

University of Windsor

Scholarship at UWindor

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Theses, Dissertations, and Major Papers

1973

Chivalry in the works of Malory : its practice and sufficiency.

William A. Horbanuik
University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd>

Recommended Citation

Horbanuik, William A., "Chivalry in the works of Malory : its practice and sufficiency." (1973). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1434.
<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/1434>

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email (scholarship@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone at 519-253-3000ext. 3208.

CHIVALRY IN THE WORKS OF MALORY:
ITS PRACTICE AND SUFFICIENCY

BY

WILLIAM A. HORBANUIK

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the
Department of English in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario

1973

© William A. Horbanuik 1973

447677

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my readers, Dr. B. Harder and Dr. C. Fantazzi for setting aside their time to look at my paper. I would especially like to thank Dr. Lois K. Smedick for her insight and patience.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of my thesis is to examine the nature and practice of chivalry in The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, and to determine the importance of chivalry in the Quest of the Holy Grail.

In Malory, the narrative describes knights in their quest to gain worship by adventure. Such a scheme bound a knight to a military code of conduct, called chivalry, to guide him in his quarrels and battles. Chivalry allowed knights to demonstrate their restraint, courtesy, and fairness in doing their noble deeds; and such possible conduct inevitably seems to parallel the Christian virtues of mercy, charity and gentleness. A 'jantyllman' knight often expressed these virtues in his actions.

The close alliance of knightly conduct and Christian behaviour could not mask the secular motives of chivalry. A complete knight had to be a lover, and a lady was often sought by a knight much in the same way he pursued an adventure. Certainly the code of chivalry made provisions for the gentle treatment of ladies so that in exchange, a knight could perform noble deeds of arms in her defence, and could exhibit his inherent qualities of goodness. Such desires to please a lady introduced to chivalry elements of sensitivity and finesse.

If chivalry was a military code of conduct, the question remains as to the necessity of being a knight, of Christian

virtue and of secular love. The examination of Gawayne is meant to discuss these practical aspects of chivalry by taking into account his personal characteristics. Gawayne lived without love and, in his crude way, he did deny the more gentle aspects of chivalry. A character study of Gawayne reveals that he, like most knights, was proud; but, he was also willful, spiteful, and vengeful. He vacillated incredibly between passions of hate and love, without ever making a Christian gesture by repenting his sins. And yet, for all this, there is no indication that he did not consider himself to be a knight of chivalry (although he often broke the military rules of the code). Gawayne demonstrates, I think, the ability (or lack of ability) of the code of chivalry to deal with individuals. If chivalry set rules, it also had to be dynamic enough to include a Gawayne. Such a conclusion leads one to suspect that chivalry depended more on the individual interpretation given it by a knight, than on any structure of rules or laws governing conduct.

To what extent, then, did this flexible military code of conduct, with its secular love and Christian implication, influence the success of the knights questing for the Holy Grail? Certain aspects of chivalry ruled out any possibility of winning the Grail. Killing for the sake of gaining worship, the pursuit of secular love, and knightly pride, were obstacles barring the success of the questing knights. Of the knights who were successful on the Quest, only Launcelot has a prominent role in the other tales, so that he might

display his chivalry. His lack of total success lies in the fact that he was a knight of chivalry (which made his adultery acceptable in the knightly world). He did repent his sins. Bors and Percival seemed to be arbitrarily chosen to succeed, but it is no coincidence that they were men of strong faith. Galahad alone achieves the Grail totally by divine grace; and he demonstrates the grace he enjoys by being the agent of God.

Chivalry, in its glorification of love and earthly worship, plays a part in the success of knights on the Quest only in those areas where knightly and Christian virtues are the same. True success is reserved for those that are divinely graced.

