancelot whenever
he can. Even when Arthur accuses Lancelot of treason with Guinevere, Gaeth's
loyalty persists in what Malory might refer to as a "wrongeth quarrell".
Gaeth refuses to go armed to the burning of the queen. Dorn reminds Lance-
lot that his honour is at stake in the defense of the queen: "for and ye ded
any other wyse all the world wolde spake you shame to the worldis end.²

Of these episodes in which Lancelot defends the queen, the event
of her abduction is the most convincing in demonstrating Malory's personal
stamp, his "sen", in his treatment of the love affair. Malory has ignored
Lancelot's courtly love tradition. In imposing his own spirit on the episode

¹Charles Moorman, "Courtly Love in Malory", Journal of English Literary His-
tory, XXVII (1960), 163-176.

he shapes his own conception of Lancelot as a knight of epic heroism. This
makes Malory's Lancelot no less a lover; he chooses to show his love for the
queen in a different and possibly more admirable way. In stressing his hero's
process in this episode rather than his symptomatic qualifications, Malory avoids
the demoralizing effect of the religion of love in his French sources.

The symbol of French "courtisie" or "amour courtois" is, undoubtedly,
the cart which gave Lancelot his name, "Le Chevalier de la Charette". The
cart appears in the abduction of Guinevere. The episode is the substance
of Chrétien's romance; it occurs as a lengthy account extending from pp. 163-
226 of the French Prose Lancelot\(^1\), each successive account losing something
of the original "sen", until we have the bare bones of the event in Malory.
The whole of the incident of the ignominious cart in Chrétien's romance
demonstrates the French delight in the lover's abject submission to the
tyrannical dictates of love, even at the expense of honour or "worship". Lancelot
hesitates but a second before the dwarf's rude command to enter:
"Tant solemnant devs pas demere/ Li Chevaliers que il n'i monte."\(^2\) But the
damage has been done. The author remarks: "Har le fes, mar i doma honte;/
Que maintenant sus ne saillit;/ Qu'il s'antendra por mal bailli."\(^3\) The
stranous casuistic debate between Love and Reason going on in Lancelot's
mind becomes all important:

\[\text{Mes raisons qui d'amour se sunt}
\text{Li dit que de monter se sont,}\]

\(^3\)Ibid., 366-368.
Si le chastie et si l'annuisne
Que rien ne face ne n'anproinuhe,
Don il et honte ne reproche,
L'est pas el euer, mes an la boche
Raison qui ce dire ils es;
Mes amors est el euer enclose...
Que tost for la charrette mont,
Amors le visat, et il i faut;
Que de la honte ne li chaut
Puis qu'amors le commande et viat.1

In the Prose Lancelot, the absence of such psychological subtleties of love indicates the unimportance of Lancelot's breach of the commandments of the God of Love. Guinevere is angry with Lancelot because he left the court for London without her permission and because he gave her ring, although unwillingly, to Morgan la Fey. Lancelot, in the prose version, is of a more practical nature; he makes getting in the cart dependant upon the assurance of the dwarf's promise: "Ne creanteras tu fait Lancelot que tu me mands dusques a ma dame se fou y monte."2 As in Chrétien's account, the author links the cart with infancy and hence with the loss of honour: "A celui tamps estoit si laide de carete que aus ne seist dedens que toutes lois et toutes neust perdues."3 But he is still much less pragmatic than Malory's Lancelot. What is most remarkable about Malory's here is the total lack of any kind of internal confusion between reason and the passions. Lancelot's ability to execute actions with precision reflects an inner harmony. In matters of love he knows what he is about. Such subtle inner

1Ibid., 369-381.
2Sommer, O2, Cit., IV, 162, 36-37.
debate would only interfere with accomplishing the task of rescuing Guinevere; hence, Malory completely ignores the question of whether or not Lancelot's dignity will be sacrificed by riding in a cart that goes to the hangings. Lancelot demands to get in, cuffing the dwarf when he delays: "Lancelot lepe to hym and gaff hym backwarde with hys gauntelet a. rexemanle, that he felle to the erthe starke dede." However uncourteous the action, it is expedient. Therefore, in Malory's version, the ignominious cart has been drastically altered as is the French Prose Lancelot. The alteration is significant.

In the Prose Lancelot, the cart is a recurring symbol of Lancelot's disgrace and becomes the motivation for repeated tests of Lancelot's courage. He is taken to task not for breaking love's commands but for shaming knighthood or chivalry. During an interruption in Lancelot's progress towards the queen, he takes lodging with a kindly vavasour. While at dinner, a strange knight enters and asks for the "Knight of the cart". When Lancelot identifies himself as the one who had ridden in the infamous cart, the stranger knight insults him, charging him with cowardice. Having lost his honour, Lancelot, he says, will be incapable of crossing the sword bridge much less freeing the people of Gorre:

Consent as tu euer de si haute preece empreindre quant tu as perdus toutes loys si as en penne grant folie quant tu enjus penas a passer le pont de leppe pour delivrer des gens de cest pais.2

Neither Malory nor any other character in the romance impeaches Lancelot's honour with allegations of cowardice. In fact, Guinevere, watching at the window for her lover, rebukes a woman for suggesting that Lancelot's repu-

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tion might suffer from a ride in the cart:

And then she rebuked that lady that lykened sir Lancelot to ryse in a charyote to hangyng: 'Forsothe hit was fonde-morthed,' sayde the queene, 'and evyll lykened, so for to lyken the moste noble knyght of the worlde unto such a shamefull deethe.'

