

THE INNOVATIVE VISION OF MALORY'S
TALE OF THE SANKGREAL

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THE INNOVATIVE AND UNIFYING VISION
OF SIR THOMAS MALORY IN
THE TALE OF THE SANKGREAL

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ABSTRACT

Malory's Quest of the Holy Grail has generally been regarded as a rather inept translation of the Quest del Saint Graal, Malory's source. Critics, especially Vinaver, have usually maintained that Malory did not understand the theology of the original and consequently 'secularized' it, missing its essential point. In defense of this argument, they have pointed out that Malory reduced the length and number of the many speeches and homilies, delivered by monks and hermits, found in the French Quest. They have also accused Malory of exonerating Lancelot, saving him from the humiliations he encounters in the French and failing to present him as a good penitent. This argument can be challenged, however. The incidents and passages frequently used to demonstrate Malory's secular outlook either do not stand up to close examination or else establish merely that Malory's purpose differed from the French author's. In no way do they prove that Malory diminished the religious significance of the tale.

A further case can be made that Malory in fact added a further level of meaning to the Quest. Most literary critics, and many historians, have assumed that chivalry was essentially dead and gone in Malory's time, and that his interest in knighthood could only have been nostalgic. Recent historical evidence, however, suggests the opposite--that knighthood was very much alive in the fifteenth century. The literary evidence supports this stand. On the basis of a close comparison of Malory's Quest and its source, an argument can be made that Malory had a lively interest in chivalry and was actively involved in the attempt to define an ideal of knighthood which was in

harmony with Christian standards. To complete this argument, a number of differences between the two versions of the Quest suggest that Malory was influenced by the ideal of political or mixed rule advanced by Sir John Fortescue, and that Malory incorporated political responsibilities into his chivalric ideal.

On the basis of this evidence, it appears that Malory's Quest deserves to be treated, not as an inadequate translation of the French, but as an innovative and coherent work with considerable merits of its own.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to suggest the need for a new approach to Malory's Quest of the Holy Grail. In the past it has received little attention and less praise; presently, despite the increased amount of Malory scholarship, it still gets short shrift. Yet a case could be made that the Quest is one of the most vital parts of the Morte Darthur.

Most contemporary critics of Malory follow one of two schools of opinion. Either they agree with Vinaver that the Quest should be regarded simply as a translation, or, like Moorman, they view the Quest as the first scene in the final act of the Arthurian tragedy. Both of these points of view have merit. Unfortunately, they are both too restrictive to advance our understanding of the Quest--especially our understanding of Malory's intentions for the Grail story--very far. Our definitions of translation and tragedy are quite different from those with which medieval and early modern writers like Malory worked; unfortunately, contemporary critics do not always take this important difference into account when they apply modern criteria to venerable literature. The sad result is that too often Malory, especially in his Quest, is faulted for not obeying critical standards which are an invention of our time, not his. Equally unfortunately, readers who begin with the wrong set of assumptions either decide that Malory is an over-rated author or else a most obscure one. Yet these conclusions challenge Malory's age-old reputation and popularity; and it is difficult to believe that he intended the Morte Darthur as a

labour for scholars only. The problem, then, is to find an approach to the Quest which resolves these difficulties, which is not prejudiced and which does not immediately dismiss the tale as a quaint oddity.

In order to appreciate Malory's achievement in the Quest, it is necessary to consider it both as a translation and as an independent work. Considering the Quest as a translation in the modern sense is inherently unfair to Malory since the precept of painstaking adherence to the original was seldom followed in his time. To arrive at a fair estimation of Malory's ability as an artist and a translator, it is necessary to examine those passages in the Quest which are commonly held to support the 'secularization' hypothesis and to consider whether there is a pattern to Malory's deviations from his original text. It is also necessary to ascertain what balance exists between those passages which are native to the French Queste and those which are Malory's creation. This task is the purpose of Chapter I.

Malory is generally acknowledged to be one of the great chivalric writers, and any critical theory about Malory must take chivalry into account. In general, those scholars who agree with Vinaver have assumed that the kind of chivalry which Malory so enjoyed writing about was essentially secular and bellicose. Other critics, like Moorman and Pacboda, have concluded that chivalry was an ideal of conduct which was inherently unstable and socially divisive. Almost all critics of Malory have assumed that chivalry was a dead issue in Malory's time, and that Malory's interest in knighthood could only have been nostalgic. However, the historical basis for this outlook is not as

solid as it once seemed. A case can be made that chivalry was very much alive in Malory's time, and that Malory was actively involved in the attempt to define the chivalric ideal. Chapter II examines the critical assumptions about Malorian chivalry and considers the historical evidence, as well as the literary evidence provided by the Quest.

Whether knighthood was moribund or flourishing in the fifteenth century, most critics have assumed, largely because of his apparent relish for the details of combat, that Malory was a practical man and that little is to be gained in searching the Morte Darthur for intellectual content of any sort. The Quest has been particularly neglected in terms of this kind of inquiry, for two major reasons: firstly, the Quest del Saint Graal, Malory's original, is an extremely tightly knit theological work which seems invulnerable to any important change in intent; secondly, Vinaver's 'secularization' allegation seemed to prove that Malory did not understand the content of his original and that his alterations proceeded from intellectual incompetence. If these assumptions are not taken, however, then there is a fresh case for taking Malory seriously. Chapter III examines the possibility that Malory was influenced by contemporary ideals of political theory and expanded his ideal of knighthood to include a certain obligation on the knight's part to maintain just government and serve the public good.

The purpose of this thesis, then, is to establish the inadequacy of current critical approaches to the Morte Darthur, especially to the Quest, to suggest some new methods for examining Malory's version of the Grail story, and to draw attention to the rich and innovative treatment which Malory gave to the Quest.

CHAPTER I

Critical Evaluation of the Quest

The Quest has long suffered at the hands of Malory critics and scholars. Even when Malory became a subject for serious study, the Quest was held in relatively low critical esteem. From the first, critics felt that Malory's handling of the Grail material was not competent. In 1922, Chambers wrote:

I hope I shall not imperil sympathy if I say that I do not regard the Quest of the Grail as one of the most satisfactory parts of the Morte d'Arthur. Again it is not altogether Malory's fault. But the much-told tale is told better elsewhere.¹

In an even earlier criticism, Vida D. Scudder stated of the Quest that "the ensuing story is in many respects badly told by Malory"² and went on to remark:

these books of the Grail do not reveal their beauty to a superficial reading. They seem at first monotonous. The colours are faint, the visible world is seen as if through a blur of pallid moonshine, the knights pass through ghostly and unconvincing adventures, explained in far-fetched allegories.³

These are valid criticisms of the Grail material in general, and of the Vulgate Quest, Malory's source, in particular; but they are not fair criticisms when applied to Malory's version of the Quest. As Chambers himself notes, most of the problems which he and Scudder perceive in Malory's Quest are inherent characteristics of the Vulgate text. Chambers may demonstrate insight as a critic of comparative literature when he states that:

The Galahad Quest has not the mystery of Chretien de Troyes' original fragment; it may be just because it is not a fragment. It has not the tender melancholy of the Perlesvaus, the version translated as The High History of the Holy Grail. German scholars find a deeper humanity in Wolfram von Eshenbach's Parsival.⁴

However, such a comparison is unfair to Malory, because it denies him any status as an artist, and assumes that if he worked as a translator, his work could not rise in value above that of his source. Chambers seems to find no merit at all in Malory's Quest; but before we fault Malory it might be wise to question the validity of Chambers' method of investigation.

Scudder's remarks demonstrate considerable insight into the nature of the Malorian and Vulgate Questes. Certainly the French author used every technique at his disposal to diminish the impression of physical reality in his tale so that its spiritual or supernatural significance would not lose its hold on the reader. Obviously this kind of disembodied narrative is not particularly attractive to Scudder; it is also possible that Malory himself was not taken with such a rigidly allegorical presentation and modified it, when possible, to suit his own purpose and taste. Like Chambers, Scudder is unable to focus on any feature of Malory's Quest which is not found in his source because she does not credit him with the ability to innovate. Chambers faults Malory for not selecting more congenial models, while Scudder seems to wish he had not stuck so closely to his source. Unfortunately, neither critic is interested in Malory's own achievement, in those differences which set his Quest apart from all the others.

The early critics of Malory were not entirely just in their appraisal of his Quest, but it is not fair to blame them for the short-

comings of their perspective. Hindsight is, after all, the cheapest form of insight, and it is easy to forget that until scholars like Chambers and Scudder established that Malory was a writer worthy of serious consideration, most critics of Malory gave him very short shrift indeed. As Pachoda notes, these commentators

were not bothered by the technical problems of authorship, originality and unity; their concern was almost wholly with the nationalistic bias of the book.⁵

The critical ferment of the last sixty years has done a great deal for Malory's reputation as a writer and for the general level of interest expressed in the Morte d'Arthur. But it has done very little for the reputation of Malory's Quest. Contemporary critics still tend to shy away from it or damn it with faint praise, just as Chambers did. When they devote attention to the Quest, it is usually with the object of proving something not about it, but with it. The Quest has been employed in this fashion to prove theories about the unity of the Morte d'Arthur, Malory's use of sources, and his understanding of medieval political theory. These may be valid exercises and they may contribute to our appreciation of Malory as a writer, but they do very little to improve our comprehension of Malory's Quest.

Possibly due to this lack of interest, critical opinion of the Quest has improved only slightly since Chambers' time. In an early remark, Vinaver wrote that:

Malory's Quest is indeed a confused and almost pointless story, a beautiful parade of symbols and bright visions. It is deprived of its spiritual foundation, of its doctrine, and of its direct object.⁶

Vinaver subsequently modified his opinion, but only slightly, and even in his later criticism he insists that Malory did not grasp the point or

the technique of his source, the Vulgate Queste del Saint Graal. He describes Malory's attitude to the Grail Quest 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.⁷

Vinaver charges that Malory's alterations radically change the significance of the Grail story so that it becomes only another adventure of the Round Table. He claims not only that Malory changes the intent of his source material, but that he consistently misunderstands it, and 'secularizes' it as the result of his incompetence. Vinaver's critical intelligence is formidable; his arguments are both subtle and thorough, strong enough to be granted considerable respect even from those who are totally opposed to his findings. Yet despite Vinaver's seeming preference for the French version of the Quest, he himself admits that it is through Malory's telling that the story survives today:

He may have misunderstood the Grail doctrine, confused the whole spiritual issue and omitted some essential parts of the narrative; for all this, it is through his version and not through the French Queste that the symbol of the Grail has reached in our imagination that degree of reality without which no symbol can live.⁸

This statement reveals a paradox in Vinaver's evaluation of Malory's Tale of the Sankgreal which demands careful examination. If Vinaver is right, the only saving graces of Malory's Quest lie in his prose style and his gift for dialogue. Vinaver is adamant in his refusal to grant Malory any ability to understand the material he

translated. But the abilities he does praise in Malory--which have only to do with style--do not seem sufficient to distract the reader from what are, in Vinaver's opinion, fundamental errors in both the conception and the execution of the work. Again, if Vinaver is right, the only reason for the relative popularity of Malory's Quest is that it is part of the most-read collection of Arthurian romance.

Perhaps the best way to investigate this critical dilemma is simply to examine Vinaver's most damaging charges in the light of what is found in Malory and his source, so that we may gain a clearer idea of what Malory wished to accomplish in the Quest, and of the degree to which he succeeded.

'Secularization' is the key term in Vinaver's appraisal of the Quest. He uses it as a general category to sum up those changes in Malory's telling of the Grail story which are the result of not adequately comprehending the French source material. Vinaver faults Malory for being an incompetent translator, contending that:

Throughout the story Malory is primarily concerned with 'erthly worship' and the consequent attempt to secularize the Grail theme as much as the story will allow. Ignoring the contrast between 'la chevaillierie celestiale' and 'la seculiere', Malory replaces the former by 'virtuous living' and even uses the phrase 'knyghtly dedys and vertuous lyvyng' to describe the duties of a good Christian.⁹

This quote, unfortunately, represents the combination of a splendid observation with a highly questionable preconception. It is quite true that Malory describes chivalry and standards of conduct in terms which diverge significantly from those used by the French author. But this observation alone does not establish either Malory's

incompetence as a translator or a deliberate attempt to empty the Quest of religious meaning. Only if we accept, as Vinaver does, that the French Queste del Saint Graal is the definitive version of the Grail story and that any changes introduced by Malory are necessarily for the worse, will we conclude as Vinaver does that Malory both misread and mistranslated the Queste.

Vinaver employs the term 'secularization' to describe the methodical alterations, or perhaps more accurately, the processes of re-imagining and re-shaping which Malory applied to his source. However, in addition to this rather broad classification, Vinaver makes use of several other charges to explain his dissatisfaction with Malory's alterations. The first is that, in an effort to reduce the significance of the supernatural element so important in his source, Malory drastically reduces the number of supernatural events and devotes considerably less space to the exposition of doctrine than does the French Queste. The second is that Malory systematically defends Lancelot from the insults he receives so often in the original, and in so doing, loses a large part of the original's meaning. Third, and most important of all, is the allegation that Malory made these changes out of a fundamental failure to grasp the meaning of the Vulgate Queste, and that as a result, his version is lacking in coherence and has no artistic merit of its own.

The Quest, in either version, possesses an inherent supernatural element, and of course there are many marvels in Malory's Quest. But, as C. S. Lewis observes, "There are fewer marvels in Malory than in the corresponding French romances."¹⁰ and also "Malory's text naturalizes,

negatively, by the omission of wonders, and positively by introducing practical, mundane details."¹¹ It is not impossible that Malory reduced the frequency, and thereby the importance, of the mystical events in his work because he simply did not like to think of any level of reality beyond the here-and-now; perhaps he was "a burly, commonsensible man who was always trying to turn the faerie world of the romances into something much more earthly and realistic."¹² But the opposite stand to this one is at least equally possible. Lewis notes that "a simple and serious delight in marvellous narrative most emphatically does not involve any indifference to mundane details"¹³ and concludes his examination of this problem by stating that since a reduction in the number of marvels may very well increase their effect, then it is equally valid to suppose that "Every supposedly naturalistic change that Malory made in the story might proceed from a far fuller belief and a more profound delight in it than the French author had ever known . . ."¹⁴ It is, of course, difficult to establish what Malory's taste in this or in many other matters was, lacking as we do any corroborative evidence; nonetheless, Lewis's remarks are valuable for two reasons: they explain the miraculous effect of some passages in Malory's Quest despite the overall reduction in number of marvellous apparitions, and they also provide insight into Malory's own conception of the Grail story, into what Lewis elsewhere calls "the logic of the imagination"¹⁵ which must have been responsible for some of the major changes which Malory made to his source material.

It is also possible that Malory made less frequent use of the marvellous element, not because he disliked it in itself, but because

he felt that it interfered with other features of the material. And it must also be considered that Malory's reduction of the supernatural is neither unique nor unprecedented. While it is true that there are fewer marvels in Malory than in the Vulgate Queste, it is also true that there are fewer marvels in the Vulgate than in some of the earlier romances such as the Didot Perceval or Chretien de Troyes' Conte del Graal. Yet nobody talks about 'secularization' in the Queste del Saint Graal. Nonetheless, a case could be made that there is a continued, if not continuous, process of 'secularization', if by the term we mean a reduction in the number of miraculous events, from the early verse romances about the Grail to the Vulgate prose cycle. Unfortunately, 'secularization' is not an adequate term to describe such a complex and lengthy process. It is difficult to be conclusive about this matter of the supernatural element in Malory. As Lewis has pointed out, less may very well be more where mysteries are concerned; on the other hand, although statistics do reveal fewer marvels in Malory than in his source, a mere analysis of numbers cannot prove Vinaver's charge of secularization. In this particular instance, the reader must decide for himself what effect Malory's telling of the Grail story has on him.