CHAPTER I

CHIVALRY IN THE WORKS OF SIR THOMAS MALORY¹

Chivalry, as Malory describes it, is a knightly form of behaviour martial at its core, but including, at least potentially, virtues associated with morality in general and ethics of the "gentle" classes. The moral virtues have a Christian basis, and the ethics are susceptible to Christian interpretation. This essentially military structure did allow for an individual response to situations by a knight. In his Preface to the collection of tales translated by Sir Thomas Malory, Malory's publisher, William Caxton, wrote:

For herein may be seen noble chyvalrye, curtosye, humanyte, frendlynnesse, hardynesse, love, frendshyp, cowardyse, murdre, hate, vertue, and synne. (p. xvii)

Caxton warns the readers of Malory of the murder, hate, and sin within the tales, indicating that chivalry certainly did have its dark side, as would be the case with an essentially martial way of life. A chivalrous knight, however, even within the strictly military code of conduct, could express his humanity, friendliness and love. We are told we:

¹ Unless indicated otherwise, all quotations will be taken from the one volume edition of The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, ed. Eugène Vinaver (Oxford, 1954, reprinted 1968). In preparation of this paper, Vinaver's three-volume edition cited in my Bibliography was consulted.

...may see and lerne the noble actes of chyvalrye,
the jentyl and vertuou dedes that some knyghtes
used in tho dayes, by whyche they came to honour,
and how they that were vyciqus were punysshed and
ofte put to shame and rebuke;.... (p. xvii)

In an epilogue, Caxton laments:

O ye knyghtes of Englonde where is the custome and
vsage of noble chyvalry that was ysed in the dayes/
what do ye now/ but go to baynes/ playe atte dyse
And some not wel advysed vse not honest and good
rule ageyn alle ordre of knyghthode/ leve this/
leve it and rede of the noble volumes of saynt
graal of lancelot/ of galaad/ of Trystram/ of
per se forest/ of percyval/ of gawayn/ many mo/
There shall ye see manhode/ curtosye / gentylnesse/ ²

Caxton observed that the fifteenth century knight was a man
of leisure, a man who did not follow a code of conduct that
might demonstrate his inherent goodness. The previous excerpt
connotes that the contemporary readers of Malory understood
chivalry to be a guide to, rather than a model of, ethical
and moral worth. Through chivalry a knight could exhibit his
positive characteristics if, in fact, he had such qualities.

"The idea that chivalry could be used as a means of moral
perfection was popular throughout fifteenth century Europe."³

Vinaver carefully notes that chivalry "could be used as a
means," indicating that the fifteenth century reader did not
not regard chivalry as synonymous with such virtues as
"manhodé", "curtosye", or "gentylnesse", but as a mode of
life wherein such personal virtues could be exemplified.

Chivalry, as Malory describes it does, in some areas,

² "The Order of Chyvalry," The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton, ed. W. J. B. Crotch (London, 1928), pp. 82-83.

³ Eugene Vinaver, Malory (Oxford, 1929), p. 56.

imply and even force moral behaviour on its adherents. King Arthur, in structuring a specific code of conduct for his knights:

...charged them never to do outerage nothir morthir, and allwayes to fle treson, and to gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy.... Also, that no man take no batayles in a wrongfull quarell for no love ne for no worldis goodis. (p. 91)

The knights that followed Arthur's specific code of conduct were ~~subjecting~~ subjecting themselves to virtuous living. There is no separation between chivalry and morality as Arthur outlines it in this instance. Vinaver points out that Malory is didactic in his statement about chivalry here, whereas he tends to be indirect or incidental in other comments on the subject.⁴ Malory clearly intends to demonstrate that certain aspects of the code of conduct required ethical behaviour. The code may have set ethics, but it did not necessarily imply any religious significance. Instead, the rules for a knight's treatment of ladies suggest a secular motive: "it is a code suitable for an ambitious, high-minded order just setting out toward adventure."⁵

Arthur's knights sought adventures to prove their "prouesse" or ability to do deeds of arms. The knights, by such actions, hoped to gain worship (respect and approval). Balin, because he slew the Lady of the Lake, desperately

⁴ "Commentary," The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, ed. Eugene Vinaver (Oxford, 1947), III, p. 1335.