Lancelot, himself, in heroic defiance, travels in the cart for twelve months and accomplishes, without aid of his horse, more than forty battles.

Malory says:

And so I love here of this tale, and overlape great books of sir Lancelot, what gretes adventures he ded when he was called 'Le Shyvalore de Charyot'. For, as the Freynehe booke sayth, because of dispYTE that knyghetes and ladyes called hym 'the knyght that rode in the Charyot', lyke as he were juged to the jybet, therefore, in the despite of all then that named hym so, he was caried in a charryotte a twelve-monethe; for but lyttil after that he had slayne sixe Nellygannte in the quynges quarrell, he never of a twelve-monethe com on horeshak. And, as the Freynehe booke sayth, he ded that twelve-monethe more than forty bastayles.

The cart, because it shows Lancelot's assertion of independence and personal heroism, becomes virtually a symbol of epic defiance. It is notable that the decision is Lancelot's. In the French Prose version, it is Arthur who decides that, for Lancelot's sake, all carts should be honoured: "et pour lui devorciient estre toutes charretes honorees a tous tours." To this end: "de lorc en avant tant comme li roys veqni ne fu hore dumptes en karete."  

In keeping with a reduced narrative, Malory excludes many episodes which intentionally test Lancelot's physical endurance in the cause of love. This is not merely an economic handling of his sources but a conscious desire

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2Ibid., 1154, 1-12.


4Ibid., 213, 15-16.
to alter what he found to suit his conception of his hero. There is no need, for example, to waste time in withholding Lancelot's name. It is taken for granted that only Lancelot would rescue Guinevere. Malory omits such incidents as the perilous bed, the crossing of the sword bridge and the attempted seduction of the hero. These tests of the lover's courage and fidelity stem in part from the French author's delight in showing the lover's self-imposed suffering. In Chrétien's romance, Lancelot removes the armour from his hands and feet, and, in the presence of the astonished people of Corse, crosses the sword bridge. This self-inflicted torture for the sake of love is totally unnecessary to the furthering of the action:

Maine et gêneux et pieux se bleue;
Mes tot le tassage et salme,
Amor qui le conduit et saumpe,
Si li est tot a sefrir douz.¹

The Vulgate version has retained the episode, but as usual, the emphasis is on Lancelot's desire to refute the stranger knight's charges of cowardice. Malory's Lancelot endures all physical punishment within the heroic context of battle. The more difficult and demanding the combat, and the more knights he falls, the greater is Guinevere's "worship" of Lancelot. However, the hero will rebuke Guinevere for unnecessary trial. Since she appears not to be in any danger of Mallyagaunce, Lancelot says to her: "'And, madame,' sayde sir Lancelot, 'and I haue wiste that ye volde have bote so lyghtly accorded with hym I volde not a made such haste unto you.'"²

In the French sources, physical and mental suffering are possibly more acceptable when unnecessary than when they are the natural outcome of battles undertaken for the lady's praise as in Malory. Andreas Capellanus

asserts the bond between love and suffering:

That this suffering is inborn I shall show you clearly, because if you will look at the truth and distinguish carefully you will see that it does not arise out of any action; only from the reflection of the mind upon what it sees does this suffering come.  

Thus in Malory what is a long series of unnecessary, tedious trials of the lover becomes direct unimpeded action: "Than sir Launcest rode as fast as he myght, and the booke sayth he toke the watir at Westymaster Brydge and rode his horse anywhere over the Tamys unto Lambyth." The dangerous sword bridge becomes the very prosaic Westminster Bridge. However, Lance-lot does indulge in the occasional complaint to Guinesvere of all that he endures for her love:

'Thys ye nat the firste tyme, seyde sir Launcelot, 'that ye have ben dis-please with me causeless. But madame, ever I muste suffir you, but what sorrow that I endure, ye take no forse'.

From the self-inflicted suffering of Lancelot in the French sources arise fears of failure. In the prose Lancelot, the hero almost loses his mind for fear that he will fail in saving the queen and only regains courage when he recalls the Ransel of the Lake:

si pense li chevaliers moust longement a chou que il aloit echant, ne mule riens ne le t oint en son sens que la dame del lac seulement a qui il creanta qui il reccorroit la royes.

There is no trace of weakness or fear of failure in Lancelot's confident presentation at Mallyaganne's castle: "Here I am, sir Launcest du Lake that shall fught with you all!" Whereupon, Lancelot proceeds to smite

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3 Ibid., 5-8, 1098.
5 Malory, Ibid., 1127, 26-27.
the porter "undir the ege wyth hys gauntelet, that hys rekke braste in
two pecis.\footnote{\textit{Mandegar} of Troyes, ed.\;\textit{Cambridge} (1858), 346.}
An epic beast must be fulfilled and, presumably Lancelot
would indeed, fight with all Maligneauce's fellowship as well.\footnote{\textit{La Chanson de G anoncle}, ed.\;\textit{Cambridge} (1858), 71.}