The charge that Malory systematically reduced and often eliminated some of the doctrinal exposition so important in the Vulgate Queste is far more important to the support of Vinaver's attack than is the debate over the relative number and significance of miracles. Once again, Vinaver is quite correct in observing that Malory greatly reduced the length of many of the sermons contained in the Queste del Saint Graal. But Vinaver seems to assume that any condensation, let alone

deletion, of the original exposition of doctrine necessarily proves that Malory "misunderstood the Grail doctrine".¹⁶ So adamant is Vinaver on this point that even his concessions have an air of accusation about them:

The Queste was, of course, too solid and too elaborate a structure to be so easily upset, and the few alterations made by Malory could neither conceal its purpose nor obliterate its character.¹⁷

Vinaver is mistaken in his judgement because he fails to consider the difficulties that Malory faced in adapting the Queste to his own purpose. The Queste del Saint Graal was originally one part of the Vulgate prose cycle, which contained in addition a Lancelot and Mort Artu. Each of these tales was long enough to fill a large volume, and the complete cycle, especially in its later, more extended form, was very large indeed. Now Malory's plan for his Arthuriad was considerably more complex than that of the Vulgate, but in typical fifteenth century fashion he proposed to write it in one volume. As a result of this design requirement, he was compelled to reduce the length of the Queste as he found it. In this he succeeded; his version is little more than half the length of his source. Malory was only able to achieve such a degree of condensation by paring away at the long and intricate sermons offered by priests and hermits to passing knights, which are such a striking (although often tedious) feature of the Vulgate Queste.

Before considering the artistic effectiveness and doctrinal accuracy of Malory's alterations, it might be advisable to note that not all critics are entranced by the rigours of Cistercian exposition. As we have already seen, Scudder complains about the longwindedness of some

of the priestly monologues. Ferdinand Lot refers to them as "'l'interminable kyrielle d'hermites'"¹⁸, and Vinaver himself admits that the exposition of doctrine and allegorical interpretation of events usually proceeds to "the bitterest detail".¹⁹

Whether or not Malory liked this feature of his source, he seized on it as the key to the condensation he desired. He chose wisely. In the Vulgate Queste, the hermits' expositions were essential, for as Vinaver points out, "The French Queste was a treatise on grace with hardly a page or a line not intended for doctrinal exposition".²⁰ But if we grant that Malory's purpose with the Grail story was not the same as the French author's, and that he was under the constraint of fitting the Quest into a larger narrative, then it becomes apparent that the long didactic speeches were the most suitable material for abridgement and condensation.

However, in shortening these passages, Malory did not lose their point. In most cases Malory is surprisingly faithful to his original, and in this context Vinaver's remark that "Malory's Tale of the Sankgreall is the least original of his works"²¹ is perhaps an unintended compliment. Even though Malory was forced to reduce his material quite severely, so that he was criticized by Vinaver for not being able to "fully appreciate the religious doctrine of his source",²² his translations of the speeches of the monks and hermits are always faithful to the substance, even if they do omit the lesser details of the original. Benson offers a balanced appraisal of Malory's method of translation:

Nevertheless, the reader has no difficulty in following the meaning of the action, for even in Malory's version where the explanations are drastically condensed, each dream, adventure, and temptation is clearly explained in exhausting detail, and even the most inattentive reader must realize he has moved from the realistic world of Sir Tristram to a world of symbolism.^{22a}

As proof of this claim, let us consider the following passage, in which Sir Gawain seeks advice from a hermit. In both versions of the Queste the passage is of no importance to the plot itself, but helps to establish Gawain's character and spiritual state. As the episode is a fairly long one, it may conveniently be divided into two parts: the first, which builds up to the hermit's speech, illustrates Malory's skill in narrative, while the second, the sermon itself, serves to establish Malory's competence in handling doctrinal exposition.

The French author spends an unwarranted amount of space building up to the hermit's speech, as this rather long quote will demonstrate:

Sir Gawain proceeded alone till he came to a hermitage and found the hermit in his chapel chanting the vespers of the Holy Virgin. He dismounted and stayed for the office, and afterwards begged lodging in the name of holy charity; this the hermit vouchsafed him cordially.

That evening the holy man asked Sir Gawain where he came from, to which he gave a candid answer and told him also of the Quest he had embarked on. On learning the identity of his guest the hermit said:

"Indeed, Sir, did it please you, I should very much like to know something of your life."

Without more ado he began to speak to Sir Gawain of confession, calling to mind the most edifying texts of the Gospels and urging the knight to confess his sins, and he would be at pains to counsel him.

"Sir," said Sir Gawain, "if you would elucidate a remark that was made to me two days ago I would unbosom myself to you, for you seem to me a worthy man, and you are, as I well know, a priest."

The good man assured him that he would do all he could to assist him. Sir Gawain observed him and

saw him so venerable in age and demeanour that he was moved to confess himself to him. So he told him of those offenses against Our Lord which lay heaviest on his conscience, nor did he omit the words which the monk had spoken to him.²³

This is not a skillful bit of writing. It is serviceable, but it also illustrates Vinaver's remark that the French Queste

was written by someone who was clearly an expert in theological discussion, but whose mind never grasped the picturesque possibilities of the story, and whose language never extended to imaginative expression.²⁴

The French author's use of indirect speech is unspirited, his attempts at creating dialogue are unsuccessful, and his phraseology is long-winded in the extreme.

In contrast, Malory's description of the same meeting is livelier and better proportioned, while still true to the sense of the original passage:

And syr Gawayne rode tyll he com to an ermytage, and there he found the good man seyng hys evynsonge of oure Lady. And there sir Gawayne asked herberow for charité, and the good man graunted hym gladly. Than the good man asked hym what he was.

'Sir,' he seyde, 'I am a knyght of kynge Arthures that am in the quests of the Sankgreall, and my name ys sir Gawayne.'

'Sir,' seyde the good man, 'I wolde wete how hit stonduith betwxe God and you.'

'Sir,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'I wyll with a good wyll shew you my lyff if hit please you.'

There he tolde the eremyte how a monk of an abbay 'called me wycked knyght'.²⁵

The two versions of the above passage are substantially the same. But Malory's has several advantages. It is unquestionably more compact. This is due partly to the omission of insignificant detail, and partly to Malory's preference for direct rather than indirect dialogue. As Vinaver notes, Malory's use of language is vivid, strong enough to help

create a sense of character from dialogue, at the same time allowing him to trim some of the fat from his source. For example, the phrase "with a good wyll" not only indicates Gawain's attitude towards confession, it also serves the same purpose as an entire sentence in the original. Malory's translation of this passage, then, is not only true to his source, but also shorter, more natural, and more lively. Surprisingly, it also possesses the virtue of being more complete. The process of condensation and use of direct speech make Gawain's declaration of himself and his quest far more striking than in the French, and Malory repeats verbatim the charge previously made against Gawain, instead of merely referring to it as the French does. In no way does Malory's handling of this narrative passage bear out Vinaver's charge of 'secularization'.

It is, however, in Malory's handling of the long sermons and homilies given by the hermits and other holy men that Vinaver finds the major substance for his attack. Because he approaches Malory's task as simply that of translation--in the modern, not the medieval, sense--Vinaver too easily accepts the Vulgate not merely as Malory's source, but as the authoritative version of the two. The viewpoint which results from this attitude is inherently unfair to Malory. Because Malory preserves the basic structure of the Queste del Saint Graal and retains the meaning, if not the length, of most of the sermons, he is taken to task for his lack of invention--the Quest is "the least original of his works";²⁶ however, when Malory deviates from his source in any way, it is assumed that incompetence is the reason for

the change. While it may be true, as Vinaver asserts, that Malory "was not interested in the complexities of the Grail doctrine",²⁷ this does not prove that in translating the Queste he was "more out of his element than ever".²⁸ Even P. E. Tucker, who does not credit Malory with much theological capability, maintains that "there is no necessity to argue that Malory is trying to deprive the original of religious significance."²⁹

For an example of Malory's ability to handle doctrinal exposition, let us examine the hermit's speech to Gawain which follows the passage previously cited. The Vulgate version follows:

The hermit, discovering that four years had elapsed since he had last been shriven, said to him then:

'In justice, Sir, were you called a bad and faithless servant. You were not admitted to the order of chivalry to soldier in the devil's cause thenceforward, but in order to serve our Maker, defend Holy Church and render at last to God that treasure which He entrusted to your safekeeping, namely your soul. To this end were you made knight, and you, Gawain, have abused your knighthood. For you have been henchman to the enemy, forsaking your Maker and living the worst and most dissolute life that ever a knight lived. Now you can clearly see that he who called you a bad and faithless servant knew you well. And indeed, had you not been so hardened a sinner, the seven brothers would never have perished by your hand nor with your help, and would even now be doing penance for the wicked custom they established in the Castle of the Maidens and making their peace with God. He whom you seek, Galahad the Good Knight, did not act thus: he overcame without destroying them.³⁰

The gist of this passage is obvious enough; the hermit summarizes the purposes of chivalry, demonstrates that Gawain has broken his promise as a knight, and contrasts his spiritual state with Galahad's. There is a powerful sense of logic and conviction behind the hermit's words,

but it is marred by a cumbersome, almost legalistic, style.

Malory's version of the same speech is both shorter and richer:

'He myght well say hit,' seyde the eremyte,' for whan ye were made first knyght ye sholde have takyn you to knyghtly dedes and vertuous lyvyng. And ye have done the contrary, for ye have lyved myschevously many wyntirs. And sir Galahad ys a maid and synned never, and that ys the cause he shall enchyve where he goth that ye nor none such shall never attayne, nother none in your felyship, for ye have used the most untrewyst lyff that ever I herd knyght lyve. For sertes, had ye nat bene so wycked as ye ar, never had the seven brethirne be slayne by you and youre two fellowys: for sir Galahad hymself alone bet hem all seven the day toferne, but hys lyvyng ys such that he shall sle no man lyghtly.'³¹

Although Malory's version of this monologue is considerably shorter than the original, it is a faithful and basically complete translation. There is only one deletion which could be considered important. Malory does not mention the penance of the seven knights. This omission does not, however, prove his ineptness in translating complex doctrine. The question is one of selective emphasis. By leaving out the phrase about penance Malory is able to take full advantage of the damning contrast between Gawain and Galahad. In any case, it should be noted that Malory's changes do not lighten the hermit's attack on Gawain; if anything, they emphasize his deficiencies by heightening the contrast between his state and Galahad's. 'Secularization' is an inadequate and mistaken term when used to describe these subtle and skillful modifications.

Malory even adds material to strengthen the sense of dissimilarity between the two knights. The phrase "'And sir Galahad ys a mayde and synned never'"³² is not only perfectly consonant with

the French author's emphasis on chastity and sexual purity; it helps to define the otherwise general condemnations "'ye have lyved myschevously many wyntirs'"³³ and "'ye have used the most untrewyst lyff that ever I herd knyght lyve.'"³⁴ It might be objected that this change alters the meaning of the original, by putting too great a stress on chastity as the key to success in the Grail quest. Malory avoids this problem by using the term "'knyghtly dedes and vertuuous lyvnyng'"³⁵ to describe the conduct of a true knight. Vinaver takes issue with this expression because he finds it unsuitable "to describe the duties of a good Christian".³⁶ This is a misplaced criticism. Malory's phrase seems a reasonably accurate epitome of the French author's definition of knightly conduct: "'to serve our Maker, defend Holy Church and render at last to God that treasure which He entrusted to your safekeeping, namely your soul.'"³⁷ Malory's equivalent may be faulted for lacking substantial detail, but in no way is it hostile to the original meaning. Perhaps what Vinaver really dislikes about "'knyghtly dedes and vertuuous lyvnyg'" is that the compression of the phrase suggests a greater harmony of purpose between chivalry and religion than the French author would have cared to suggest. In Vinaver's terms, Malory disregards the distinction between secular and celestial chivalry.

But can this charge be proved from this instance? Certainly the passage as a whole is true to the general meaning of the French, and the disputed phrase does not disturb this accord; but what if it did? The problem lies not in Malory, but in Vinaver's assumption that chivalry necessarily meant the same for Malory as it did for the French author. Such a view totally ignores not only the radically

different personal perspectives of the two writers--the one himself a knight, the other a monk--but also the important changes in chivalry which occurred during the intervening years. As a result of this preconception, Vinaver fails to consider the possibility that Malory, rather than 'secularizing' the Grail story, attempts to redefine knighthood so that "'knyghtly dedes and vertuous lyvnyg'" justly describe a good Christian life. P. E. Tucker sums up this purpose in the statement: "one function of the Quest for him (Malory) is to reconcile chivalry with Christian standards of conduct."³⁸

The alterations made by Malory to his source which we have already examined seem to square well with this definition of his purpose, but one charge remains to be investigated--the accusation that Malory is too much concerned with Lancelot's reputation and saves him from the criticism he meets so often in the Queste del Saint Graal, thereby violating the logic and intent of the original. To Vinaver, this is Malory's most important error of judgement: "But the substitution of the Arthurian for the Christian set of values is perhaps best illustrated by the attempt to rehabilitate Lancelot."³⁹ According to Vinaver, Malory is guilty of sins both of omission and commission in his presentation of Lancelot:

Not only does he omit important passages which might reflect discredit upon his hero, but he insists on Lancelot's past greatness and assigns to him a role which he could never have played in the original version.⁴⁰

This is a formidable and complex accusation; to disprove it exhaustively, detail by detail, would require more space than can be allotted here. However, if Vinaver is correct in his assertion, then

several conclusions can be drawn from it which can be examined more conveniently. If, in his "attempt to rehabilitate Lancelot", Malory imposes unsuitable standards on his source material, then we would expect that Lancelot's career as a penitent reveals not only an inability on Malory's part to grasp the religious meaning of his source, but also a failure to fit Lancelot convincingly into the quest. Most important, we would expect certain anomalies in Lancelot's career as a penitent.

Three incidents which occur during Lancelot's penance are commonly held to prove that Malory's Lancelot has the wrong attitude towards his quest and mistakenly regards it as merely another 'Arthurian' adventure. The first of these episodes takes place shortly after the knights depart from Camelot. While in the presence of the holy vessel, Lancelot becomes physically paralysed, and as punishment for his presumption in undertaking the quest without first seeking confession, he is stripped of his arms and his horse. This theft, of course, leaves him devoid of all that pertains to chivalry, and to complete Lancelot's humiliation, it is a squire, his social inferior, who takes his arms. This much is common to both versions of the Queste. However, what follows, Lancelot's reaction to his misfortune, seems to differ considerably.