⁵ Thomas L. Wright, "The Tale of King Arthur": Beginnings and Foreshadowings, Malory's Originality: A Critical Study of Le Morte Darthur, ed. R. M. Lumiansky (Baltimore, 1964), p. 39.

needed an adventure to restore him to the good graces of Arthur and his court; thus, Balin swore to take "...what aventure shalle falle to me, be it lyf or dethe,..." (p. 67). Gareth, in his quest for a redeeming adventure, willingly endured the insults of his lady Lynet, and told her:

'...I woll nat departe from you; for than I were worse than a foole and I wolde departe from you all the whyle that I wyne worshyp.' (p. 228)

P. E. Tucker notes that a noble knight improved his reputation by battle, and thus his honour.⁶ While proving his martial ability, a knight could do noble deeds. This would involve being both a fierce warrior and a knight of charity, restraint and fairness. Noble and Christian deeds in some instances overlapped, and such overlapping will be discussed later.

Knights in tournaments would often join their adversaries if the latter were a smaller or battered group. Tristram informed Arthur that he could no longer gain worship in a battle that was being fought:

'Sir, leve your fyghtyng with the twenty knyghtes, for ye wyne no worship of them, ye be so many and they so feaw. ...for I, to encrease my worship, I woll ryde unto the twenty knyghtes and helpe them with all my myght and power.' (p. 392)

Tristram seemed concerned not so much by the fact that the twenty knights were being threatened, but that because they were outnumbered, he could perform no noble deeds of

⁶ "Chivalry in the Morte," Essays on Malory, ed. J. A. W. Bennett (Oxford, 1963), p. 47.

arms against them. To truly maintain the honour of his enemy, a knight of worship would not allow his foe to fight at an advantage. Gawayne warned Marhaus to alight and Marhaus replied "Ye teche me curtesy, for hit is nat commendable one knyght to be on horsebak and the other on foote" (p. 116).

A knight seeking worship was often too proud to yield in battle, or to be a "recreaunte." Sir Blamour, at the mercy of Tristram, chose death rather than surrender "...for I had lever dye here with worshyp than lyve here with shame" (p. 309).

A knight was careful to protect any worship he might have earned, because he did not want his fame to become tarnished. Any indication of cowardice meant that a knight would suffer more shame and abuse than if he were to stand his ground and fight a losing battle. King Lott saw the tide of war turn against him in his dispute with Arthur, and he reached the unpleasant conclusion "...we muste nedis voyde or dye, and but if we avoyde manly and wysely there ys but deth" (p. 25). Such a concern for reputation was also based on the fact that a knight felt responsible for the prestige of his family. Before meeting in combat with Sir Tristram, Sir Blamour was reminded by his brother Sir Bleoberys that they were ccusins of Sir Launcelot "And there was never none of oure kynne that ever was shamed in batayle, but rathir, brothir, suffir deth than to be shamed" (p. 308) Launcelot himself, while fighting for Arthur in the Roman campaign, refused to desert a dangerous struggle, where the odds were greatly against him:

'And as for me and my cousyns of my bloode, we
ar but late made knyghtes, yett wolde we be loth
to lese the worshyp that oure eldyrs have deservyd.'

(p. 154)

The previous examples indicate that knights were very much aware of their lineage. The concepts of worship and lineage are closely related. A knight's renown would spread if he fought another knight of worship greater than his own. Sir Gareth, in anticipation of his battle with Sir Parsaunte of Inde, a knight of great strength and ability, realized "...the more he is of worshyp the more shall be my worshyp to have ado with hym" (p. 228). A knight's worship depended on the name and reputation of his ancestors. Sir Marhalte, in preparation for his battle with Tristram, a fight that would decide the question of King Mark's obligation to pay tribute to Ireland, warned King Mark that his foe must "...be of blood royall,..." (p. 283). Marhalte believed that the man of the greatest worship had to be a man of royal blood.

It is important to note that the consequences of a man's lineage were not lost on the contemporary readers of Malory. William Henry Schofield describes a proclamation issued by Henry V in 1415, that no man might bear arms in the upcoming French wars unless he could prove his ancestral right to do so.⁷

⁷ Chivalry in English Literature: Chaucer, Spenser and Shakespeare (Harvard, 1912, reprinted 1940), p. 117.