Although the devotion of the lovers in Malory is equally as con-
vincing as the corresponding French protestations of love, the story itself
is not characterized by a slavish idolatry to the religion of love. This
elaborate metaphor runs through the French accounts of courtly love. After
the meeting of the lovers at Maligneauce's castle, Lancelot, when leaving
his unrelenting queen, genuflects in humiliation as though before the altar
of an offended god: "Lancelot sageneuille si loing que il la voit et l (1)
encline neult profondement."\footnote{\textit{Jouvenel}, ed.\;\textit{Cambridge} (1858), 438.}

Likewise in Chretien:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Au departir a soplicie}
\textit{A la chambr e et fet tot autel.}
\textit{Con s'il lust devant un autel.}
\textit{Fut s'an part a autel graut angoiiss.}\footnote{\textit{Jouvenel}, ed.\;\textit{Cambridge} (1858), 438.}
\end{quote}

Malory avoids the demonizing effect of such idolatrous conceits which
belong to the more sophisticated, more stylistically conscious "son" of
the French. The English author is concerned with telling us matter of factly
of the virtue of fidelity expressed in action. Such idolatry can also
threaten chivalric excellence if it leads to a pretense of cowardice in
answer to the whines of the lady. In the final battle with Maligneauce, Guin-
vers, in Chrétien's tale, demands that Lancelot do his worst in the combat.

\footnote{\textit{Malory}, \textit{Op. Cit.}, 1127, 29-30.}
\footnote{\textit{Sayers}, \textit{Chanson}, \textit{Op. Cit.}, p. 36. In her introduction, Sayers comments on
the victor's boast in battle which is akin to the insult hurled at the op-
ponent's corpse. Lancelot never resorts to cursing a felled knight. Such
behaviour would be inconsistent with Malory's notions of courtesy and magnani-
mity.}
\footnote{\textit{Sommer}, \textit{Op. Cit.}, IV, 206, 17.}
\footnote{\textit{Feaster}, \textit{Op. Cit.}, 473-4737.}
Lancelot complies in order to win her favour:

Et cil se met lors a la fuit,
N'onces puis contre chevalier
Ne torna lascol del destrier,
Ne moirx rien ne feist
Se sagrant honte n'i veist
Et son let sa desener
Et fet semblant qu'il et peor,
De toz cos qui viennent et vont.¹

Lancelot is completely false to the high standards of chivalric excellence, handling his weapons like a ploughboy and finally slinking away in retreat, before knights who are actually of inferior skill. In the Vulgate version, he even resorts to demonstrations of Poor horsemanship. This is tantamount to treason against the code of knighthood since chivalry, by definition, is inseparable from good horsemanship. Malory must have taken pride in such excellence, for he never lets Lancelot relax the heroic ideals of chivalry. Lancelot's honour is dependent on a maximum effort in combat. For this reason, the combat with Nellygaunce differs from its source in the Vulgate Prose Lancelot in which the hero abdicates his role, although temporarily:

"hors s'en vint Lancelot a la mellee et quant il dut ferir gras cope si se tant au col de cheval et fait semblant qu'il doive cheoir."² Nellygaunce is the coward in Malory's tale. Although Guinevere nods to Lancelot to obey her wishes that he slay the coward immediately, Nellygaunce is given another chance. Lancelot has never denied a knight mercy; but in partial acquiescence to her, Lancelot disarms, giving the opponent the advantage, in preparation to fight to the death:

me there hit shall not help me, and rght so I shall do batyle with you.

for I wol never go fro that I have onys sayde.1

The king and Guinevere, as well as "many a lady and many a knyght norwayled of sir Lancelot that he wolde jouparth hymself in suche wyse".2 Once again, Malory, by a change in interpretation, exaltes Lancelot to epic stature and makes his hero loved more for his heroism.

According to Vinaver, Malory did not use the French Prose Lancelot, which Sommer edited, for his account of Lancelot's madness. However, Vinaver says that Malory's version more closely resembles the account in the Prose Tristan and it is from this source that Vinaver makes his comparisons. The French Prose Tristan is a borrowing from the Prose Lancelot.3 As we have seen in the "charrette" incident, it is the "sen", the spirit of English heroism that is more important in Malory than the "matiere". For this reason, my comparisons with the French Prose Lancelot will point out only general differences in the French and English conceptions of Lancelot's character rather than specific differences in narrative content. In the French, characteristically, it is the courtly spirit that consistently prevails in the treatment of Lancelot. Malory concentrates on heroic action while the French tends to dwell on Lancelot's inner torment, his regret for past happiness, and the hero's self-inflicted physical punishment. One passage from the French episode of Lancelot's madness will be sufficient to point out the general difference in direction from Malory. After Guinevere's rejection of Lancelot,

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2 Ibid., 1139, 27-29.
because of his relationship with Elaine, the French author describes the psychological suffering of the dejected lover:

quant Lancelot fu hors de camaloth, et il li souvint de sa dame et des grans loies qu’il eues maintes fois, et oux li convenra souffrir paine & traite mal et anois et travaus, si veisses homme corsoeie, et commence a faire un duel si grant et si merveilleus qu’il fu aussi que touns estragies & commence a eschacher ses cheveus qui tant estoient bel et a esgratiner son vis si que li sans en sant de toutes pars, si se commence a doulourer et a maudire cele aventour qui tant li est crouse et selensese Et dist que insufe a poi avoit il este li plus croues hors del mond. Et oux est a ce venus que li remmanz de sa vis li sera tornes en pleurs et en lermes et en toutes majeurtes Et cele chose li nat tal dolour et cors qu’il voldroit bien estre ocis ore mors, et ne li caudroit comment.1