The French author provides a compelling description of Lancelot's despair and sense of loss:

And when the day dawned fair and bright, and the birds broke into song throughout the forest, and the sun's rays filtered through the trees, and when he saw the beauty of the day and heard the birdsong that had often gladdened his heart, and saw himself stripped

of arms and horse and all he had, and knew the sharpness of Our Lord's displeasure, then he thought the time would never come when anything on earth would yield him joy again. For there where he thought to find all joy and honour and worldly acclaim, in the adventures of the Holy Grail, he had reaped only failure and its bitter gall.⁴¹

This is one of the few passages in which the French author permits himself the liberty of description. The evocation of the beautiful morning, in contrast to Lancelot's anguish and desolation, creates a passage which is powerful and, in C. S. Lewis's words, "finely imagined".⁴²

As usual, the corresponding passage in Malory is much briefer, though not without a certain force:

So thus he sorrowed tyll hit was day, and harde the fowles synge: than somewhat he was comforted. But whan sir Lancelot myssed hys horse and hys harneyse than he wyst well God was displesed with hym.⁴³

The general critical reaction, at least since Vinaver, to this episode has been to use it as proof of Lancelot's waywardness and as one more example of Malory's misunderstanding of his source. Edmund Reiss, for one, seizes on the phrase "than somewhat he was comforted";⁴⁴ he states:

but this is a false comfort, for the song of birds is traditionally a sign of worldly pleasures. Lancelot appears to be in danger of being deceived by his pleasant surroundings. His dark night is not yet past.⁴⁵

Reiss's response to this passage is unfortunately both inappropriate and inexact. Regardless of the general truth of the iconography he asserts, he applies it intrusively to a phrase without regard to the meaning of the larger context. It is unfair to assume that Lancelot

is being led astray by the beauty of his surroundings when we are told in the next sentence that he is well aware of God's displeasure with him. Further, the passage is full of reminders that Lancelot is aware of his sinfulness and will repent. Immediately after Lancelot discovers he is unable to rise in the presence of the Grail, we are told "Wherefore aftir that many men seyde hym shame, but he toke repentaunce aftir that."⁴⁶ When he awakes from his trance he is rebuked by a supernatural voice: "'Sir Launcelot, more harder than ys the stone, and more bitter than ys the woode, and more naked and barer than ys the lyeff of the fygge-tre! Therefore go thou from hens, and withdraw the from thys holy places!"⁴⁷ Lancelot seems to be properly impressed by this strange accusation; as he leaves the chapel, he reflects on its meaning and admits its truth--"For the wordes wente to hys herte, tylle that he knew wherefore he was called so."⁴⁸ By the time Lancelot notices that his horse and arms are missing, his sense of guilt and unworthiness are confirmed, and he begins to reflect upon the reasons for his failure:

'And now I take upon me the adventures to seke of holy thynges, now I se and understande that myne olde synne hyndryth me and shamyth me, that I had no power to stirre nother speke whan the holy bloode appered before me.'⁴⁹

Not until Lancelot reaches this stage of awareness are we told that then he "harde the fowlys synge; than somewhat he was comforted."⁵⁰ In the context of the passage there seems little room for any fear that Lancelot is about to be lulled into a false sense of security by the birdsong. Malory's alteration to the original is slight, and certainly "does not . . . empty the scene of all religious significance."⁵¹

Reiss judges against Malory's description of Lancelot's predicament because Reiss approaches it from the same Augustinian point of view as the Cistercian author of the Queste del Saint Graal. What is at issue here is Malory's (and Lancelot's) attitude toward the world. It is obvious from reading Malory that he does not feel there is anything wrong with Lancelot being briefly 'comforted' by the beauty of the physical world, as exemplified by the birdsong. It is equally apparent that this source of consolation would be unthinkable for the French author. The root cause of this difference lies in Augustine's idea of sin: "All sins are contained in this one category, turning away from things divine and truly enduring, and turning toward those which are changeable and uncertain."⁵² Furthermore, "The will that turns away from the unchangeable good common to all and turns towards its own good, or to anything exterior or inferior, sins."⁵³ From this point of view, almost any enjoyment of the physical created world for its own sake is culpable and, indeed, borders on idolatry; even for Lancelot to be 'somewhat comforted' by the birdsong is suspect, because in his appreciation of this one small, however beautiful, facet of creation, Lancelot is decidedly in danger of turning toward an 'inferior' good. It is for this reason that the French uses the birdsong as a symbol for all the worldly pleasures which Lancelot previously enjoyed so greatly.

Ultimately, we have two choices in our interpretation of this passage. If, like Vinaver and Reiss, we take the Augustinian point of view of the French author as our standard, we have to censure Malory either for allowing Lancelot to backslide at such an early point in his spiritual career, or for taking entirely too secular a view of the

material himself. In either case, we must eventually agree with Vinaver's 'secularization' theory. However, there is another possibility which Reiss and Vinaver both overlook, the possibility that Malory was pursuing a different theological tack from his predecessor. C. S. Lewis notes that in contrast to the extensive and rigid dualism between matter and spirit found in the French version, Malory seems to wilfully blur, if not dissolve, this set of distinctions. Lewis credits this fundamental change in approach to the "difference between the rigid schematization of Latin thought, and the softening, compromising temper of us islanders."⁵⁴ If Lewis is right, then it becomes possible for us to regard Malory's alteration of the birdsong's meaning not as a slight mismanagement of theological material, but as a meaningful recasting of material consistent with Malory's own purpose and vision. As a result of this viewpoint, Malory's Lancelot is able to be 'comforted' and still remain genuinely penitent, a possibility which the French author could not admit.

The second episode frequently alluded to as proof of Lancelot's waywardness and Malory's mishandling of his source occurs when Lancelot leaves a small boat, in which he has voyaged for several months, so that he may go ashore for a little while. Reiss interprets this behaviour to mean, among other things, that Lancelot is incapable of living "apart from the world"⁵⁵ and that once more he is in danger of neglecting the quest he is on. It is, of course, quite true that Lancelot does not leave his boat in the French version of the story:

Lancelot had been a long time drifting without once setting foot on land when, in the dead of night, he beached where a forest ran down to the shore. There fell on his listening ears the sound of a knight

approaching on horseback, crashing noisily through the wood At the knight's approach Lancelot made no hurried move to snatch up his arms, persuaded that this was the fulfillment of the old man's promise that Galahad should be with him and keep him company a while.⁵⁶

However, the significant indicator of Lancelot's spiritual state is not that he stays on board the boat, but his absence of fear and his certainty that he will soon be with his son, Galahad.

With the exception that Lancelot leaves the boat, Malory's version of this passage is faithful to its source:

And so on a nyght he wente to play hym by the watirs syde, for he was somewhat wery of the shippe. And than he lystened and herde an hors com and one rydyng uppon hym, and whan he cam nyghe hym semed a knyght, and so he late hym passe and wente thereas the ship was.⁵⁷

Some critics interpret this passage as proof of Lancelot's instability, his failure to remain firm in the new life he has been directed to in the quest for the Grail. Reiss looks at Malory's alteration as proof of Lancelot's instability: "This very human response certainly shows Lancelot's inability to live apart from the world";⁵⁸ in addition, Reiss believes Lancelot is ready to succumb to his former way of life; Galahad's obviously providential arrival "is almost as though it were to keep him from falling".⁵⁹ Tucker is even more blunt in his assessment of Lancelot at this moment--"His strength of purpose fails".⁶⁰

Granted that Lancelot does leave his boat, is his decision such a momentous one as these critics suggest? First, if Lancelot is giving in to temptation, what kind of temptation is he giving in to? If Lancelot cannot live apart from the world, as Reiss believes, does this mean we are to interpret his leaving the boat as a firm decision on his

part to return to the court and to Guinivere's love? Reiss's response seems extreme, given the sparseness of the passage it is based upon. Nowhere does Malory give any indication that Lancelot is about to abandon the quest. Second, the only motive that Malory assigns to Lancelot's brief excursion on shore is that "he was somewhat wery of the shippe", and he is careful to make it clear that Lancelot does not stray far from the vessel, but stays close "by the waters syde". Nor does Lancelot's behaviour establish a loss of interest in his quest. As C. S. Lewis notes, "Middle English 'play' in such a context is of course a very mild word; we should have said 'to stretch his legs' or 'to relax'".⁶¹ For a man who has been confined in a small boat for "a month and more", with no company other than Percival's dead sister, Lancelot's respite does not seem unduly indulgent. Finally, it must be remembered that Lancelot's miraculous boat moves whither it will, "without sayle or ore",⁶² seemingly under the direction of some supernatural agency. As a result, it is not because of Lancelot's wishes, whatever they may be, that the boat heads for shore. This point in itself largely invalidates most of the criticism previously cited.

In any case, the outcome is the same in both versions: Lancelot meets Galahad, and the two voyage together for almost half a year-- which certainly does seem to show that Lancelot can live apart from the world. And, far from being misled into forgetfulness or pride, Malory's Lancelot displays more humility when he meets Galahad. In a passage unique to Malory, we are told that Lancelot "kneled downe and asked hym (Galahad) hys blesynge",⁶³ while in the French, Lancelot

simply rises and greets the stranger. It may well be that Malory tries to improve our opinion of Lancelot through such minor additions, but it does not follow that he achieves this end merely by deleting criticism of his hero; Malory's Lancelot is, if anything, both more courteous and more humble, more aware of his shortcomings, than his French predecessor.

One other incident is frequently used to show that Malory did not understand the spiritual meaning of the Queste and that his characterization of Lancelot is prouder and less penitent than that found in the original. At the Grail castle, Corbenic, Lancelot is finally allowed to gaze into the room containing the Grail, but is forbidden to enter. However, in both versions of the Queste, Lancelot disobeys this commandment. When the priest celebrating the mass is about to fall, Lancelot can no longer hold back, and rushes to his aid. Although the story is common to both tellings, Reiss singles Malory out for blame, because Malory's Lancelot is guilty of "again committing the sin of presumption, again showing a lack of faith."⁶⁴ Ironically, Reiss attacks Malory for a non-existent alteration, but does not pay enough attention to those changes he does make.

The most important of these concerns Lancelot's attitude to the predicament he finds himself in. Before stepping inside the room, into the direct presence of the Grail, the French Lancelot makes a rather careful prayer: "'Ah! gracious Lord Jesus Christ, let not my going to help this priest, who stands in need of aid, be a cause to me of hurt or damnation.'"⁶⁵ In contrast, Malory's Lancelot seems to be more concerned with the priest's predicament than his own, and his speech is

both more spontaneous and more humble than the original: "'Fayre Fadir, Jesu Cryste, ne take hit for no synne if I helpe the good man whych hath grete nede of helpe.'"⁶⁶ It is true, in either case, that Lancelot should not disobey the command to stay out of the room, but in Malory, his transgression reveals his best qualities: as Tucker puts it, "courage and courtesy are fused in one characteristic gesture."⁶⁷ Once again, without altering the facts of the story, Malory changes it slightly to make it richer and more human. He makes Lancelot more appealing, and yet, even more clearly than in the French, he establishes the limits of Lancelot's spiritual understanding.

From the previous examination, it appears that 'secularization' is not a useful term to describe the nature of Malory's Queste. While it is true that Malory did make many alterations to the material he found in the French Queste del Saint Graal, it by no means follows automatically that these changes deprive Malory's Quest of religious significance. The three major charges which must be dealt with in order to counter the 'secularization' argument--the omission of the supernatural element, the misunderstanding and consequent mishandling of doctrine, and the misplaced admiration for Lancelot--are all logically consistent with each other, and superficially present an imposing and unified outlook; however, they may be faulted for failing to allow Malory any purpose of his own, and evaluate his Quest solely as a translation of the French. Not only is this point of view unfair to Malory as a writer, but its evidence proves, upon a close reading, to be either incorrect, inconclusive, or insignificant.

The case for Malory's dislike of the supernatural element is, at best, inconclusive. Even a hasty comparison of the two Questes demonstrates how much of the miraculous has been pared away in Malory's version. But whether this establishes beyond doubt a distaste on Malory's part for miracles is quite another matter. From his own formidable experience as a writer, Lewis observes that less may very well be more in the handling of material outside the range of everyday events; Vinaver admits that Malory's book is the one which has held the public's imagination; and Malory's own attitude towards the Grail story, at least as he declares it in the colophon is one of the greatest respect; it is unlikely that he would seek to damage such an obviously important part of his source material. In the absence of any data other than the Quest itself, we can do nothing but reason backwards from the page, and the written evidence is simply not restrictive enough to conclusively favour either point of view. Malory may have detested the supernatural events he found so freely scattered about the French Queste and may have wished to deal ruthlessly with them, or he may have felt the most profound reverence for the miraculous element of his source and deeply regretted the necessity of reducing their number and the space allotted for them. Either hypothesis is possible, and the wise reader will choose whichever accords with his own impression of the book.

The contention that Malory was incapable of understanding the theology of the French Queste, and that he consequently failed to accurately translate the many sermons and homilies contained within it, is not supported by a close reading of the two texts. Due to the necessity of fitting the Quest into a larger narrative, Malory

frequently condensed the long speeches offered so freely by monks and hermits in the Vulgate; as a result, it is true that many of the original details were sacrificed. However, Malory is careful to preserve the core of the argument, and in many cases his gift for condensation makes the instruction and advice of the holy men more powerful and engaging. It is possible that Malory was not interested in the complexity of doctrine for its own sake, but this does not mean that he was necessarily incapable of understanding and translating the underlying religious meaning. In fact, Malory's reduction in length of the many sermons frequently has the effect of throwing the more important ideas into a sharper focus, uncluttered by unnecessary details.

The last charge against Malory, that he elevates Lancelot to a position which he does not occupy in the French Queste, and that he saves Lancelot from the criticism which, in the French, he richly deserves, is a misdirected criticism. It is quite true that Lancelot does not receive as many rebukes in Malory as he does in the Vulgate, but this change alone does not prove the accusation. More to the point is the portrayal of Lancelot's penance, and as we have already seen, Malory's handling of this feature of his story in no way justifies criticism. Those changes he does make to Lancelot's career as a penitent do not 'secularize' his material or deprive it of religious content, but rather serve to establish Lancelot as a man, and a penitent man, in a way that the Vulgate does not.

Vinaver, Reiss, and Tucker are wrong in their conviction that Malory was 'out of his depth' when he wrote his Quest. Although they are frequently correct in their observation of minor changes in detail

between Malory and his source, their conclusions about the significance of these changes are mistaken, primarily because they put Malory in a kind of critical straitjacket by insisting that in all cases where Malory diverges from the French, he is to be considered at fault. This preconception is unfortunately the result of a modern concept of translation probably unknown to and certainly not practised by most medieval writers. This attitude consequently denies Malory any purpose of his own in writing the Quest and necessarily frustrates one of the most important goals of criticism--to evaluate the writer in the light of his purpose. The secularization theory is incorrect, but many of the observations used to support it are valuable, especially because they strongly suggest that, although Malory's version is generally faithful to its original, its purpose and ultimate meaning are not exactly the same. In order to adequately understand the nature of the changes which Malory made to the Quest, and to grasp his purpose in doing so, it will be necessary first to examine one of the most vital elements of the Morte d'Arthur--chivalry.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I

¹E. K. Chambers, Sir Thomas Malory (London: The English Association, Pamphlet no. 518, 1922), p. 8.

²Vida D. Scudder, Le Morte Darthur of Sir Thomas Malory (1910; rpt. New York: Haskell House, 1965), p. 276.

³Scudder, p. 264.

⁴Chambers, p. 8.

⁵Elizabeth T. Pachoda, Arthurian Propaganda: Le Morte Darthur as an Historical Ideal of Life (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), p. 4.

⁶Eugène Vinaver, Malory, (1929; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 84.

⁷Sir Thomas Malory, The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, ed. Eugène Vinaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), III, p. 1522.

⁸Malory, III, p. 1528.

⁹Ibid., p. 1522.

¹⁰C. S. Lewis, "The English Prose Morte" in J. A. W. Bennett ed., Essays on Malory (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 11.

¹¹Lewis, p. 11.

¹²Ibid., p. 12.

¹³Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁶Malory, p. 1528.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 1524.

¹⁸P. M. Matarosso, trans., The Quest of the Holy Grail (London: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 23.

¹⁹Malory, p. 1524.

²⁰Ibid., p. 1525.