7

Malory's knights were deserving of the worship they enjoyed because, as E. K. Chambers observes, men of nobility were obligated to seek out chivalrous adventures. Percival and Agglovayle refused to reside at home with their mother:

'A, my swete modir,' seyde sir Percyvale,
'we may nat, for we be comyn of kynges bloode of
both partis. And therefore, modir, hit ysoure
kynde to haunte armys and noble dedys.'⁸ (p. 597)

Men of Percival's background had it in their blood to do 'noble dedys' and by 'noble dedys' one gained worship. As Vida D. Scudder points out, "Noble lineage involves responsibility for noble service."⁹

Malory could expect his readers to understand the relationship that existed between noble lineage and noble deeds, because of the medieval belief that certain personal qualities were common to a class and might be hereditarily transmitted:

Although any objective examination of their own society would have convinced them that children of noblemen could be as base as peasants and those of peasants could have the power to rule, literary convention prescribed that a man of noble birth was ipso facto a superior being and endowed with the virtues of his social group. The wicked knight is an aberration, a traitor to his class and is vanquished by the good knight because of the evil qualities which make him a recreant.¹⁰

⁸ English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages (Oxford, 1945), p. 196.

⁹ The Morte Darthur of Sir Thomas Malory: A Study of the Book and Its Sources (London, 1921), p. 275.

¹⁰ W. F. H. Jackson, The Literature of the Middle Ages (New York, 1960), pp. 16-17.

The lineage of a knight, then, was the basis of his social status, and the reader is to judge him on the degree to which he conforms to or diverges from the norms of his class.

A knight of nobility tried to reflect the positive aspects of his class and family line by being a "jantyllman." The "jantyllman" knight introduced to chivalry a finesse and sensitivity that went beyond a mere code of conduct.¹¹ Dame Lyonesse declared that she could not love the Rede Knyght of the Rede Laundis because "...he is nother of curtesy, bounte, nother jantylnesse;..." (p. 234). To develop these attributes of a "jantyllman," a prospective knight would have done well to follow the example of Tristram, who was described by Arthur as "...the man of moste worship," (p. 427) when Tristram arrived at his court. Tristram was versed in "...harpynge and on instrumentys of musyke..." as well as on the fine points of "...huntynge and in hawkyng..." Such training was meant to "...discever a jantylman frome a yoman and a yoman frome a vylayne" (pp. 279-280).

A knight could choose simply to fulfil his duties (loyalty to the lord, an exchange of services for protection), or, if he was a "jantyllman," he could demonstrate the virtues of "curtosye," "humanyte," and "frendlynesse." The code of chivalry was flexible enough to allow a knight to act according to his own sense of propriety.

¹¹ C. S. Lewis, "The English Prose Morte," Essays on Malory, p. 9.

Virtuous deeds had a Christian intent because knights were aware of God and of His possible intervention in their knightly affairs. Accolon believed that God was responsible for his defeat at the hands of Arthur, and that He would "...do with my body what He woll" (p. 106). Balin was of the opinion that knightly quests were part of a divine scheme, as he remarked that he would take any adventure "...that God woll ordayne for me" (p. 47).

A knight who was convinced of the justice of his complaint would make oaths to, or in the name of, God. King Ban felt it his duty to avenge the death of his horse in battle as he said "...I truste in God myne hurte ys none suche but som of them may sore repente thys" (p. 26). In a more significant instance, Gawayne vowed to avenge the death of his brother Gareth, by Launcelot:

'For I promyse unto God,' seyde sir Gawayn, 'for the deth of my brothir, sir Gareth, I shall seke sir Launcelot thorowoute seven kynges realmys, but I shall sle hym, other ellis he shall sle me.' (p. 835)

A knight, by making a vow, would ask a person to have faith in him. Arthur was grievously wounded by Accolon and yet he refused to yield because he had promised "...by the feythe of my body to do this batayle to the uttermeste whyle my lyff lastith,..." (p. 104). Sir Sagramour believed that because Tristram was a knight, he would be faithful to the vows he took to "...telle us your name, be your feyth and trouthe that ye owghe to the hyghe Order of Knyghthode" (p. 300).