Malory’s Lancelot does not indulge in futile self-reproach. A quick summary of Lancelot’s reaction follows Guinevere’s rejection. After swooning, Lancelot “lepte oute at a lay-wyndow into a garden,”2 Self-inflicted physical punishment becomes simply the hazards of jumping out a window: “wyth thornys he was all to-cracched of his vysage and hys body”.3 Malory dismisses the critical moment with “he nameth furth...and was as wylds [woodes] as ever was man. And so he ran too yere, and never man had grace to know hym.”4 Malory turns his account over to Guinevere and Elaine who rebukes the queen sorely: “Ye have done grete synne and yorself grete dyshonoure,”5 In the French account Guinevere’s dismissal is death to Lancelot. However, Malory never allows Lancelot to indulge in suicidal despair: “morte mort haste toi de venir a moi, quar de moi ne me chant quar de vivre sui iou tous rasses [as]es.”6

3Iloc., Cit., 5.
4Iloc., Cit., 6-8.
5Iloc., Cit., 16.
In the whole of the account of Lancelot's madness, Malory allows his hero an indulgence in self-pity and regret on only one occasion. This concerns the making of a shield with "a quene crowned in the ryddis of silver, and a knyght clene armed kneelynge afore her". However, Malory does not dwell on Lancelot's loss of Guinevere but moves on to Lancelot's sorrow for the loss of Arthur, and the knightly society he symbolizes: "He wolde onys every day loke towarde the realms of Logry, where kynges Arthure and quene Guenityver was, and thon wolde he fall upon a wepyng as hys herte shold be waste." The loss of Arthur's court means the loss of the chivalric life in which Lancelot excelled as well as the admiration of the queen, It is significant that, immediately after this account, Lancelot hears of a tournament which he wishes to attend. In spite of his unstable mental condition, Lancelot is still conscious of his former reputation as a knight of great prowess. The mere mention of a chance to perform feats of arms serves to remind him of his past greatness.

In the "courtly love" context of the French sources, the physical and emotional collapse of the hero are more convincing proof of the lover's devotion. Malory, it would appear, does not devote as much description to elaborate sentiment, particularly if it is at the expense of heroic action. Malory uses the occasion of Lancelot's madness not to show the lover meaning about love's injustice but to reinforce the image of Lancelot's excellent physical courage and his magnanimous courtesy:


2 Loc. Cit., 11-12.
Both Elaine's and Bors' rebukes are reminders that Guinevere should think more of Lancelot's reputation as a man of great worship than her personal, groundless jealousies. As Bors has indicated, everyone suffers because of the absence of Lancelot: "he that was all curse leader and curse succour". Guinevere's actions are contradictory and damaging to her relationship with Lancelot. After the quest, when Lancelot withdraws from her company to protect her for, as he says, "that were me loth to see you dishonoured"1, she accuses him of infidelity: "I se and fale dayly that youre love begyneth to slake".2 She dismisses him from the court a second time. When no one will defend her in the cause of Sir Patryce's death, even Arthur senses that she must be at fault: "What sylith you', seide the kynges, 'that ye can nat hape sir Lancelot uppon your syde?"3 Her emotional fluctuations contrast unfavorably with Lancelot's consistent devotion. It is her unreasonableness that leads to contention between them. Although the fickleness of the lady might be expected by "courtly" lovers, Malory, as I have attempted to show, has chosen to ignore this aspect of his lovers' relationship, and, therefore, does not praise Guinevere's actions. Her contradictory behavior culminates in Lancelot's chastisement. When he stays behind from a tournament, it is Guinevere's turn to warn him of slander: "What wille your enemies and wyne sey and done?"4 Lancelot replies: "Hit ye late con syn ye were women so wyse!"5 This reply appears to be original in

1 Ibd., "The Booke of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere", 1046, 27.
2 Ibd., 1045, 31-32.
3 Ibd., 1051, 29-30.
4 Ibd., 1065, 32.
5 Ibd., 1066, 6.
in Malory. It tends to reinforce the growing contention between the pair which is symptomatic of the greater crisis approaching Arthur's Round Table. Lancelot goes to the tournament at Guinevere's request but, contrary to her desire, he "wol to ayenste the kynges and ayenste all hys felship". The contention between the queen and Lancelot also points to the growing burden of complexity associated with Lancelot's role in the world.

Likewise, when Lancelot wears the baid of Astolat's sleeve, "that none of hys blode thereby myght know hym", Guinevere is "woode wrothe" and "enstranged herselvffe from hym". Bors exonerates Lancelot: "And all that he ded was for the love of vou because he wolde bene at thys turnements". Guinevere's later contradiction, "ye myght have shewed hir son bounte and jantilnes whyche myght have preserved hir lyff", is a complete volte-face. Malory magnifies the effect of Lancelot's noble actions with the Maid by changing the content of the dead girl's letter. In Malory, the letter praises Lancelot and testifies to his fidelity to Guinevere: "And a clesne maydye I dyed, I take God to wytnesse, And pray for my soules, sir Lancelot, as thou art pereles." The French account, however, is a