- ²¹Malory, p. 1521.
- ²²Vinaver, Malory, p. 78.
- ^{22a}Larry D. Benson, Malory's Morte Darthur (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 212.
- ²³Matarosso, trans., Quest, p. 78.
- ²⁴Malory, p. 1525.
- ²⁵Malory, II, p. 891.
- ²⁶Malory, III, p. 1521.
- ²⁷Malory, I, lxxv.
- ²⁸Eugène Vinaver, "On Art and Nature" in J. A. N. Bennett ed., Essays on Malory (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 33.
- ²⁹P. E. Tucker, "Chivalry in the Morte" in J. A. N. Bennett ed., Essays on Malory (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 91.
- ³⁰Matarosso, trans., Quest, p. 79.
- ³¹Malory, II, p. 891.
- ³²Ibid., p. 891.
- ³³Ibid., p. 891.
- ³⁴Ibid., p. 891.
- ³⁵Ibid., p. 891.
- ³⁶Malory, III, p. 1523.
- ³⁷Matarosso, p. 79.
- ³⁸Tucker, p. 91.
- ³⁹Malory, p. 1523.
- ⁴⁰Ibid., p. 1523.
- ⁴¹Matarosso, p. 86.
- ⁴²Lewis, p. 15.
- ⁴³Malory, II, p. 896.
- ⁴⁴Ibid., p. 896.

⁴⁵Edmund Reiss, Sir Thomas Malory (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966), p. 132.

⁴⁶Malory, p. 895.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 895.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 895.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 896.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 896.

⁵¹Lewis, p. 15.

⁵²St. Augustine, De libero arbitrio I xvi 35 in Reiss, p. 133.

⁵³St. Augustine, De libero arbitrio II xix 53 in Reiss, p. 133.

⁵⁴Lewis, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁵Reiss, p. 136.

⁵⁶Matarosso, p. 257.

⁵⁷Malory, p. 1011.

⁵⁸Reiss, p. 136.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 136.

⁶⁰Tucker, p. 87.

⁶¹Lewis, p. 15.

⁶²Malory, p. 1011.

⁶³Ibid., p. 1012.

⁶⁴Reiss, p. 136.

⁶⁵Matarosso, p. 262.

⁶⁶Malory, p. 1016.

⁶⁷Tucker, p. 92.

CHAPTER II

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF MALORIAN CHIVALRY

The material examined in the previous chapter demonstrates the lack of validity of the 'secularization' hypothesis advanced by Vinaver and supported, in whole or in part, by many critics. However, while a detailed examination of Malory's Quest reveals that Malory was considerably more competent in handling the Grail material than his detractors would maintain, it also confirms their observations that Malory did, in some way, alter the meaning and significance of the Quest. While it is apparent that Malory was not trying to delete the religious element of his original, it also seems that he was interested in adding a further thematic element of his own. The best explanation is that, in response to the vigorous attack on knighthood found in the Quest del Saint Graal, Malory was compelled to defend, and in the process, to redefine chivalry, with the further purpose of reconciling the chivalric and the religious ways of life.

Advocates of the secularization hypothesis put forth by Vinaver seem to share certain preconceptions, both about chivalry in the fifteenth century and about Malory's attitude to chivalry. The first is the mistaken assumption that, regardless of their feelings toward it, Malory and the French author were writing about the same kind of chivalry, or, more exactly, that they understood chivalry in the same terms. The second, which can be but is not necessarily connected to the first, is the notion that chivalry no longer served any useful

purpose in the fifteenth century, and that Malory's attitude to his material could only have been nostalgic. The third and most extreme assertion is that Malory, a knight himself, was blind to the defects of chivalry and blunted the edges of the previous author's attacks on it whenever possible.

In order to evaluate the first two charges, it is necessary to survey the state of chivalry in both the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries. Many critics seem to think that the differing attitudes of the French author and Malory toward chivalry are simply the result of opposite tastes or personal outlooks. That the two authors hold widely different views on chivalry is indisputable; but this discrepancy of opinion is also the result of the transformation of knighthood which occurred between the completion of the two Quests.

The author of the French Quest has no love for chivalry; this is most plainly shown by the many attacks he showers upon Lancelot, the representative figure of knighthood. What were the features of chivalry which invited such an attack? Before attempting to answer this question, it is wise to remember that chivalry "is an especially slippery abstraction"¹ which is not very amenable to analysis. Like most codes of behaviour, chivalry does not lend itself to division and classification, the standard techniques of academic investigation. Nonetheless, according to the categories used by Sidney Painter--feudal, religious and courtly--the chivalry of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries can be classed as primarily feudal or military. Chivalry at this time was the code of the professional warrior, not the gentleman, and while the rules of chivalry applied to almost the

entire aristocracy, they made no pretence of being, as they later became, a civilizing influence. The chivalry of this period, which the author of the French Quest attacked so vehemently, bears little resemblance to the kind of chivalry which Malory celebrated in the Morte Darthur.

With the exception of the Crusades, the medieval Church was, in principle at least, devoted to the goal of international peace.² It can hardly be expected that such an institution would approve of the "arrogance, hatred of restraint, and love of battle"³ which according to Painter characterized the knight of the early Middle Ages. The values most prized in this most basic chivalry only confirmed the ecclesiastical opposition to knighthood. Besides the prerequisite of noble birth, three major qualities were viewed as essential to the chivalry of this period. They were prowess, the skill in battle which distinguished the professional warrior, largesse, the giving of many and expensive gifts, and loyalty, both to the feudal overlord and to fellow knights.⁴

The importance of prowess and loyalty is so obvious that it is natural to assume they were the most important of the chivalric virtues. After all, a knight without prowess is not an effective warrior, and a disloyal knight forfeits his privileged position in feudal society. But perhaps because these characteristics of the medieval knight could be taken for granted, so essential were they to his status as a knight, largesse was the feature that received the most attention and certainly the most praise. It is possible that not all this interest in generosity and open-handedness came initially from the

knights themselves. As Painter observes, the troubadors probably had a good deal to do with the importance of largesse:

The persistent propaganda of hungry minstrels and impecunious knights raised largesse so high in the estimation of the feudal class that it was considered the primary characteristic of the noble. According to Stephen of Bourbon, a great preacher was asked by a group of knights to name the chief noble virtue, and he proved to their complete satisfaction that the position belonged to largesse.⁵

The knight of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, then, was primarily a warrior, and the major values of his code--prowess, generosity, and loyalty--suited his role well. However, the church found it difficult to approve of chivalry. Many of the knightly virtues--courage, strength, and fidelity--would have found favour in the ecclesiastical eye but for their ultimate purpose and application. The medieval church was theoretically opposed to all war between Christians, and though its "attempt to persuade an aristocracy whose chief function was fighting that homicide should be abjured, was naturally not very fruitful",⁶ at least it did succeed in limiting the involvement of noncombatants. In fact, of course, the church had no real control over warfare at all except for the exercise of spiritual authority which could extend to the excommunication of an entire country if it persisted in war for an unconscionable time.

Unfortunately, from the church's point of view, not only was the purpose of knighthood in direct opposition to its most basic teachings, but even the chivalric virtues had their dark side. Prowess certainly included some admirable qualities; the man who possessed skill in battle must also have been courageous, strong, and careless of physical

comfort. The ideal of prowess demanded an almost ascetic attitude from the knight, an attitude which the church could have admired, but for its application on the battlefield. Furthermore, prowess was closely bound to the knight's pride in himself, his noble birth and the occupation of war.⁷ Pride of any sort was anathema to the church, but such an intense pride as the knight's, springing from such unworthy causes, was insupportable.

Largesse had even fewer redeeming qualities than prowess. Reasonably enough, the church upheld the early teaching about the corrupting influence of wealth and might well have applauded the aristocratic impulse to unburden oneself of filthy lucre as quickly and as often as possible. There were probably two reasons why the church did not feel comfortable with the cult of largesse. Firstly, largesse implied a concern with wealth and display which was far too secular for the clergy to approve of. Secondly, the knight who wished to demonstrate largesse was obliged either to have a considerable income or else find an alternative source of wealth. And the church had always been rather dubious about the knightly attitude to the spoils of war. A phrase from Urban's speech of the First Crusade illustrates this distrust of knightly cupidity or avarice: "Now they may become knights who hitherto existed as robbers."⁸ This excerpt certainly conveys the church's fear that war was all too frequently prompted by the desire for gain, and that many knights indulged in rapine. Such a mercenary view of war was indeed expressed by Bertrand de Born:

And it will be good to live for one will take the property of usurers and there will no longer be a peaceful pack-horse on the roads, all the townsmen will tremble; the merchant will no longer journey in peace on the road to France. He who wishes to enrich himself will only need to steal well.⁹

As Painter observes, "Bertrand was a man of no reticence."¹⁰ and "while his views were shared by many nobles, few would have avowed them so frankly."¹¹ Nonetheless, the church must have fretted at its inability to restrain the knightly appetite for plunder, and consequently, the clergy could never approve of largesse: it was too secular an ideal and too closely related to crimes against property.

Even the ideal of loyalty could be criticized by the church, though on less severe grounds. In itself, loyalty was of course admirable. Furthermore, the knight's allegiance to his lord was vital to the maintenance of the feudal system and to the order of society as a whole. These features of chivalric loyalty were beyond reproach. But the strong bonds which chivalry promoted between knights probably reinforced the aristocracy's sense of uniqueness and importance, and in so doing, frustrated the church's attempt to create order and peace.

The church was ambivalent in its opinion of the military kind of chivalry described in the preceding passages. On the one hand, the church could not but admire the austerity and fellowship which characterized the chivalric ideal, and for practical reasons it was forced to regard knighthood as an important component of feudal society. On the other hand, the chivalry of the early Middle Ages was too undisciplined and unrestrained for the church to fully approve of it, regardless of its merits. However, when the doctrine of courtly love began to influence the ideal and the practice of chivalry, the church must have felt it had no choice but to harden its opposition to knighthood. While the church may have been willing to compromise on an issue such as the legitimacy of war, it could not accept

courtly love's attack on chastity and its consequent condoning of adultery. It is entirely possible that courtly love was not as great a threat to morality as it initially seemed, and that the church's fears were largely unfounded. Courtly love met with a frosty reception from the more conservative elements of the aristocracy, and while it was influential, over a long period of time, in transforming the knight from a rough soldier into a courtier, it seems unlikely that the doctrine was taken totally seriously or applied in its entirety.¹² Despite these qualifications, the merging of the courtly with the earlier military element in chivalry must have made knighthood appear even more secular and more antagonistic to the fundamental tenets of Christianity.

The author of the French Queste wrote at a time when knighthood had begun to assimilate various courtly elements, and verse romances which celebrated the ideal of courtly love were extremely popular. As a member of the Cistercian order, it is hardly surprising that he took a severe view of the deficiencies of contemporary chivalry. What is striking about the Vulgate Queste is the way in which its author takes for granted the essentially secular and sinful way of life. Lancelot possesses the vices of both military and courtly chivalry: pride and lust. In the French Queste, Lancelot's pride is exemplified by his narrow trust in prowess, his concern over his chivalric reputation, and his immoral preoccupation with glory, while his lust is established obviously enough by his adulterous liaison with Guinivere. Yet, at the same time, Lancelot is presented as the best knight of the Round Table, and his faults are portrayed as the

necessary result of the code he lives by. Through his portrayal of Lancelot, the French author attempts to discredit the entire order of chivalry. Wilson's remark that "Lancelot is an example par excellence of an order that deserves rebuke"¹³ is far more appropriate to the purpose of the French author than it is to Malory's.

That the attitude of the two authors to chivalry should be so different is at least partly due to the many changes which both the ideal and practice of knighthood underwent in the years separating the two Questes. The basic chivalric virtues--prowess, generosity, and loyalty--remained important, but existed in a different social context, and many other factors entered into the composition of knighthood. In any discussion of chivalry, it is wise to keep in mind Benson's cautionary note: "Of course, chivalry is an especially slippery abstraction, and where, when, even whether it existed depends on how one defines it."¹⁴

Without disregarding this warning, it is still possible to arrive at a rough idea of the ideals--if not always the practice--of fifteenth-century knighthood. Prowess, generosity, and loyalty continued to be the primary components of chivalry. Obviously, strength and skill in arms were as necessary for noble deeds in the fifteenth century as in the twelfth. Malory's respect for prowess and its allied qualities is such that he coins his own term for it--"worship", the epitome of knightly behaviour. Largesse, the generous bestowing of wealth, continued to be necessary for the knight who wished to enjoy a great reputation. It seems to have been expected that a knight of high standing would bestow largesse plentifully, and even though this convention should be regarded with some scepticism, it appears to have

been more than merely an invention of poverty-stricken romance writers. Edward the Black Prince, for example, gave lavishly to both his retainers and his hosts, and his acceptance of the custom probably indicates how deeply it had become imbedded in the habits of the upper class.¹⁵ Malory also seems to have considered largesse an important chivalric quality; Lancelot, for example, bestows largesse upon deserving young knights like Gareth, and great lords and ladies are praised for the quality of their tournaments and feasts.

Unfortunately, the emphasis on largesse must have made life difficult for the poorer knights. As Benson notes, by the fifteenth century it was no longer respectable to fight for plunder, but at the same time tournament prizes were often not sufficient to defray the expenses expected of the winner.¹⁶ Some men who were entitled to be knights preferred to pay an annual fine rather than assume the rank, simply in order to avoid the financial onus of chivalry. Others who were of sufficient nobility but lacked the funds necessary for knighthood were forced to remain at the rank of squire and serve another man more fortunate. Although the cost of being a knight was probably greater in the fifteenth century than at any previous time, and prevented at least a certain number of the lesser nobility from attaining that previously desirable--and frequently profitable--position, the financial burden of chivalry and the wish for glory probably encouraged the practice of knight-errantry. As the expenses of the chivalric life increased, the motive of plunder became less respectable, and the likelihood of profit from local tournaments decreased, many knights left their homes to seek glory (and money) in the great international contests of arms. Largesse was certainly

as important to the fifteenth century knight as to his predecessor of the twelfth or thirteenth century, but the economic context in which he had to survive had changed greatly.¹⁷

Loyalty remained an integral part of the chivalric code, but its significance had also altered. In the early days, when chivalry was firmly fixed in the pattern of the feudal system, the principal object of the knight's loyalty was his feudal lord. By Malory's time, feudalism--at least in England--was a great deal more flexible than it had been in the thirteenth century; as a result of the change to a money economy, feudalism was based on trade more than on land, and was contractual rather than permanent.¹⁸ One result of these transitions was that the aristocracy suffered from a sense of social insecurity. The nobility's response to this problem, as the bond between a knight and his lord became less important, was to insist on those qualities that set them apart as a class. Consequently, the loyalty and sense of community between the chivalric nobles increased, as did the stress on knightly behaviour as an obligation owed to all other members of the same class.