A knight gave his complete loyalty to his king, a strength of bond similar to that existing between a man and his God. Tristram was ordered by his lord, King Mark, to commit the unknighly act of jousting with the weary Sir Lamerok. Tristram agreed reluctantly "'...bycause I woll nat displese, as ye requyre me so muste I do and obey youre commaundement'" (p. 325). For a knight favoured by his lord, loyalty could be construed as an act of love on the knight's part. The sword in the stone that was destined for Galahad, was utilized by Arthur as a test of his knight's loyalty. Gawayne attempted to draw the sword only because he was ordered to do so by Arthur. To Percival, Arthur asked "'Sir, woll ye assay for my love?'" (p. 629) Percival set his hand to the sword at the request of his king.

Mercy was a benevolent act with Christian meaning that was practiced by many knights. A knight was expected to "...gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy,..." (p. 91). A victorious knight would grant mercy to his foe often with the stipulation that the defeated knight do penance by submitting himself to the will of his conqueror. The Grene Knyght, the Rede Knyght, the Blew Knyght, and the Rede Knyght of the Rede Laundis all yielded to Gareth and pledged their knights to him (pp. 223-241). Gareth commanded each that:

'...whan that I calle uppon you ye muste yelde you unto kynge Arthure, and all your knyghtes, if that I so commaunde you.' (p. 225)

Gareth also demanded of each knight that "he made his omage and feauté" to Gareth (p. 241).

Gentleness, as a knightly virtue, is best described in Arthur's outline, which introduces the role of the lady in chivalry. A knight had:

...allwayes to do ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen. and wydowes socour: strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them, uppon payne of dethe. (p. 91)

Christian parallels, however, could not disguise the secular side of chivalry. Chivalry required that to be a complete knight, a man had to be a lover. A knight pursued love much as he sought an adventure, for worship. Tristram made it clear to Sir Dynadan that love was necessary "....for a knyght may never be of proues but yf he be a lovear" (p. 511). A lady was helpful on a journey because she could provide a motive for a fight if she were insulted or taken advantage of. In her defence, a knight could do noble deeds of arms and prove his gentlemanly nature. Sir Palomydes admitted to Tristram that he loved La Beale Isode:

'And now, sir Trystram, I woll that ye wyte that I have loved La Beall Isode many a longe day, and she hath bene the causer of my worshyp. And ellys I had bene the moste symplyste knyght in the worlde, for by her, and bycause of her, I have wonne the worshyp that I have; for whan I remembred me of quene Isode I wanne the worshyp wheresomever I cam, for the moste party.' (p. 578)

To keep the company of a lady who might bring him worship, a knight often had to demonstrate patience, perseverance, and restraint. To her sister, Lynet related Sir Gareth was "....curtyese and mylde, and the moste sufferynge man that ever I mette withall", and that he weathered her insults. "And at all tymes he gaff me goodly and meke answers agayne" (p. 244).

A knight was required to win his lady's love by proving himself worthy of her, much in the same way a new knight had to prove his character to seasoned knights. Lyonesse, after being rescued by Gareth, would not give him her love until he had laboured for a year and would "...be called one of the numbir of the worthy knyghtes'" (p. 242). Such a condition could be made because a lady's request had the power of a knight's oath, and the knights themselves were aware of how an appeal by a lady might force a knight into an unfortunate situation. Gareth would not slay the Knyght of the Rede Laundis, despite all the good knights whom the Knight had hanged, because, as Gareth said, the action of the Rede Knyght "...was at a ladyes requeste I blame hym the lesse,..." (p. 240).

As a final resort for winning a lady's love, a knight could seek to gain love through pity. If we consider the term "pité" in the context of courtly love, we might regard it as a reaction to the humility, obedience and martial ability of the knight, as he becomes a servant in love to his lady.¹² Sir Pelleas described to Gawayne his tortured love for Ettarde, and his desire to humble himself before her, despite her dislike of Pelleas for "...I truste she woll have pyté upon me at the laste;..." (p. 122).

A knight that failed to fulfil the requisites of love would earn scorn. The wife of the earl Sir Segwarydes loved

12 C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (Oxford, 1936), p. 2.

Tristram; when Tristram failed to rescue her from Sir Bleoberys de Gañys, she hated Tristram "...for he that I loved and wente that he had loved me forsoke me at my nede" (p. 303).