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3 Ibid., 1069, 12-13.
4 Ibid., 1092, 5-7.
5 Ibid., 1097, 21-22.
6 Ibid., 1097, 14-15.
7 Ibid., 1096, 33-35.
scathing attack on Lancelot's character. The man reviles Lancelot: "je
vos respont que ge sui morte por le plus prendone del monde et por le plus
villain: ce est Lancelos del lae, qui est li plus villains que ge sache."¹
Significantly, she does not verify Lancelot's fidelity to Guinevere. Malory's
changes are to keep Lancelot wholly above reproach both as the lover of the
queen and as "the most nobelyst knyght of the worlde".²

Lancelot's role as lover of the queen has expanded beyond the sim-
ple exchange of "many dedys of arraye" for the queen's "grete favoure aboven
all other knyghtis".³ It seems that chivalric prowess in the cause of
virtuous action is no longer sufficient. Lancelot must now become Guine-
vere's personal champion "in nyght othir in wronge".⁴ Lancelot puts his
chivalric prowess to the service of this end. Success in physical combat
proves the right and wrong of an issue, irrespective of the truth: "Well
I prove with syne hondys that ye say untrewly in that."⁵ Ethical considera-
tions simply cannot be dealt with in physical terms as the quest proved to
Lancelot. He is unable to think in abstract ethical terms. This reminds
us of his instinctive reliance on chivalric action at the offering of the
mass at Corbenic. Lancelot could not separate the physical properties of
the experience from its spiritual essence. Strength was incongruous here
and, likewise, cannot prove the truth of a situation. P. E. Tucker confirms

⁴Ibid., "The Book of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere", 1058, 32-33.
⁵Ibid., 1133, 32-33.
this when he says that "Lancelot is blinded to questions of right and wrong by the struggle of the moment: he relies on his prowess alone."\(^1\)

It is this limitation in Lancelot that concerns Malory rather than the sin of adultery which is at best a weak justification for the ultimate responsibility of the lovers for the problems that face the Arthurian court. Hence the story is not "a debasement of what might have been virtuous love", that is chastity and stability, as Hoorneman would propose.\(^2\) Prowess in deeds of arms is, as I have pointed out elsewhere, the height of achievement of a knight of the active world, the world of chivalry. Even though Lancelot is potentially the king's enemy after escaping from Aggravain's trap, Arthur still praises his prowess: "'Jesu Mercy! ' sayde the kyng, 'he ys a merveylous knyght of proven'.\(^3\) Lancelot's chivalric efforts, all being an expression of his love of Guinevere make her a symbol of his attachment to the world. Guinevere usurps God as the machina mentis. Reiss explains this relationship:

It is, however, not Guinevere as a person who does these things. Rather, she must be taken as a symbol of the dangers of excessive earthly love, the queen thus may be viewed as representing primarily the worldly alternative to the Holy Grail, and this substitute is of course, inadequate.\(^4\)

"Inadequate" it may well be as Lancelot's role as lover is becoming increasingly difficult to perform. Immorality is something else. It seems Malory does not evaluate in moral terms, or, at least, leaves that up to the reader.

\(^1\)Tuckey, Op. Cit., "Chivalry In the Morte", p. 94.


The contention between the lovers is essentially the cause of Lancelot's lack of inner harmony in Malory's last book. The queen demands more open and excessive proofs of Lancelot's love. She asks him to wear her sleeve in the tournaments. Lancelot has never before done this and it is an open avowal of his love. Three occasions point to Lancelot's desire to increase his chivalric efforts, in self-trial, for Guinevere's sake. The first occasion I have pointed out on page 21 of this thesis. Lancelot's motivation becomes clearer in the light of his disagreement with Guinevere. The queen has just urged Lancelot to go to the tournament at Camelot and exert himself in feats of arms. Lancelot says he will be against Arthur's fellowship in this event. He well knows that Arthur's knights are the best in England. Furthermore, he says he will not reveal his name to Barnard of Astolat unless "and if God gyff me grace to speke well at the justis". This is an indication that his worship is at stake. In spite of his grievous wound, when he is felled from his horse, "magne then all he made hym to mounte uppon that horse". He obviously succeeds, for he "dyd there the serveyloust dedes of armes that ever man sawe". Somewhat later he explains his overwhelming desire to do extra well to Bors even at the risk of his life:

for I wolde with pryde have overcome you all. And there in my pryde I was more slayne, and that was in myne one defaughte; for I nyght have gyffyn you waruynges of my baynge there, and than had I had no hunte.  

\[2\] Ibid., 1072, 9-10.  
\[3\] Ibid., 1072, 35-36.  
\[4\] Ibid., 1064, 1-4.
On a second occasion, that of the Great Tournament at Westminster, Lancelot expresses doubt in his chivalric prowess. As Vinaver has pointed out this section is "virtually unknown in Arthurian literature" although it is somewhat "paralleled in the Morte Arthu and in Le Morte Arthur". Lancelot is severely wounded by a female hunter prior to the tournament. He expresses fears in his continuing success in gaining worship:

'A mercy Jesu' sayde sir Launcelot, 'I may calle myselfe the moste unhappy man that lyvyth, for ever when I wolde have saynyst worship there befallyth me ever som unhappy thynges.'

Nevertheless, Lancelot makes his appearance and the numerical count of knights he unhorses is impressive:

And so they yode unto kyng Arthurs lodgeynge all togyder, and there was a grete feate and grete revelle. And the prize was yevynt unto sir Launcelot, for by hercundys they named hym that he had smitten done fifty knyghtys, and six Careth fyve-and-thirty knyghtes, and sir Lavayne four-and-twenty.