It is true that knightly courtesy did not greatly improve the conditions of war in the later Middle Ages, but it is interesting to note that chivalric concerns did frequently dictate the management of minor campaigns, and that the word of a noble enemy was highly regarded. To Malory, a knight's 'worship' is to a great extent the reflection of his personal honour, the worth of his word. In one case at least, a high regard for knighthood and high rank determined the outcome of a siege. Painter gives the example of the surrender, during the Hundred Years War, of the castle of Hainault, which

occurred because the castellan so coveted the prospect of being knighted by his noble adversary, the duke of Orleans, that he was willing to hand over the keys to the castle in exchange for the privilege.¹⁹

Less striking, but perhaps more important, is the way in which knights made important agreements on no greater surety than their word. The chronicles are full of situations in which knights made promises, frequently to their disadvantage, and kept them, even when honour was the only compulsion they were under. Equally surprising, to our cynical age, is the fact that this strong, almost altruistic sense of honour was not viewed at the time as extraordinary; it was expected. William Rufus is quoted as saying: "Far from me would it be to believe that an honest knight would violate his parole. If he did, he would be forever an object of contempt as a man outside the law."²⁰ Painter observes that:

The sceptical and far from chivalrously inclined King John considered that to require his disaffected barons to make charters promising to be faithful to him was an effective means of preventing a revolt, and very few barons appeared in arms against him until these charters had been formally invalidated by Magna Carta.²¹

So strong was this sense of honour that it often prevailed over political advantage, even in times of war. For example, King John of France, after his capture at Poitiers, was released from an English prison and allowed to return to France, in exchange for a number of hostages. Obviously, if he hoped to ready France for the next round of battles, his presence there was vital to his plans. Yet, so strong was his sense of honour, that "When one of these hostages was so unchivalrous as to escape, the king returned to prison in London."²²

There is, then, a strong body of evidence to suggest that, despite the changes it underwent between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, chivalry remained an important concept throughout the Middle Ages and maintained a certain continuity. However, many critics and many historians have assumed that chivalry was a spent force by Malory's time. Benson sums up this point of view:

Whatever attitude critics in recent years have ascribed to Malory--nostalgic, revivalist, condemnatory--most have accepted without question R. W. Chambers' dictum: The world to which the Morte Darthur belonged had passed away before the book was finished.²³

In accepting the obsolescence, if not the death, of chivalry in Malory's time, critics have merely been following what the historians have been telling them. Writing in 1921, Huizinga commented ironically on the historians' treatment of chivalry:

The medievalists of our day are hardly favourable to chivalry. Combing the records, in which chivalry is, indeed, little mentioned, they have succeeded in presenting a picture of the Middle Ages in which economic and social points of view are so dominant that one tends at times to forget that, next to religion, chivalry was the strongest of the ideas that filled the minds and the hearts of those men of another age. We have come a long way from the romantics who viewed the Middle Ages above all as the era of chivalry.²⁴

Historians have come to this lowly estimation of fifteenth century chivalry for several major reasons. Chivalry is usually viewed as an element of the feudal system. Certainly by the fifteenth century in England, feudalism was no longer a significant part of political or economic life; therefore it has been popularly assumed that the chivalry of the time must have outlived its purpose and fallen into decay. Since, by Malory's time, the knight was no longer the most important figure in the army, as the advances in infantry

tactics and the utilization of gunpowder had robbed the armed cavalry of their earlier supremacy on the field of battle, many historians have come to the conclusion that chivalry no longer possessed any military significance. Ironically, the very abundance of records concerning tournaments, jousts, symbolic conflicts such as the pas d'armes, and pageants, has reinforced this impression of chivalry's decadence. Finally, the common attitude toward chivalry in Malory's own time, taken by ecclesiastical and lay writers, was that chivalry had sadly declined from its past glory.

Despite the solid appearance of this evidence, a careful examination reveals that chivalry remained an important part of the noble life in England. It is true that chivalry had its social basis in the feudalism of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and it is equally true that by the fifteenth century the earlier land-based feudalism had been replaced in England by 'bastard feudalism'--"a contractual, monetary . . . relation between a great lord and a lesser nobleman; the great lord would pay a fixed fee or offer political protection in return for feudal services."²⁵ At first glance, this new contractual way of arranging services would seem to have been a death-blow to knighthood; but it was not. As the noble class saw their status menaced by their own loss of wealth and the rise of the merchants, their response was to emphasize those qualities that set them apart as a class. It is entirely possible that Malory himself was influenced by what might be called an aristocratic, as well as a chivalric, revival. Ferguson notes that "the official documents after 1413 make more frequent use of terms denoting social status,"²⁶ while Benson singles out "honour and high birth"²⁷ as those characteristics

with which aristocracy identified itself. Chivalry retained a great deal of its military importance, but gained a new social dimension as "an ideal of noble conduct that defined that class".²⁸ Further, the trend towards contractual obligations and "bastard feudalism" encouraged English legalists to define, in precise terms, the nature of just rule and "good lordship", two developments which were also closely bound up with the evolution of chivalry.

It is hard for us to take the elaborate pageantry of the later tournaments very seriously. Modern historians tend to be rather scathing in their assessment of the military sports of the fifteenth century. Painter's comments are typical:

Now and then princely courts sought entertainment in watching two massively armored knights tilt at each other over a breast-high fence. But all this was pure froth. The glory gained from such affairs was not for prowess in battle but for reverence for tradition. The noblemen whose real occupation was wheedling offices, sinecures, and pensions out of kings and sovereign princes still felt obliged to make their bow to the customs of the past. The martial sports which had delighted the knights of medieval France died on the field of Agincourt, but the corpse was not buried until Montgomery's lance ended the reign of Henry II.²⁹

According to Painter, then, the practice of chivalry was basically an indulgence, a courtly pastime which no longer had either a military or a social function.

Ferguson, in his Indian Summer of English Chivalry, maintains a similar view. He admits that the fifteenth century took ceremony seriously in a way which we do not now, but, like Painter, he is unable to see any practical significance in the pageants of the later Middle Ages. According to Ferguson, by Malory's time both the joust and the tournament had lost their original function--to keep knights in

training for battle--and had become little than a courtly spectacle:

. . . there is about these practices the unmistakable taint of decadence. Through all runs the same self-conscious pursuit of form, often at the expense of the original moving spirit. The tournament proper, the combat of many against many, the 'melee' in which the knight liked to see the image of battle itself, had developed into something relatively tame. From an engagement in the open field, all but devoid of restrictions or rules, differing from war only in that it was supposedly fought for the love of it rather than any animosity to the opposing side and that it did not culminate in the loss or gain of territory, it had become little more than a spectacle, hedged in both by regulations and by wooden barriers, a courtly pageant.³⁰

Ferguson is equally scathing in his assessment of the joust:

At best less the simulacrum of battle than of the duel, it now lost all contact with the realities of warfare . . . More and more the joust became a mere exhibition of personal prowess, part courtly exercise, part athletic contest. Its rules became increasingly formal.³¹

It is apparent that Painter and Ferguson hold similar opinions on the inutility of chivalry in Malory's time, or to use Ferguson's term, its essential 'decadence'. However, perhaps the most extreme criticism of chivalry in the late Middle Ages comes from Jusserand, who views the knightly pastimes of the jousts and tournaments as completely anachronistic:

They (tournaments) had no choice but to disappear like the flamboyant style itself, supreme expression of the Gothic on the eve of its death . . . Far, indeed, are the rough battles, fought in the open field, in the days of Phillipe-August and Henry Plantagenet. Despite blows, wounds, and death, they are now beautiful fetes, beautiful as manuscript illuminations, like miniatures come to life.³²

While Painter, Ferguson, and Jusserand may be entirely correct in their information, they are somewhat mistaken in the significance that they ascribe to it. Certainly tournaments and jousts were more elaborate, less dangerous and less warlike in Malory's day than they were two centuries earlier. Nonetheless, as Jusserand himself admits,

these martial sports still demanded a high degree of skill and were not without a real element of danger. Furthermore, these activities can only be evaluated within the context of their times. If jousts and tournaments were more elaborate in the later Middle Ages than they had been previously, this does not immediately establish that they were shockingly decadent to contemporary observers. Certainly the Morte Darthur demonstrates that Malory took a lively interest in chivalric combats of all sorts, and the jousts and tourneys described by Malory can hardly be faulted for being too tame. Life itself had become (at least for the aristocracy) more elaborate and slightly more peaceful during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

To a large extent, this refinement was due to the influence of literature, one which had become considerably more powerful by the end of the Middle Ages. About the importance of literature as an influence on both chivalric ideals and practice, Benson states: "The ideals of chivalry seem largely to have been a literary invention, and it was not until the late Middle Ages that even the nobility was much influenced by literature."^{32a} For obvious reasons, the rude social and economic circumstances of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the almost incessant local warfare of that period, did little to encourage the average knight to cultivate literacy. However, by the fifteenth century, life and literature influenced each other to a considerable degree, and were far closer to each other than they are now. Huizinga's observation that "Art in those times was still wrapped in life . . . we might venture the paradox that the Middle Ages knew only applied art"³³ is certainly applicable to the reciprocal relationship which existed between chivalric literature and chivalric

practices. If activities such as the joust and the tourney seem fanciful, contrived, even degenerate, to historians such as Ferguson and Jusserand, it is in large measure due to the power of romances in the later medieval period. As Benson remarks:

The more realistic romances became, the more realistic romances seemed, so that sometimes, as Martin de Riguer has shown, it is difficult to separate fiction from reality both in fifteenth-century romances and in contemporary chronicles; the fiction seems real, the chronicles fiction.³⁴

While the state of chivalrous deeds in Malory's day may seem decadent and far removed from serving any useful function, contemporary observers retained their faith in jousts and tourneys as a way for knights to maintain their prowess and gain glory. Nicholas Upton, writing not long before Malory, believed that these martial sports helped the knight "to prove one his strength and manhood; which manhood and fortitude is a moral virtue; yea, and also one of the cardinal virtues."³⁵ A fifteenth-century challenge quoted by Benson also makes it clear that the tournament was considered to be an important element of knightly training. Through "its feats of the necessary discipline of arms",³⁶ the tournament encouraged:

the experience and enabling of nobles to the deserving of chivalry, by the which our mother church is defended, kings and princes served, realms and countries maintained in justice and peace.³⁷

Whether or not Malory's tournaments are faithful copies of actual fifteenth century combats, their importance for the maintenance and improving of knightly skill in arms is obvious.

Remarks such as this dispute Ferguson's assumption that chivalry was moribund in the fifteenth century. Although it is difficult, when using documents of the time, to accurately discriminate between

the theoretical and practical importance of chivalry, it is entirely possible, on the evidence of chronicles and other historical material, that interest in chivalry was increasing in the fifteenth century. The joust and the tournament, the symbolic conflicts such as the pas d'armes and pageant, and the knightly ambition to do great feats of arms, to win glory, and to emulate the heroes of the romances and past antiquity--all were flourishing in Malory's time. The number of knights errant, due to both social and economic factors, was increasing, and new forms of combat such as the pas d'arme were being popularized. However contrived and theatrical they may seem to us now, active participation in the martial sports continued well past the fifteenth century. Benson notes "the idea that tournaments had a direct military and moral value survived even in the Elizabethan Accession Day Tilts and in Vulson's seventeenth-century Vray Theatre."³⁸ While it is difficult to assign a specific date for the death of chivalry, it is apparent that the pursuit of knighthood was still very much alive in Malory's time.

However much we may wish to believe in the vitality of chivalry in Malory's time, the comments of medieval clerics and moralists suggest the opposite. If we are to believe these writers, chivalry had suffered a severe decline by the later Middle Ages. Caxton's lament on the state of contemporary knighthood, written for the preface of his translation of Lull's The Book of the Order of Chyualry, may be taken as typical criticism:

Oh ye knights of England, where is the custom and usage of noble chivalry that was used in those days? What do ye now but go to the bagnios and play at dice? And some not well advised use not honest and good rule against all order of knighthood.³⁹

From this comment it is obvious that Caxton does not approve of the kind of knighthood that was practised in his own time, and also apparent that he appealed to a more glorious past for his model of true chivalry. Caxton believed that chivalry had flourished in King Arthur's time, and that it had remained in a worthy state before suffering a decline in the last hundred years. That he did not feel the comparatively recent past to be completely devoid of good example can be deduced from his advice to:

look in later days of the noble acts since the conquest, as in the days of King Richard, Coeur de Lyon, Edward the First and the Third and his noble sons, Sir Robert Knolles, Sir John Hawkwood, Sir John Chandos, and Sir Walter Manny. Read Froissart. And also behold that victorious and noble king, Harry the Fifth . . .⁴⁰

How reliable a criticism of contemporary chivalry is Caxton's? Some historians, such as Raymond Kilgour, in his Decline of Chivalry, have relied on comments by writers like Caxton to establish the notion that knighthood was in sorry shape by the fifteenth century. However, it is dangerous to place too much confidence in such remarks, and wise to inspect them with the caution advised by Benson:

Chivalry is, among other things, a moral code, and those who admire chivalry are by definition moralists. Morality, of whatever sort, was always better in the past, is always sadly declined in the present, and is therefore always in need of revival. That is why the history of chivalry is a history of 'revivals'.⁴¹

This invocation of the need for discretion in evaluating the significance of historical references to the condition of chivalry seems to be well borne out by the evidence. Chivalric writers, like Caxton, always believed that a period of ideal chivalry had existed not too long before their own time. But criticisms of contemporary knighthood date back to the period of Chretien de Troyes and John of Salisbury,

and continue until 1648 when Marc Vulson de la Columbiere castigated the nobles of his time for not living up to the ideals of chivalry. If we take this trend at face value, we are presented with a decline in knighthood which lasted for four hundred years! It therefore seems wiser to consider this criticism as a pulpit tradition than as a necessarily accurate assessment of the state of chivalry. As Benson notes, a nostalgia for past perfection was shared by the preachers of the Middle Ages: "All, with one accord, look back from their own day to some golden age of chivalry in the past".⁴² While the clerics may often have been correct in their diagnosis of the evils of their own time, the very prevalence of their backwards yearning for a past model of chivalric conduct discredits it as a reliable source of information about the knighthood of their times.

From the preceding argument, it appears that chivalry survived the decline of land-based feudalism, that jousts, tournaments, and other martial sports were followed with enthusiasm, and that contemporary accounts of chivalric degeneracy should be regarded with scepticism, if not downright distrust. There is a good deal of evidence which suggests that if chivalry ever did have a golden age it was in the later Middle Ages, at the time when Malory was writing.

However, it must not be thought that the chivalry of Malory's time was entirely comparable to that of the early thirteenth century, when the Quest del Saint Graal was composed. While it is true that the basic values of knighthood--prowess, loyalty, largesse--remained important in Malory's era, the purpose of, and the motives behind, chivalry had changed considerably. As the direct military importance of knighthood decreased, as the influence of literature on chivalric

practices and ideals increased, as society became more complex, chivalry changed and adapted to a different cultural environment.

The most important of these changes to the chivalric code of values, especially in England, was the ideal of public service, the notion that the knight, as a knight, had a special duty to maintain social order and justice. The first clear statement of the idea that a knight had any social or religious duties beyond those expected of all good Christians probably occurred in Urban II's sermon of 1095 on behalf of the First Crusade.⁴³ Perhaps because this message was directed towards a specific action, it did not have an immediate impact on the ideals of chivalry. It was not until the middle of the twelfth century that scholars began to consider in detail what the relationship between knighthood, the church, and the state should be. While Malory was not a scholar, he was deeply interested in chivalry, and must have been influenced by the ideas of chivalric theoreticians. In order to understand the significance of Malory's theory of knighthood, it is necessary to consider the ideas of those men who established the chivalric tradition to which Malory also belonged.

One of the most distinguished of these writers in England was John of Salisbury. Like many of the moralists quoted earlier, he believed that the chivalry of his day was corrupt and badly needed reform. But his criticisms of the practice of chivalry did not alter his convictions about the importance of chivalry. According to Salisbury, the order of knighthood was a divinely instituted profession comparable to the clergy:

The former (clergy) are called by the tongue of the pontiff to the service of the altar and the care of the church. The latter (knights) are chosen for the defence of the commonwealth by the tongue of the leader.⁴⁴

From this statement it can be seen that Salisbury's view of knighthood is in essential opposition to that expressed by the author of the French Quest. While Salisbury criticizes those knights who do not live up to the high standards of the chivalric code, he does not believe, as the French author does, that knighthood is characterized by pride and lust; Salisbury, like Malory, believes that chivalry ought to fulfill certain moral and social purposes, and that it can be reformed in accordance with these functions.