This example is an extension of the concept that a knight had to be true to his first love, despite the fact that she might be married. Launcelot declared Tristram his enemy after Tristram married Isode le Blaunche Maynes, even though la Beale Isode was already wed to King Mark:

'Fye uppon hym, untrew knyght to his lady!
That so noble a knyght as sir Trystrames is
sholde be founde to his fyrst lady and love
untrew, that is the quene of Cornwayle!' (p. 331)

Physical love with another lady was regarded as a desertion of the knight's first love. A knight could still be true to his first lady if he did not have intercourse with another. Tristram sent a letter to Launcelot emphasizing that "...as he was a trew knyght, he had never ado fleyshly with Isode le Blaunche Maynys" (p. 348).

Explaining why he would never marry, Launcelot said he would be forced to give up adventures, battles and tournaments, and further:

'...as for to sey to take my pleasaunce with peramours, that woll I refuse: in prencipall for drede of God, for knyghtes that bene adventures sholde nat be advoutrers nothir lecherous, for than they be nat happy nother fortunate unto the werrys; for other they shall be overcom with a sympler knyght than they be hemself, other ellys they shall sle by unhappe and hir cursednesse bettir men than they be hemself. And so who that usyth peramours shall be unhappy, and all thyng unhappy that is aboute them.' (pp. 194-195)

According to Launcelot, having a 'peramour,' that is, a lady for the sake of sexual pleasure, is lecherous. He also condemns adulterers. Though Launcelot is not making a case for love, he is sustaining the Christian notion of marriage. Those who are adulterous or lecherous will be dealt with by God. As a young and aspiring knight when he made this judgment, Launcelot was actually prophesying the unhappiness that was to plague him following his adulterous affair with his king's wife, Guenevere.

Malory, in a personal commentary, describes unstable love as being changeable like the seasons. He instructs his readers to be unselfish in their love and to guide their hearts:

...firste unto God, and nexte unto the joy of them that he promysed hys feythe unto; for there was never worshypfull man nor worshypfull woman but they loved one bettir than another; and worshyp in armys may never be foyled. But firste reserve the honoure to God, and secundely thy quarell muste com of thy lady. And such love I calle vertuose love. (pp. 790-791)

Malory, in this passage, is instructing his readers to have the proper priorities for love. Virtuous love is stable and is not contrary to the service of God; however, it is significant that Malory does not mention the sacrament of marriage. The kind of love Malory describes, demands loyalty.¹³

¹³ R. T. Davies, "The Worshipful Way in Malory," Patterns of Love and Courtesy, ed. John Lawlor (London, 1966), p. 163.

For men and women coude love togydirs seven yerys,
and no lycoures lustis was betwyxte them, and than
was love, trouthe and faythefulnes. And so in lyke
wyse was used such love in kynge Arthurs dayes. (p. 791) v

Malory obviously favoured a love that did not require physical satisfaction. Faithfulness was superior to the fulfilment of passion.¹⁴

The nature of chivalry is summed up best by Sir Ector de Maris in his eulogy to Sir Launcelot:

'A, Launcelot!' he sayd, 'thou were hede of
al Crysten knyghtes! And now I dare say,' sayd syr
Ector; 'thou sir Launcelot, there thou lvest, that
thou were never matched of erthely knyghtes hande.
And thou were the curtest knyght that ever bare
shelde! And thou were the truest frende to thy lovar
that ever bestrade hors, and thou were the trewest
lover of a synful man that ever loved woman, and thou
were the kyndest man that ever strake wyth swerde.
And thou were the godelyest persone that ever cam
emonge prees of knyghtes, and thou was the mekest
man and the jentylllest that ever ete in halle emonge
ladyes, and thou were the sternest knyght to thy
mortal foo that ever put spere in the reeste.' (p. 882)

Launcelot would declare Palomydes his friend but also avenge Arthur, his own lord, after Arthur was unhorsed by Palomydes in a tournament (pp. 549-550). He witnessed Sir Pedyvere murdering his wife, but he was still able to grant mercy if that knight would do penance by visiting the Pope in Rome (p. 208). At the castle of Tintagel he would save, from two giants, sixty damsels who had been waiting for him seven years. So loved was Launcelot, that supernatural powers

14 Davies, pp. 163-164.

(the Lady of the Lake) conspired to protect him from the possibility of ever fighting his close friend, Tristram (p. 133). Launcelot proved himself to be the truest lover of all by saving Guenevere from Arthur's fiery judgment (pp. 831-832).