The third and final occasion I refer to is the healing of Sir Urry. This episode tests more than chivalric prowess since Halory states that Urry "shulde never be hole untyll the beste knyght of the wolde had serched hys woundis." Recently, P. E. Tucker has hypothesized a source for this episode although the editor of Halory's works indicates that it is as unknown in Arthurian literature as "The Great Tournament". Although

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2Ibid., 1106, 4-7.
3Ibid., 1113, 34-1114, 3.
4Ibid., 1145, 19-20.
5P. E. Tucker, "A Source for 'The Healing of Sir Urry' in the Morte Darthur", MHR, I (1955), 490-492. Tucker points out a number of passages, separated by other material relating to Lancelot, existing half-way through the Lancelot Proper in volume V of the Vulgate version that contain an episode of an unknown knight who has an incurable wound. Although Tucker points out
Many explanations are given for Lancelot's behaviour; I tend to agree with Vinaver in rejecting Lamiansky's theory that "Lancelot is hesitant... because of his adulterous guilt".¹ My rejection is in accord with the direction that my analysis of Lancelot takes. Although it is clear that Lancelot wants to be acquitted of any charge of presumption, "I wolde not take upon me to touche that wounded knyght in that entent that I shulde passe all othir knyghtes"², I believe the incident expresses Lancelot's own self-testing. It may be recalled that Arthur on the occasion of the departure for the Grail quest had asked Lancelot to remove the sword from the rock. Lancelot immediately sensed his unworthiness, in a matter which he must have ultimately known to be spiritual, and refused. It would appear that he is in doubt about his reputation in the world of action here as well: "for never was I able in worthynes to do so hyghe a thyngye".³

If Lancelot were hesitant because of his adultery, as Lamiansky suggests, he would never attempt to heal Urry. If this were a question of spiritual matters, rather than worldly, he knows God would not help him. Likewise, this is why he left to Calahad the feat of pulling the sword from the rock. Lancelot sees this as an adventure relating to his worship in the world and, hence, Guinevere's affection is dependent on it. His doubt may well be confirmed by that same occasion when the damself said that even in worldly adventures he should "nat wene frome henceforth that ye be the knyght of the worlde".⁴ Lancelot's tears are tears of relief that he now

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³Ibid., 1152, 18-15.
⁴Ibid., 863, 27.
knows that he is the best knight in the world. God has answered his prayer that his "syngle worship and honest be saved". 1 As Vinaver so justly states "on the eve of the catastrophe which is to put an end to Arthurian knighthood, Lancelot's greatness is thus emphasized once more!" 2 What this earns for Lancelot, in practical terms, is another devoted follower: "And this sir Urre wolde never go frome sir Launcelot". 3 Sir Lavayne similarly had said "for sythen I saw first my lorde sir Launcelot I conde never departe frome hym, nother nought I wolle, and I may folow hym." 4 This chorus of devoted followers conclusively intensify the magic of Lancelot's greatness.

At the conclusion of Malory's romance the hero and the heroine of the final book forsake the world and the active life for the spiritual and contemplative life of prayer, fasting and total concentration on the Divine. There is no indication that Guinevere would retreat from the world. Malory has not given her as complex character dimensions as Lancelot. As Reiss has remarked, Guinevere's relationship to the hero is for the most part a symbolical one. In the critical confrontation of the lovers in Guinevere's chamber at the time that their guilt is revealed, Guinevere has a foreshadowing of her own death. She says to Lancelot: "But and ye be slayne I wol take my dethe as mekeely as ever ded marter take hys dethe for Jesu Cristes sake." 5 Although Guinevere realizes Lancelot's death

1Ibid., 1152, 21-22.  
2Ibid., p. 1591.  
3Ibid., "The Healing of Sir Urre", 1153, 25.  
means her death at the stake, her more than willing acceptance of it might suggest an unconscious symbolical death. She will, in a sense, be dead to the world with Lancelot's death. This is, of course, the resolution she does make when she says: "I beseeche Almyghty God that I may never have power to see sry Lancelot wyth my worldly eyen." 1

In the case of Lancelot, Malory has kept the Grail and the contemplative life it offers in sight before and after the quest. Lancelot's references to his pride on the two occasions previously mentioned are, of course, reminders of the words said to him: "thou enelyned to that party for bobbaunce and pryde of the world." 2 Guinevere repeats the same words to Bors in chastising Lancelot: "Yet for all hys pryde and bobbaunce, there ye proved yourself better man than he." 3 This is, undoubtedly, an ironic instance of her misunderstanding of herself as Lancelot's motivation for such demonstrations of pride. The irreconcilable dichotomy between the active and contemplative worlds, reinforced by the references to pride, thus continues to exist within the chivalric context. The hermit's inability to cure Lancelot, either mentally or physically, during Lancelot's madness, is a symbolical foreshadowing of the incompleteness of Lancelot's experience of the quest:

But the orynge myght nat fynde hym his sustenance, and so he enployred and vexed syche bothe of body and of hys wyte: for defaute of sustenance he waxed more woorser than he was aforetime.

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1Ibid., "The Dolorous Death and Departing", 1255, 36-37.