The importance which Salisbury ascribed to knighthood can be gathered from the following excerpt from the Policraticus:

But what is the office of the duly ordained soldiery? To defend the Church, to assail infidelity, to venerate the priesthood, to protect the poor from injuries, to pacify the provinces, to pour out their blood for their brothers (as the formula of their oath instructs them), and, if need be, to lay down their lives. The high praises of God are in their throat, and two-edged swords are in their hands to execute punishment on the nations and rebuke on the peoples, and to bind their kings in chains and their nobles in links of iron. But to what end? To the end that they may serve madness, vanity, avarice, or their own private self-will? By no means. Rather to the end that they may execute the judgement that is committed to them to execute; wherein each follows not his own will but the deliberate decision of God, the angels, and man, in accordance with equity and the public utility.⁴⁵

It is surprising to what extent Salisbury's statement on the nature and purpose of knighthood foreshadows Malory's ideas on the same subject. Like Malory, and unlike the author of the French Quest, Salisbury believes that true chivalry, "duly ordained", is not antagonistic, but complementary, to the Church, and that both chivalry

and the clergy constitute legitimate orders. Furthermore, Salisbury looks at the knight's function as more than military; he expects the knight to administer justice "in accordance with equity and the public utility." The notion of public service expressed by Salisbury also influenced Malory. As Lewis notes, Malory's outlook is practical, moral, and religious; and while Malory attempts to make a fusion between the religious and the chivalric life, unprecedented in Salisbury's time, the same elements of thought and the same basic attitude towards chivalry may be found in both authors.

First of all, Malory and Salisbury both rejected the courtly, worldly chivalry which to the author of the French Quest epitomized knighthood. Salisbury's own ideal of knighthood was austere and ascetic, and it is therefore not surprising that he respected the order of knighthood and compared it in importance to the order of the clergy. It is obvious that Malory also believed in the value of chivalry, and that his appreciation was not limited to the strictly secular features of knighthood. Secondly, Malory and Salisbury believed that chivalry had both a political and a religious significance. Salisbury was careful to point out that the principles of true knighthood in no way conflicted with the teachings of the church. Indeed, to Salisbury, the two callings of chivalry and the Church complemented each other:

For soldiers that do these things are "saints", and are the more loyal to their prince in proportion as they more zealously keep the faith of God; and they advance the more successfully the honour of their own valour as they seek the more faithfully in all things the glory of their God.⁴⁶

That Salisbury was also interested in the social responsibilities of knighthood can be judged from the long list of duties he includes in the quote previously given from the Policraticus. In Salisbury's vision of chivalry, the knight becomes more than a soldier; he is identified with the principle of justice, and becomes involved with the problems of governing.

Since Malory's Quest is not a treatise, but a work of literature, it is natural that his ideal of chivalry is not stated so explicitly as Salisbury's is in the Policraticus. Nonetheless, from the discussion of the previous chapter, it should be clear that the charge that Malory secularized the Grail story is not well founded, but that Malory, like Salisbury, believed there was no fundamental conflict between the way of chivalry and the way of religion. Furthermore, Malory's obvious respect for chivalry, and his criticisms of knights who do not live up to the standards expected of them, demonstrate that he thought of true knighthood as an order of sworn brothers much like the clergy, and believed that such an order was worthy of respect. Finally, Malory, like Salisbury, was convinced that chivalry had a social and political function, and many of the slight revisions he made to the text of the French Quest are intended to emphasize this idea, as will be demonstrated more fully in the next chapter.

Malory and Salisbury were not exceptions to the general trend of chivalric thought in the later Middle Ages. In some respects they are peculiarly English, especially in their concern that the knight should maintain the laws of his country. In certain matters, particularly the nature of the political order that it is the knight's duty to protect, Malory and Salisbury do not entirely agree. Despite these

differences, they are representative of a large number of chivalric writers and theoreticians.

This consensus of thought can be appreciated by a comparison of the ideas expressed in Salisbury's Policratus with those contained in Ramon Lull's Le Libre del Ordre de Cauayleria, translated by Caxton in Malory's time as The Book of the Order of Chivalry. The very popularity of Lull's work demonstrates not only the vitality of chivalry in the later Middle Ages but also the general consensus of the chivalric audience which he addressed. The importance of Lull's work as an influence on chivalry can be deduced from Painter's remark that "There is no conclusive evidence as to how popular Lull's book was in its own day, but by the fifteenth century it had become the standard handbook of chivalry."⁴⁷

On most major points Lull and Salisbury are in agreement. Like Salisbury, Lull compares the order of chivalry with that of the clergy, finds them equal in honour and importance, and believes that they are concerned with similar and complementary tasks: "The clergy urge the common people to virtue by learning and example, while the knights accomplish the same end of the terror inspired by their swords."⁴⁸ Lull also agrees with Salisbury that the knight has a duty to promote social order through the law. According to Painter, Lull believed that "the function of the chivalric order was to supply the force needed to maintain the laws of God and man."⁴⁹ Finally, Lull sets out the same code of loyalties--to God, king, and the helpless--that Salisbury had conceived, and states that the knight is bound by duty to keep the peace in his country.⁵⁰

Salisbury's ideal of knighthood may have been advanced in his own time, but it influenced other chivalric writers for several centuries. In his work we see the beginning of a tradition, not confined to England, according to which the knight was neither a brutal soldier nor a courteous lover, but the exemplar and upholder of justice and the social order. Within this chivalric tradition, to which Malory certainly belonged, the most important single idea was that the principal function of the knight was to serve the common good. Benson explains the prevalence of this belief in the fifteenth century:

The late medieval belief that knighthood served the common good--"socially useful standards"--was almost universal by Malory's time. The Chandos Herald praised Edward III for maintaining the "bien publique", Christine de Pisan explained the obligations of chivalry to "la bien commune" and "la chose publique", and Malory's contemporary, John Hardyng, whom we know Malory read carefully, stated that Arthur's knights were sworn to defend
 The faith, the church, maidens, and widows clene,
 Children also, that were in tender age,⁵¹
 The comun profit ever more to sustene.

On the basis of this evidence, Benson's conclusion that "Malory's formulation of the basic knightly code thus reflects the common understanding of his contemporaries"⁵² seems well-founded.

Malory's Quest is frequently compared with disadvantage to the Vulgate Quest by critics who erroneously assume that the French version, because it is the original, must necessarily be authoritative on such matters as chivalry. This notion is mistaken. The two writers are working in different traditions. The author of the French Quest, whether or not he was a Cistercian monk, was certainly writing in a vehemently antiseccular mode when he composed the Quest. From his point of view, chivalry did not require reform, but abandoning, due to its

innate sins of pride and lust. The kind of chivalry he describes is certainly an extreme example of the courtly sort, but nowhere does the author put forth the possibility that any other kind of chivalry, more spiritually acceptable, is possible. The life of chivalry and the life of religion are mutually exclusive in the Vulgate Quest.

That they are not in Malory's Quest is due to the fact that Malory was influenced by a different tradition of chivalric thought. The ideal of knighthood that he adopted from John of Salisbury, despite its insistence on high moral standards, true belief, and the necessity of public service, was not anti-worldly; rather, it expected the true knight to cooperate with the Church in the administration of peace and order here on earth, a thought which would be inadmissible to the French author. Despite the innovations in Malory's ideal of chivalry, in its essential features it is far closer to the tradition represented by John of Salisbury and Ramon Lull than to that found in the Vulgate Quest. The following chapter will attempt to give some examples of the manner in which Malory modified his original material in accordance with his chivalric ideal, and will also offer a more detailed study of the political thought of Malory's time and its influence on his ideal of chivalry.

CHAPTER II

¹Larry D. Benson, Malory's Morte Darthur (Cambridge, Mass.: Howard University Press, 1976), p. 147.

²Huizinga, quoted in Elizabeth T. Pachoda, Arthurian Propaganda: Le Morte Darthur as an Historical Ideal of Life (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), p. 33.

³Sidney Painter, French Chivalry (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1940), p.2.

⁴See Painter, pp. 28-44.

⁵Painter, p. 32.

⁶Ibid., p. 66.

⁷Ibid., pp. 1-2.

⁸Pope Urban II, in Painter, p. 66.

⁹Painter, p. 35.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 35.

¹¹Ibid., p. 35.

¹²See Painter, pp. 136-138, and Benson, p. 154.

¹³Wilson, in Edmund Reiss, Sir Thomas Malory (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966), p. 138.

¹⁴Benson, p. 147.

¹⁵Painter, p. 43.

¹⁶Benson, p. 165.

¹⁷See Benson, pp. 142-144.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 143.

¹⁹Painter, pp. 56-57.

²⁰Painter, p. 41.

²¹Ibid., p. 41.

²²Ibid., p. 42.

²³Benson, p. 139.

- ²⁴Johan Huizinga, Men and Ideas (New York: Anchor Books, 1968.
- ²⁵Benson, p.143.
- ²⁶Arthur B. Ferguson, The Indian Summer of English Chivalry (Durham: Duke University Press, 1963), p. 11.
- ²⁷Benson, p. 143.
- ²⁸Ibid., p. 143.
- ²⁹Painter, p. 62.
- ³⁰Ferguson, p. 14.
- ³¹Ibid., p. 15.
- ³²Jusserand, in Ferguson, p. 14.
- ^{32a}Benson, p. 141.
- ³³Huizinga, Men and Ideas, p. 244.
- ³⁴Benson, p. 169.
- ³⁵Nicholas Upton, in Benson, p. 168.
- ³⁶Benson, p. 168.
- ³⁷Ibid., p. 168.
- ³⁸Ibid., p. 168.
- ³⁹Caxton, in Ferguson, p. 35.
- ⁴⁰Ferguson, p. 35.
- ⁴¹Benson, p. 145.
- ⁴²Ibid., p. 147.
- ⁴³See Painter, p. 67.
- ⁴⁴John of Salisbury, quoted in Pachoda, p. 71.
- ⁴⁵John of Salisbury, "Policraticus", trans. J. Dickinson, The Portable Medieval Reader (Kingsport: Penguin Books, 1949), p. 90.
- ⁴⁶Ibid., p. 90.

⁴⁷Painter, p. 77.

⁴⁸Ramon Lull, in Painter, p. 79.

⁴⁹Painter, p. 79.

⁵⁰Ramon Lull, in Painter, p. 79.

⁵¹Benson, p. 149.

⁵²Ibid., p. 149.

CHAPTER III

MALORIAN CHIVALRY AND THE VISION OF POLITICAL RULE

Until recently, Malory has so generally been approached as a mere translator that few critics have attempted to search the Morte Darthur for any intellectual content.¹ As has already been discussed in the first chapter, many scholars have followed Vinaver in condemning Malory for his 'secularization' of the Grail story. However, even those who have taken a more sensitive approach to Malory have usually given him little credit as an exponent of contemporary ideas. For example, Ferguson, in his Indian Summer of English Chivalry, examined Malory's contribution to the body of chivalric literature but came to the conclusion that his interest was essentially nostalgic, not practical, and bore no relationship to the social demands of the fifteenth century.² More recent research, however, has suggested the opposite-- that chivalry was in many respects an important part of fifteenth-century life. Benson asserts that the influence of chivalry in Malory's time was probably greater than ever before, and that if chivalry ever did enjoy a golden age, it existed in the later Middle Ages.³ Pachoda has demonstrated that chivalry had more than a military or literary function in Malory's day, and through a study of medieval political theory, she has pointed out that the duties of knighthood were a subject of major interest to the political theoreticians and statesmen of medieval England.

If, unlike many critics, we take the view that Malory's interest in chivalry was not merely nostalgic, then we would expect to find

some evidence in the Morte Darthur that would testify to its author's practical and theoretical interest in knighthood. The Quest would seem to be an unlikely place to find such information, given the unworldly nature of the tale. Yet the reverse is true. The Vulgate version of the Quest may well have challenged Malory's attitudes to the point where he felt called upon to vindicate and explain not only the ideals of true chivalry, as he conceived them, but also the ideal of the society that both nurtured and benefitted from the practice of such chivalry. Regardless of the truth of this hypothesis, there are many references in Malory's Quest which illuminate his views of ideal knighthood and its social context. When these many references are gathered together, they clearly invalidate the charge that Malory was a careless and insensitive translator, and testify to the coherence of his thought. They also demand a reappraisal of his artistic achievement, for they indicate the care with which Malory added a further level of meaning--chivalric, moral, and political--to his story, while preserving its original allegorical and doctrinal core.

As we have already seen, the idea that chivalry served the common good was well established in fifteenth-century England; in fact, the more specific notion that the knight had a special obligation to uphold law and order dates back at least as far as the twelfth century, when it was expressed by John of Salisbury. This idea remained important to political and chivalric theorists, but it was gradually modified in accordance with certain attitudes toward government and law. This difference, which is of crucial importance to an understanding of Malory, can be appreciated by a comparison of Salisbury's thought with

that of the distinguished fifteenth-century legalist, Sir John Fortescue.

A brief exposition of Fortescue's political theory is necessary for an appreciation of Malory's artistic and intellectual achievement in the Quest. Not only does it demonstrate that Malory was influenced by contemporary ideas on government, but also that he laboured to re-define the duties of knighthood so that they were in essential accord with his own ideal of good government.

The most important element of Fortescue's thought is the distinction he makes between regal and political rule. In regal or monarchical rule, the king has absolute power and is therefore not bound to consider the needs or well-being of his subjects. Fortescue admits that a good king will govern through just laws--"which laws be right good under good princes"⁴--but points out that the system of regal rule will encourage a bad king to ignore or oppress his subjects and lay waste his kingdom through misrule. To Fortescue, the ideal system of government is political rule, in which kingship is defined in terms of just governing. The prince who rules by this system is bound to consider the welfare of his country and people when he makes laws, for he is obligated to make only those laws which all the people will assent to. Under this kind of government the state becomes a kind of commonwealth, because although the king is head of the body politic, all citizens belong to that body and their opinions determine how it will be ruled and governed. The chief beauty of political rule is that it acts as a deterrent and corrective to tyranny, for while a king may easily, under regal rule, consider only his self-interest in the

making and changing of laws, under political rule, such a king would forfeit his right to rule, as tyranny is counter to the mandate he is bound to honour.⁵

According to Salisbury, the people and king together form the realm. In political rule, therefore, concord between the ruler and the ruled is essential. Rule by fear, so important to Salisbury, gives way to rule by an implied contract, a core of assumptions shared by ruler and ruled alike. Obviously, even with political rule there are circumstances, such as the need to remove a tyrannical king from power, which call for force; but under political rule, law is the first means of redressing wrongs and force is reserved for those situations in which law fails to resolve differences. Fortescue's ideal of political rule, then, alters many features of society found under regal rule: it assumes a greater sense of unity within the people of the realm (Fortescue talks of the "incorporation, institution, and one-ing of themself into a realm"⁶), and demands that the king make a distinction between his private and public interests, and act only for the benefit of the entire realm, using law and the opinion of his people, rather than force, to guide the operation of the state.