4Ibid., "Lancelot and Elaine", 622, 14-16.
"Defaute of sustenamunce" in the contemplative world led to Lancelot's diversion by the water's edge while waiting for Calahad. Lancelot's own words to Guinevere recall his failure to reject the worldly life of activity after the quest. His attempts to fulfill the hermit's request to forswake the queen have not been very successful and have earned only her accusation of infidelity. Lancelot replies:

'A, madame,' sayde sir Lancelot, 'in thyse ye must holde me exceded for dyvers causis: one ys, I was but late in the quest of the Sankgreall, and I thanke God of Hys grete mercy, and never of my deserynge, that I saw in that my queste as much as ever saw any synfull man lyvinge, and so was hit tolde me. And if that I had not had my prey thoughtis to returne to you[2] o love agayne as I do, I had sene as greate mysteryes as ever saw my somme sir Calahad, Pericivale, other sir Bors. And, therefore, madam, I was but late in that queste, and wyte you well, madam, hit may nat be yet lyghtly forgotyn, the hyghe servyse in whom I dud my dyligente laboure.1

Many scholars, notably Lumiansky refer to Lancelot's resorting to Guinevere after the quest as his chief sin, the sin of instability. Hence, adultery becomes the most important factor in the decline of the Round Table. The moral context, as I have previously indicated, is too narrow to explain fully Malory's treatment of Lancelot. Lumiansky sees Bors, who achieved the vision of the Grail, because he was chaste except for one time, as an example of fidelity to God. Bors resisted the carnal temptations of the ladies of the castle and rejected his brother to save a maiden's chastity. Thus he was able to cut himself off from worldly ties in order to see the vision. Furthermore, Lumiansky points out that Bors' role is that of "patent bearer of protective responsibility" for Lancelot.2 He carries messages to Lancelot on two occasions, warning him of his instability in turning to the world again. An old man at the Castle Corbonic bids him toll

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1 Ibid., "The Poisoned Apple", 1046, 3-14.

Lancelot that "of all worldly adventures he passyth in manhode and proves all othir, but in this sprytyuell mateyr he shall have many hys bettyrs". After the quest, Bors carries Calahad's message to Lancelot "to remember of thys unseyke worlde". Inuianysky concludes that Bors is an example to Lancelot "to avoid recommencing the adultery and thus to cleanse himself of sin".

However, if Bors as Inuianysky points out, does demonstrate such fidelity to the ideals of the quest in his own life and, if he is to serve as a model to Lancelot, then he surely should not aid Lancelot in any way in his relationship with Guinevere. Although Bors rebukes Guinevere and does encourage Lancelot's relationship with the Maid of Astolot, "and God wolde, sayre cousyn..., that ye coude love her, but as to that I may nat nuther dare nat couseyle you", he still promises to fight for Guinevere, in Lancelot's absence, when she is accused of poisoning sir Patryse. Furthermore he names Lancelot of the trap Aggravain has set for himself and Guinevere: "Ye shall nat go thys nyght be ny couseyle". Is Bors not sinning just as much by encouraging adultery as by partaking in it? He is guilty, according to the life of the quest of excessive love of the creature rather than the Creator. His total commitment to Lancelot demonstrates excessive earthly love, love "oute of mesure". His love of Lancelot is so excessive that he would kill the king to end the war against Lancelot: "Sir, shall

I make an end of this warre? (For he mente to have slayne hym). 1 Bors could hardly continue in his commitment to his Elaine as he would be disqualified from the quest since chastity, or the renunciation of the flesh, is a prerequisite for the vision of the Grail. His love for Lancelot replaces his love for Elaine. Thus Lumiansky concludes that Malory's intention is to underline Lancelot's instability in contrast to Bors' steadfastness, and, hence, Lancelot's complicity in the decline of the Round Table.

As a result of this examination of all Bors' appearances in the Morte Darthum, we have seen that Malory presented a consistent picture of Bors as a valiant and steadfast knight able to overcome the blemish of his one lapse from virtue. Thus he stands in sharp contrast to Lancelot, whose instability is paramount in the final scenes of the book. 2

I point out Lumiansky's argument and conclusion as an essential factor in my study of Lancelot. Bors, rather than serve as a contrast to Lancelot is, in fact, a parallel figure in Malory's works. This parallel makes Lancelot's dilemma more human. Both Malory's characters, in many ways, demonstrate excessive attachment to the world, to the creature rather than the Creator. Malory outlined this divided devotion when he said:

"lat every man of worship florysh hys herte in thys worlde: firste unto God, and neste unto the joye of them that he promised hys feythe unto." 3 Rather than harmonise this conflict between love of God and love of man, and love of earthly things rather than spiritual things, Malory's hero and his followers, in the medieval context, are forced to reject one for the other.

We are better able to understand Lancelot's and Guinevere's final actions. Lancelot's renunciation of the active world seems inconsistent with

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1 Ibid., "The Vengeance of Gawain", 1192, M-15.


the epic role of a knight of superhuman stature. In his final confrontation with Guinevere, he learns that she has taken to a convent "to gete my soule hele...that I may amende my myssolyvyng".1 Lancelot, in accordance with her actions replies: "Sythen ye have taken to perfection, I must nedys take me to perfection, of ryght."2 Guinevere, however, symbolizes the active world since she motivates all Lancelot's heroic exploits as well as rewards them. He now has no "raison d'être" for the active role, and, consequently, his renunciation of arms: "and sir Launcelot threwe hys armes abrode, and seyde, 'Alas! Who may truste thyse worlde?'"3 is a symbolical rejection of the active world. His action is also an expression of a loss of faith in the rewards of an uncompromising devotion to the creature rather than the Creator. Arthur gives Lancelot the principles in admitting him to the Order of Knighthood, but Guinevere gave him the means to carry them out by giving him his sword, the symbol of action. Lancelot's reaction, notably, follows the news of Arthur's death, the final stroke which is the loss of the principle of knighthood itself, the failure of the creature to achieve perfection. The symbolis is reinforced by the imitative action of Lancelot's followers, sharing his disappointment in the active role in the world, they, too, retreat to the contemplative life of the hermit: "And soo their horses wente where they wolde, for they take no regarde of no worldly rychesses."4 A knight's neglect of his horse is an expression of his overwhelming conviction of the

1Ibid., "The Nortre Arthure", 1252, 10-29.
2Ibid., 1253, 17-19.
3Ibid., 1254, 11-12.
4Ibid., 1255, 9-10.
futility of his active life. The quest had been Lancelot’s preparatory effort to reject his active role as knight for a life of prayer, fasting, self-flagellation and contemplation of the Divine.

However, the final effect Malory creates is not a panegyric to the contemplative life. We must not forget Ector’s eulogy. It is not a spiritual or even amatory but chevalric qualities that Ector extols in Lancelot.

He has consistently fulfilled the loftiest ideals of chivalric excellence with the sword and the shield:

‘A, Lancelot!’ he said, ‘thou were hede of al Crysten knyghtes! And now I dare say,’ said syr Ector, ‘thou art Lancelot, there thou lyest, that thou were never madded of ethely knyghtes hands. And thou were the curtest knyght that ever bare shieldes! And thou were the truest friends to thy lover that ever bestrade hors, and thou were the trewest lover, of a syfful man, that ever loved woman, and thou were the kyndest man that ever strake wyth swords. And thou were the godlyest persons that ever can exunge prees of knyghtes, and thou was the mostest man and the jentilllest that ever ete in hall exunge ladies, and thou were the sternest knyght to thy mortal foe that ever put spore in the rosea.’

All of Lancelot’s virtues, in fact, his entire existence is summed up in his behaviour as a knight.

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1 Ibid., p. 1662. Vinaver suggests that the only possible source for this threnody may be in the alliterative Nort Arthure. However, the eulogy praises Gawain, not Lancelot. If this is true, the position of the eulogy at the end of Malory’s works and the transference of it from Gawain to Lancelot would, of course, convince us beyond a doubt, of Malory’s intentional elevation of his hero to epic stature. In all facets of life, Lancelot has behaved as a knight and, in that category, he is without peer.

2 Ibid., 1259, 9-21.
CONCLUSION

In the course of this thesis, I have attempted to analyze one author's very personal conception of a fictional character who is, today, virtually legendary. Lancelot existed long before Malory and continues to exist long after in the imagination of such authors as Tennyson and White. Lancelot is the kind of literary character who is adaptable to many widely and varying interpretations and, for this reason, sometimes suffers distortion of his real nature. Malory's creation is peculiarly English rather than French and this is because Malory has been, inevitably, affected by his English heroic tradition, which he most probably encountered in English versions of the Arthurian stories such as the alliterative Morte Arthur. It is hoped that I have assured Malory a place in this English heroic tradition.

Secondly, I have tried to show that Malory has, in no way, confined himself to a narrow moral tradition. Lancelot concerns the author only insofar as he demonstrates the greatness of knighthood, a defunct institution in Malory's time. This last fact is significant. Malory was aware of the irreconcilable dichotomy, very medieval in its rigidity, between the active and the contemplative ways of life. The loss of function in the one sphere led to Lancelot's rejection of his active role. This was a pragmatical decision. Guinevere, the cause of all Lancelot's chivalric endeavors, left Lancelot, the knight-lover, no choice but to attempt another way of life with which he had already had some familiarity. Here, once again, rather than see Lancelot's final decision as a moral choice, Malory treated Lancelot's abdication of the active role with a
great deal of nostalgia. In fact, I think the whole of Malory's works are imbued with nostalgia for the past greatness of chivalry. Malory has written his account of Lancelot in retrospect, when chivalry had lost its pragmatic function. Therefore, the tribute to Lancelot at the end exalts his greatness as a knight, as an ideal figure, whose potential was so admirably fulfilled in his three roles as a man of virtuous action, as a sincere religious aspirant and as a man of great affections and devotions.

Malory must have had a well conceived intention in mind in creating Lancelot. In all three widely differing roles I have tried to show Malory's consistency in presenting Lancelot. The central hero has demonstrated the same limitations in character and the same potential for greatness in his three roles. His character dimensions are peculiarly medieval. Lancelot's limitations and potential as a knight can really only be assessed in the context of the two absolute ways of life he confronts. Medieval man was, inevitably, more conscious of his spiritual nature than modern man. Because there is no compromise to be made in the conflict existing between the active and contemplative roles, Lancelot, no longer trusting in the active way of the world, was compelled to reject the life of knight-lover. His adoption of the secluded, hermitic existence, the life of Divine contemplation, grew naturally and necessarily out of his experiences as a man of arms, a Grail seeker and a lover.
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