There is no good reason to assume that political rule is primarily an English invention. Fortescue mentions a number of previous authors on the subject of political rule, notably Thomas Aquinas, and refers to its use in several countries, including Egypt, Saba, "the land of Lybia, and also the more part of all the realms of Africa."⁷ But Fortescue also identifies political rule with the myth of Britain's founding and the legend of Arthur. In his discussion of the evolution

of political rule, Fortescue tells how it was first instituted in England:

But afterwards, when mankind was more mansuete and better disposed to virtue, great commonalties, as was the fellowship that came into this land with Brutus, willing to be united and made a body politic called a realm, having a head to govern it--as after the saying of the philosopher, every commonalty united of many parts must have a head--then they chose the same Brutus to be their head and king.⁸

It is hard to escape the implication that political rule was, in Fortescue's eyes, the most suitable form of government for England. The growing nationalism of his time, the search for past precedent, compel the patriotic reader to this conclusion.

Perhaps one of the stronger reasons in favour of political rule in England is Fortescue's exposition of the disastrous effects of regal rule in France. The strength of that unfortunate country, says Fortescue, is greatly impaired due to the affinity of French kings for regal rule. As a result, the common folk are taxed into poverty and the country is unable to defend itself. At this point in his argument, Fortescue turns to the Arthurian legend as a precedent for his opinion:

If the realm of England, which is an isle and therefore may not lightly get succour of other lands, were ruled under such a law and such a prince, it would be then a prey to all other nations that would conquer, rob, or devour it. Which was well proved in the time of the Britons, when the Scots and Picts so beat and oppressed this land that the people thereof sought help of the Romans, to whom they had been tributary. And when they could not be defended by them, they sought help of the duke of Brittany, then called Little Britain, and granted therefore to make his brother Constantine their king. And so he was made king here and reigned here many years, and his children after him, of which great Arthur was one of their issue. But, blessed be God!, this land is ruled under a better law, and therefore the people thereof be not in penury nor thereby hurt in their persons, but they be wealthy and have all things necessary for their sustenance of nature. Wherefore they be mighty

and able to resist the adversaries of this realm and to beat other realms that do or would do them wrong. Lo, this is the fruit of Jus politicum et regale under which we live.⁹

This passage is both a celebration of the English tradition of political rule and a warning of the consequences of departing from it. Fortescue must have believed that Brutus, Constantine, and Arthur were all historical figures. Accordingly, this passage offers a message of profound importance; the advanced state of civilization required for political rule is fragile, and political rule depends for its success upon the support of the people who compose the realm. England is identified with political rule, because it was founded upon that system of government. Fortescue's mention of England's helplessness at the hands of invaders is intended to remind the reader of the need for good government and the ease with which, through fickleness or complacency, it can be lost.

In Fortescue's version, it is Constantine who repels England's enemies and restores her to good government. But "great Arthur", though not of the first importance, nonetheless is identified with the tradition of political rule which Constantine re-established. From this viewpoint, Arthur acquires a contemporary interest to those writers, like Malory and Fortescue, who took an active interest in both the past history of their country and its present needs. To them, Arthur and his realm stood as a symbol of past glory and of a system of government which would help England to regain its proper status.

If Malory was much influenced by the growing concern in his day with political rule, we might expect that his Quest would reveal different attitudes from those found in the French version toward such

matters as the nature of social order, the importance of the different social classes to the realm, the importance of fellowship within a social class, and the responsibilities of the knight. A close reading of Malory's Quest confirms this hypothesis. Two episodes in particular convey Malory's view of the knight's duty to maintain a just social order. In the first, Bors does battle with Sir Prydam le Noir so that a gentlewoman will not be dispossessed of her estate by her evil sister. In the second, Galahad defeats seven brothers in battle in order to restore the Castle of Maidens to its former state.

In order to maintain a balanced perspective on Malory's achievement, it is necessary to remember that although he added a further level of meaning, he did so without violating the original allegorical meaning that these passages--indeed, the entire Quest--possessed in the Vulgate text. The substance intended by the French author remains in Malory's telling. The battle for the estate of the young lady represents the conflict between the Old and New Law, while Galahad's deliverance of the Castle of Maidens echoes Christ's harrowing of Hell. Malory presents the allegorical meaning of the two episodes faithfully, but succeeds in adding a further level of meaning to them--or perhaps more accurately, finds a further meaning within them, so skillfully is the alteration made. Unlike the French author, Malory is actively interested in the social and political significance of the Grail story, and whenever possible he attempts to define, largely according to the theory of political rule, the essential characteristics of chivalry and legitimate social order. Malory makes many subtle alterations to his material in order to achieve this purpose, but two incidents in

particular express his view of the knight's duty to maintain social order and justice, and the nature of a just society.

Examined from a superficial level, Malory's alterations do not seem very striking. Both passages retain the allegorical substance of the Vulgate Quest. The battle for the young lady's estate represents, in both versions, the struggle between the Old and the New Law, while Galahad's deliverance of the Castle of Maidens echoes Christ's harrowing of Hell. In no way can Malory be accused of 'secularizing' these passages. However, the careful reader, comparing Malory's telling with the French, will almost certainly notice a number of minor differences between the two. In Malory's version, for example, Sir Bors is more courteous to his opponent and more merciful to his enemy's retainers, more mention is made of the common people, there is less violence, and more emphasis is placed on social unity. Considered individually, these differences are trifling; but when considered together, they suggest that Malory was writing from a perspective which differed profoundly from the French author's, and that Malory was considerably influenced by the ideal of political rule.

Perhaps the most important difference between the two authors lies in the way they present social order. In the French Quest, we are continually given the impression that order must be imposed upon the populace, as if human nature were inherently hostile to it. This attitude is, of course, closely linked with the theory of regal rule. Fortescue himself notes that regal rule is necessary when the citizens are unruly and barbarous, and that political rule can succeed only in a civilized country. Since the French author seems to believe that

the greater part of mankind must be compelled by force to act virtuously, it is consistent with his position that order must be imposed rather brutally on those who oppose it. Thus, in the French, when Bors has won his duel and restored his lady to power, he feels compelled to use violence on those who continue to oppose her: "Many of the vassals there did homage to his lady, and those that refused were slain and dispossessed and driven from their lands."¹⁰

In Malory, Bors finds physical violence unnecessary and uses only the threat of force:

Than called sir Bors all tho that hylde landis of hys lady, and seyde he sholde destroy them but if he dud such servyse unto her as longed to their landys. So they dud her omyage, and they that wolde nat were chaced out of their landis.¹¹

Malory's alteration from the French on this point is probably the result of his conviction, like Fortescue's, that political rule or a limited monarchy exists only in a civilized society; unlike the French author, who wrote from the viewpoint arising from regal rule, Malory can see no reason for excessive force or bloodshed. The French author seems to believe that order must be imposed on a populace which is hostile to it; Malory, on the other hand, believes that once order is restored, it may be maintained by the people without any external control.

In Malory's Quest Bors is not only more merciful to the vassals but more chivalrous to his opponent, Sir Prydam. In the French, Bors literally batters his enemy into submission:

Then Bors grabbed hold of his helm and tugged so hard that he wrenched it off and threw it aside, and struck him on the head with his sword-hilt, making the blood spurt and driving the links of the mail into the wound; then,

swearing that he would kill him unless he admitted defeat, he made as if to behead him. When the other saw the sword raised high above his head, he was mortally afraid and cried for quarter.¹²

The corresponding passage in Malory shows Bors in a more humane and courteous light:

So in his withdrawyng he fells upryght, and sir Bors drew hys helm so strongely that he rente hit from hys hade, and gaff hym many sadde strokes with the flatte of hys swerde uppon the visayge and bade hym yelde hym or he sholde sle hym. Than he cryed hym mercy.¹³

In Malory's version, Bors clearly has the advantage but chooses the least violent method of forcing his enemy to submit. Striking Prydam with the flat of the sword, as opposed to battering him with the pommel, seems a good deal less punishing. Malory makes no mention of driving the chain-mail into Prydam's wound--nor of any wound at all. Most striking of all the deletions, in Malory's telling there is no reference to Bors' ultimate show of force--the sword raised high above Prydam's head. As Malory is commonly held to enjoy the details of chivalrous combat, these alterations must have particular significance.

The effect of these alterations is to suggest that the two knights, even though they are fighting, are fighting in a far more civilized milieu than the French author envisioned. In Malory's description the duel is genuine, but it is obviously fought according to certain rules or standards which both knights understand. Though they fight for different sides, they are both knights of notable reputation; as such, they are both members of what Malory calls the High Order of Chivalry, the fellowship of all worthy knights. It is this sense of fellowship which distinguishes Malory's account from the French.

The French author is concerned with opposition in this passage: conflict between the Old Law and the New Law, conflict between members of the same class--the two knights and the two ladies--as well as between the interests of different social classes (the older lady destroys the vassals and retainers of the younger). Malory, on the other hand, is concerned with the resolution of conflict, with reconciliation and harmony. It is because of Malory's emphasis on fellowship that Bors does not fight to the utterance, Prydam promises never again to fight against the young lady, 'but be allway towarde hir'¹⁴, and the older lady flees, never to reappear.¹⁵ Indeed, it could be argued that Malory, recognizing the importance of fellowship as a unifying force in the noble class, wishes to see its use extended into society as a whole.

Many of the features pertaining to political rule which Malory added to Bors's adventure can be found in the passages relating to Galahad's deliverance of the Castle of Maidens. As in the earlier episode, Malory is careful to preserve the allegorical meaning of the action. According to one of those ubiquitous hermits,

. . . the Castell of Maydyns betokeneth the good soulys that were in preson before the Incarncion of oure Lorde Jesu Cryste. And the seven knyghtes betokeneth the seven dedly synnes that regned that tyme in the worlde. And I may lycken the knyght Galahad unto the Sonne of the Hyghe Fadir that lyght within a maydyn and brought all the soules out of thralle: so ded sir Galahad delyver all the maydens out of the woefull castell.¹⁶

Although condensed, this speech faithfully corresponds in all important respects to that found in the Vulgate Quest.

Just as in the earlier passage, Malory again presents the knight as the restorer of order and just rule. Like Bors, Galahad is required to do more than win the battle. He summons the vassals and then makes them swear allegiance to the lady of the castle, so that it will be protected from hostile forces in the future. Galahad's role as a knight is not limited to a military function; since, like Bors, his calling obliges him to protect and defend social order, he is necessarily involved in the process of government.

In this episode, as in the previous one, Malory envisions social order in terms which are quite different from the French author's. Malory has a much broader notion of society; he does not think only in terms of the aristocracy. Like Fortescue, who eloquently attributed the superior conditions of the English peasant to the English insistence on political rule, Malory notes that unjust rule works against all classes of society. When he describes the rule of the seven evil brothers, he makes special mention of its effect on the peasantry, as well as the nobility: "by grete force they halde all the knyghtes of the contrey undir grete servayge and trowayge, robberyng and pyllyng the poure comyn peple."¹⁷ In the French Quest, however, the evil rule of the seven brothers is described only in terms of its impact on the nobility: "Having done this much, the brothers proceeded to seize the castle treasure, and, summoning knights and foot-soldiers, set about waging war on the neighbouring lords, till they forced them to submit and become their vassals."¹⁸ Like Froissart, the author of the French Quest seems hardly to recognize the existence of the lower orders, and certainly underestimates their importance to the body

politic. Malory, on the other hand, alters the passage so that the plight of the "comyn peple" is given equal importance with that of the noble vassals, even though to do so he has to eliminate all mention of the military details. Given Malory's normally high degree of interest in such matters, his choice argues how important he felt his alteration was. It is even possible to regard Malory's description of the brothers' rule as an illustration of the tyranny which regal rule is likely to become. The brothers forcibly assume domination without regard for the wishes of their subjects, and then rule as tyrants usually do, expending their energy and wealth and laying waste their own kingdom in an effort to secure their realm. In Malory's telling of the Castle of Maidens adventure, then, a political meaning is added to the allegorical one. Galahad overthrows tyranny and replaces it with good government.

In the two passages already discussed--Bors' duel with Prydam and Galahad's deliverance of the Castle of Maidens--Malory establishes the knight as a representative and defender of order and just rule. Without altering the allegorical significance these episodes possessed in the French Quest, Malory was able to add a social and political level of meaning to them. By the skillful alteration of detail, he makes his support clear for the kind of limited monarchy also advocated by Fortescue, and enriches his tale by giving it a kind of moral and chivalric focus never intended by the French author.

In another episode--the arrival of the Grail knights at Sarras and the coronation of Galahad as king of that city--Malory enlarges on some of the ideas already discussed, the most important being the

nature of rightful rule, the relationship between ruler and ruled, and the knight's obligation to maintain and restore just social order. Typically, Malory preserves the allegorical substance of his original, although in a condensed form. Galahad is presented as a Christ-like figure; when he and his companions enter Sarras, he heals a cripple who then helps them to carry the table of the Grail. The juxtaposition of Galahad and Escorant, the pagan ruler of Sarras, serves as yet another illustration of the confrontation between the new and old law, true faith and misbelief. The manner in which the Grail knights are sustained in prison by the Grail demonstrates the indomitable nature of faith, and their release from prison by the dying Escorant is a perfect example of the workings of Providence or grace.

Obviously, both versions of the Quest are in close agreement on this section of the tale. However, Malory diverges from his source in his development of the political themes we have noticed already. Most important, he changes Galahad's attitude towards kingship, and alters his source material so that the difference between the reigns of Galahad and Escorant can be described in terms of political and regal rule. In this episode, Malory begins to develop one of the most significant themes in his Quest--the relationship between just rule and true belief.

One of the most striking features of Galahad, especially in the Vulgate Quest, is his otherworldly nature, his wish to escape from the prison of matter into the freedom of the spirit. More than any other knight in the Quest, Galahad exemplifies the monastic ideal of

peregrinatio:¹⁹ he moves through the world as Providence dictates, but never becomes corrupted by or involved with it. From the very beginning of the tale, when Galahad appears "as demure as a dove"²⁰, (a common symbol of the Holy Ghost), we sense his extreme and intense spirituality. In accordance with this character, Galahad wishes for release from physical existence. However, it is not until his last day in prison that Galahad articulates this desire:

Galahad happened one day to make his plaint to Our Lord, saying:

'Lord, it seems to me that I have been long enough in this world: grant me, if it please Thee, prompt deliverance.'²¹

On the same day that he makes this prayer, Galahad and his companions are pardoned, and he is made king. At this point in the tale, the two versions differ. According to the French author, Galahad is forced against his own inclination to accept the duties of kingship. A supernatural voice declares Galahad as the next king, but this is insufficient to compel his acceptance. Only the threat of physical violence overcomes his resistance. The Vulgate Quest is quite clear about the nature of this compulsion:

They did as the voice commanded, taking Galahad and making him king, whether he would or no, and setting the crown on his head. All this displeased him greatly, but seeing that needs must (for they would have killed him else), he acceded to their desire.²²

Galahad's aversion to political office is, of course, entirely consonant with his character as it is portrayed in the French Quest. His search for the Grail involves him in a long process of purification and testing to ready him for his departure from this world. Acquainted as we are with his desire for deliverance, we are not surprised that he should feel, as Matarasso puts it, "weighed down

by the yoke of worldly honour"²³. The office of kingship is the final test of Galahad's obedience, chosen solely because of his aversion to the world.

Galahad's attitude to the responsibilities of government is strikingly altered in Malory's Quest. Malory completely omits Galahad's prayer for "prompt deliverance" and as a result establishes a totally different context for the account of his coronation. We are given no reason to suspect his unwillingness, nor does Malory provide any details to suggest that Galahad resents the duty of kingship, as he so obviously does in the French. Consequently, even though Malory's description of the decision to crown Galahad bears a superficial resemblance to the French version, the meaning is considerably altered:

Right so as they were in counceyle, there com a voice downe amonge them and bade hem chose the yongest knyght of three to be her kyng, 'for he shall well mayteyne you and all youris.'

So they made sir Galahad kyng by all the assent of the hole cité, and ellys they wolde have slayne hym.²⁴

At first glance, this passage reads like a simple paraphrase of that found in Malory's source. However, it is a good deal more than that. The previous omission of Galahad's prayer, along with the deletion of "All this displeased him greatly", completely eliminates any impression that Galahad fears or disdains earthly responsibilities as he does in the French. Furthermore, the threat of violence seems less ominous in Malory than in his source. It is true that there is little difference in literal meaning between "and ellys they wolde have slayne hym" and "for they would have killed him

else". However, there is a difference in the meaning of the two passages, not so much because Malory greatly reduces the power of the death-threat but because he establishes a new context for it.

Malory is actively interested in the accord between the ruler and ruled, which is suggested by the incident but is completely ignored by the French author. Malory's "So they made sir Galahad kyng by all the assent of the hole cité" tempers the following "and ellys they wolde have slayne hym". Paradoxically, the potential danger attendant on Galahad's refusal becomes the expression of the city's desire for him to accept office. In this case, Malory's two innovations--his omission of Galahad's prayer for deliverance, and his emphasis on the populace's approval of Galahad--mute the threat of violence so that our impression is not of an impassioned mob endangering Galahad, but rather of a citizenry which will take no denial.

Malory takes a different view from the French author, not only on the desirability of political responsibility, but also on the importance of the common people. In the Castle of Maidens episode, as we have seen, the French author makes no mention of the injustice suffered by the "poor comyn peple"; his interest is focused on the aristocracy. When he describes the populace of Sarras, it is as a dangerous mob. It seems that to the author of the Vulgate Quest the commons are either unimportant or menacing. This attitude is entirely consistent with that of many later writers. Froissart, for example, shares the same distrust of the villeins and describes them in his account of their rebellion as if they were alien creatures rather than men.²⁵ This distinction from Malory is significant because it is one

more indication of radically different political ideals. To both the author of the French Quest and Froissart, the common people are unstable and inherently dangerous to social order; consequently, these authors are obliged, whether they express their political theories openly or not, to endorse regal rule, for all its shortcomings, as the only practical system of government. (This difference in attitude is probably the cause of the much rougher justice meted out in the French Quest.)

Possibly as the result of a different environment, possibly as the result of a development in political thought, Malory does not view the common people as a threat to good government, but rather as a vital part of society, whose consensus is necessary if political rule is to function properly. In fact, the episode of Galahad's coronation serves to clarify Malory's definition of good government.

From the very beginning of the passage, when the Grail knights arrive in Sarras, we are reminded of the distinction between illegitimate and legitimate rule. While the king of Sarras, Escorant, is described as evil in both versions of the Grail story, the cause of his evil differs. In the Vulgate, he is condemned because he is not Christian: "But he was a cruel and perfidious man, taking as he did his whole descent from the accursed pagan breed."²⁶ To Malory, false belief is only a partial cause of Escorant's evil: "Than thys kynge was a grete tirraunte, and was com of the lyne of paynymes, and toke hem and put hem [the Grail knights] in a depe hole."²⁷ This change is significant. Through it, Malory implies a connection between right belief and right rule; he reminds us that

evil has a political and social dimension (an idea of no interest to the French author), and he prepares us for the distinction between the tyrannical rule of Escorant and the just rule of Galahad.

The different, if not opposing, political attitudes of the two authors are reflected in their definition of the king's duties. In the Vulgate Quest, the supernatural voice which commands the citizens to choose Galahad as ruler also defines kingship in the relatively narrow terms of providing defence and counsel: "Take the youngest of the three companions to your king: he will protect you well and be your counsellor as long as he lives among you."²⁸ In Malory's account, however, the voice offers a much broader definition of Galahad's duties: "Ryght so as they were in counceyle, there com a voice downe amonge them and bade hem chose the yongyst knyght of three to be her kyng, 'for he shall well maynteyne you and all youris'."²⁹ Certainly Malory's statement includes the idea of defence and council; but it includes a good deal besides. In the ideal of kingship which Malory establishes, Galahad is not only responsible for the maintenance of order but is obliged to promote his subjects' well-being in all ways. His responsibilities go beyond the protection of his domain and the dispensing of justice, which to the French author are the major duties of a ruler. Malory's ideal king is the antithesis of a tyrant; he is actively concerned for his subjects' well-being, and bears a strong resemblance to Sidney's description of the true ruler: "A prince that indeed especially measured his greatness by his goodness: and if for anything he loved greatness, it was because therein he might exercise his goodness."³⁰

It is interesting that Sidney is as concerned as Malory to stress the active connection between true faith, staunch morality, and just government.

Malory makes another set of alterations which indicate the influence of the theory of political rule. Because his political ideal is one in which harmony and agreement between the ruler and the ruled is exceedingly important, he makes several additions to his source material which help to emphasize the sense of social unity or common-wealth. When the divine voice tells the citizens of Sarras to choose Galahad, it explains "for he shall well maynteyne you and all youris".³¹ When the people do declare Galahad as their new ruler, we are told "So they made sir Galahad kynge by all the assente of the hole cite".³² The repeated emphasis on all the citizens, an invention of Malory's not found in his source, shows us Malory's concern with the political community as a whole, functioning as an entirety. In these two brief passages Malory demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between ruler and ruled in a limited monarchy. The ruler is responsible to all his subjects, while all of them owe him loyalty and support.

Considered individually, the numerous minor changes which Malory makes to his description of Galahad's coronation and reign are just that--minor. They do not seem to alter the significance of the corresponding passage in the French Quest; the basic plot and allegory remain much the same. However, when Malory's alterations are considered cumulatively, they clearly indicate a different purpose in his handling of the material. While Malory does retain the allegorical

meaning which the passage possesses in the French, he also employs it to elaborate on the ideal of just rule found elsewhere in his Quest. While Malory does not engage in polemic at the expense of his tale, the changes he makes in his description of Galahad's rule not only set it apart from his source but are clearly formulated to apply to the principles of government in general, not merely an isolated incident. All of Malory's alterations--the deletion of Galahad's unwillingness to rule, the distinction between tyrannous and just government, the differing appraisal of the populace, the emphasis on political harmony and reciprocity, and the larger definition of kingly duties--testify to the extent of his desire to give the tale a political and social, as well as a spiritual, purpose.

In the Quest of the Holy Grail Malory attempts to redefine the duties of chivalry and kingship beyond those found in his source. Certainly he takes a far more positive attitude towards knighthood than the French author; he assigns the knight an important social purpose, an involvement and responsibility in the process of good government, not suggested in the Vulgate Quest. He uses many of the adventures in his tale to help him define the requirements of just rule. While his attitude towards the story would not permit him to meddle with its essential shape and original meaning, Malory discovers episodes in it which assist him in the development and exposition of a political and chivalric ideal. Those critics who noticed these alterations and larger purpose in Malory's Quest but condemned it as 'secularization' were only half right. Malory does not secularize the religious content of his tale. It would be more correct to say that he

attempts to find a moral purpose for the secular institutions of chivalry and government, one which is essentially in harmony with Christian values.

CHAPTER III

¹Elizabeth T. Pachoda, Arthurian Propaganda: Le Morte Darthur as an Historical Ideal of Life (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), p. 4.

²See Arthur B. Ferguson, The Indian Summer of English Chivalry (Durham: Duke University Press, 1963), pp. 14-16.

³Larry D. Benson, Malory's Morte Darthur (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 141.

⁴Sir John Fortescue, "On the Governance of England", Later Medieval English Prose, ed. William Matthews (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963), p. 185.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 184-186.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 187.

¹⁰P. M. Matarosso, trans., The Quest of the Holy Grail (London: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 187.

¹¹Sir Thomas Malory, The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, ed. Eugène Vinaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), II, p. 960.

¹²Matarosso, p. 187.

¹³Malory, p. 959.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 960.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 960, in contrast to the corresponding passage in Matarosso, p. 187.

¹⁶Malory, p. 892.

¹⁷Found only in Vinaver's most recent edition of Malory, Works (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 533.

¹⁸Matarosso, p. 75.

¹⁹Jeffrey Burton Russell, Medieval Civilization (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968), p. 65.

- ²⁰Malory, II, p. 854.
- ²¹Matarosso, p. 282.
- ²²Ibid., p. 282.
- ²³Jean Froissart, Chronicles, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Brereton, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968, p. 154.
- ²⁴Mattarosso, p. 281.
- ²⁵Malory, III, p. 1033.
- ²⁶Matarosso, p. 282.
- ²⁷Malory, III, pp. 1033-1034.
- ²⁸Sir Philip Sidney, Arcadia ed. Maurice Evans (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 254.
- ²⁹Malory, III, p. 1034.
- ³⁰Ibid., p. 1034.

CONCLUSION

The central theme of Malory's Quest is unity. The Quest del Santgraal, Malory's source, is a bleak, uncompromising, and thoroughly dualistic work which is built on the dichotomy between soul and body, this world and the next, the secular and religious life. As we have seen, Malory had great respect for the Grail story, regarding it as "one of the truest and one of the holiest that is in this world",¹ and generally translated it with as high a degree of accuracy as his need for condensation would permit. Nonetheless, the significance of Malory's Quest is quite different from its predecessor's. Malory added a political and social level of meaning to his Quest which is not found in the original, and envisioned chivalry in terms which differ considerably from those of the French author.

These changes do not prove that Malory misunderstood the French Quest, or that he was an incompetent translator. They do suggest that Malory found a new meaning in the Quest and that he systematically altered it, inventing material where necessary, in order to achieve his purpose. Unfortunately, most critics who have noticed Malory's changes have usually agreed with Vinaver that the effect of these alterations is to 'secularize' the Grail story, and that these changes are the result of Malory's blind devotion to the kind of chivalry attacked by the French author. These criticisms are not quite to the point. While it may well be that Malory's Quest is not dominated by the strictly spiritual element, as the French version is, there is a very strong moral emphasis in Malory, and while his tale may lack

the mystical orientation of the original, it is not less religious for that difference.² Similarly, while it is true that Malory does not assume that chivalry is inherently sinful, as the French author seems to do, it is not true that Malory tries to protect Lancelot, the greatest of earthly knights, from all of the humiliation and misfortune which he meets with in the French.

Nonetheless, it must be admitted that the meaning of Malory's Quest differs considerably from its original's, and that few of those changes made by Malory accord with the extreme other-worldliness found in the Vulgate Quest. Rather than assuming that Malory misunderstood his story or that he simply substituted, as Vinaver would have it, "the Arthurian for the Christian scale of values",³ it makes more sense to approach his version of the Grail story as the work of a man who greatly respected the essential matter of the tale but found some of his deepest values challenged by the attitudes of the French author. Not only did Malory find Lancelot disgraced and chivalry thoroughly discredited; as he read the Vulgate Quest, he must have realized that its author believed in a clearcut and absolute division between the secular and religious life.

This he could not accept, and as a result he laboured, in his own Quest, to find a solution to this opposition of worldly and religious elements which would permit, in Tucker's words, "a good secular life".⁴ He achieved this goal, not by simplifying the Grail story or by secularizing it, but by making certain additions to it. Malory envisioned chivalry as a profoundly moral institution; he must have been shocked that the French author had defined it as essentially sinful, lecherous, and proud. He saved chivalry from this hostile

treatment without greatly altering the story by making a distinction-- between true and deficient chivalry--which had never occurred to the French author. Having made this distinction, Malory was then free to define a kind of chivalry which pursued goals compatible with the teachings of the church--peace, social harmony, and just government.

The distinction between true and deficient knighthood is especially important to Malory because it allows him to reconcile the secular with the religious life. Indeed, Malory seems to deliberately break down the barriers imposed by the French author between the two. Malory insists on the necessity of a moral and religious component in true chivalry; at the same time, he stresses the importance of the notion of public service to the religious life. Even the Grail knights are not released from this requirement, and Malory makes it clear that public duties are not to be regarded merely as penance.⁵

Perhaps the most striking example of the inter-relatedness of the secular and religious lives is offered by the passage dealing with the death of the old hermit. In the French Quest, this incident is intended to illustrate the indomitable nature of true faith: even though the old man is found dead wearing a linen shirt, which is against the rules of his order, a fiend reveals (under duress) that the old man is saved and that in fact he has triumphed over the evil men who had tried to burn him alive. Malory takes the same incident and manages to extract a fuller meaning from it. According to Malory, the old man was "com of grete lynage"⁶; in response to his nephew's plight, "he wente oute of hys ermytaige for to maynteyne his newew ayenste the myghty erle".⁷ Like Bors and Galahad, then, he is

compelled to accept worldly responsibility despite his religious inclination, and like them succeeds in creating peace as a result of his "wysedom and hardiness". Upon his return to the hermitage, two of his enemy's retainers seek to revenge their defeat by slaying the mighty old man. They are powerless to kill him, however, as neither sword nor fire can harm him on account of "the Hyghe Lorde which he served"⁸. This passage is of great importance to Malory's Quest: the old man, both knight and hermit, represents the fusion of virtues which Malory was seeking. In him the secular and religious lives are reconciled, and through his story Malory was able to find the possibility of a good secular life compatible with high Christian standards. Admittedly, the kind of Christianity practised by the old man is more moral than mystical; but that makes it possible for Malory to propose this kind of life as suitable for knights like Lancelot, who cannot, like Galahad, hope to fully achieve the Grail or live completely apart from the world. That Malory intended this interpretation can be established by the fact that Lancelot is given the dead man's hair shirt; he is expected to live up to the same standards and become the old man's successor.

In keeping with Malory's different purpose for the Grail story, his Quest has a different symbolic centre. In the French Quest, the great moment is the apotheosis of Galahad, which follows the last appearance of the Grail. But in Malory's version, the central episode occurs when the Grail miraculously appears at Arthur's court and feeds all those present:

Then anone they harde crakyng and cryng of thundir, that hem thought the payse sholde all to-dryve. So in the myddys of the blast entryde a sonnebeame, more clerer by seven tymys than ever they saw day, and all they were alyghted of the grace of the Holy Goste. Than began every knyght to beholde other, and eyther saw other, by their semyng, fayrer than ever they were before.⁹

Only in Malory's Quest is there any mention of the transformation of the fellowship by the appearance of the Grail. This is a radical departure from the way the Grail is symbolized in the French, where it is kept totally apart from the corrupt material world. But Malory's different handling of the Grail symbolism is entirely consonant with his own understanding of the quest for the holy vessel. In his story, the Grail reveals the beauty of the divine element in human nature, for a moment shows the astonished knights what they could be if they would cast off their sins, and then leads the knights on a quest to educate them in that pursuit. Malory did not secularize the story of the Grail. Rather, he found in it another meaning from that intended by the earlier author, and imparted to the material his own quest, the attempt to fuse together chivalric and religious values, to discover a way of life which glorifies God in the world He created.

FOOTNOTES

CONCLUSION

¹Sir Thomas Malory, The Works of Sir Thomas Malory ed. Eugène Vinaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), VII, p. 847.

²C. S. Lewis, "The English Prose Mate", in J. A. N. Bennett, ed., Essays on Malory (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 17.

³Malory, Works, p. 1524.

⁴P. E. Tucker, "Chivalry in the Mate", in J. A. N. Bennett ed., Essays on Malory (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 90.

⁵See P. M. Matarosso, trans., The Quest of the Holy Grail (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 304.

⁶Malory, Works, VII, p. 926.

⁷Ibid., p. 926.

⁸Ibid., p. 926.

⁹Ibid., p. 865.

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