The fact that Launcelot was a knight of chivalry meant that he was a perfect lover who had to fulfil his feudal loyalty to Arthur.¹⁵ Launcelot was faced with the problem of being faithful to both Guenevere and Arthur. In spite of individual reactions to the code of chivalry, at times it was neither compromising nor tolerant. Chivalry could not account for all the possibilities arising out of a human problem.¹⁶

In contrast to Launcelot the "...hede of al Crysten knyghtes", Sir Gawayne is one of the practical body of knight-hood. He will be examined to show how a knight fulfilled his duties and to what extent chivalric considerations determined his actions. Gawayne exhibits both good and evil aspects. He displayed a great loyalty to Arthur in the campaign against the Romans and yet his loyalty to his kin degenerated into vengeance that aided in bringing about Arthur's downfall. Although Gawayne fought fairly in tournaments and in his showdown with Launcelot, he did not treat Pellypore or Lamerok with the same respect.

Opinions of Gawayne changed with his actions. In one

¹⁵ Eugène Vinaver, The Rise of Romance (London, 1971) p. 131.

¹⁶ Wright, p. 62.

instance "...the kynge and the quene were gretely displeased with sir Gawayne for the sleynge of the lady,..."(p. 81) then later "...whan the kynge wyste that sir Gawayne was departed frome the courte, there was made grete sorowe amonge all the astatys"(p. 114). As a result of an adventure "...the damesell that sir Gawayne had coude sey but lytyll worshyp of hym"(p. 132) and "...Pelleas loved never after sir Gawayne..."(p. 133). The man whom Gawayne loved the most, Launcelot, could call him a murderer:

'...yet may hit never be seyde on me and opynly preved that ever I be forecaste of treson slew no goode knyght as ye, my lorde sir Gawayne, have done;....'(p. 838)

Launcelot, the accuser of Gawayne, later visited his tomb and "...prayde hartely for hys soule"(p. 875).

Differing and varying opinions of Gawayne make it clear that he was neither totally dedicated to nor ignorant of his duties as a knight and of his potential to be a knight of chivalry. He had to confront many situations that tested the practicality of a knight's obligation and his devotion to chivalry. Gawayne will be analysed in this context to demonstrate how knighthood and chivalry worked.

CHAPTER II

SIR GAWAYNE

Malory created his Gawayne from a variety of sources. With a new emphasis on certain characteristics, Malory constructs a complex figure, possibly with the intention of demonstrating the difficulty of being a perfect knight of chivalry. It must be recognized, however, that no single ideal of chivalry necessarily exists in Malory's narrative.

Gawayne's actions were often dictated by his sense of loyalty for his family. In the battle to establish Arthur's claim to the throne, King Lott, father of Gawayne, was slain by King Pellynore:

But kynge Pellynore bare the wyte of the dethe of kynge Lott, wherefore sir Gawayne revenged the deth of hys fadir the ten yere aftir he was made knyght, and slew kynge Pellynor hys owne hondis. (p. 58)

Sir Lamerok, as will later be discussed, did not believe that his father, King Pellynore, slew King Lott.

The animosity that Gawayne had for Pellynore and his kin surfaced during Gawayne's knighting ceremony. Gawayne was granted his request to be knighted on the same day that Arthur was married to Guenevere, but Malory significantly points out that Torre, son of Pellynore, was knighted before Gawayne:

So the kynge made Gawayne knyght, but sir Torre was the firste he made at that feste. (p. 75)

Pellynore, as a further annoyance to Gawayne, was placed by Merlin, the respected man of prophecy, in a seat of worship next to the Sege Perelous: 3

And thereat had sir Gawayne grete envy and tolde Gaherys hys brothir, 'Yondir knyght ys putte to grete worship, whych grevith me sore, for he slewe oure fadir kynge Lott.' (p. 75)

Soon after the knighting procedure was completed, Gawayne, Torre and Pellynore were made to conclude an adventure that had unexpectedly interrupted Arthur's feast for his knights (pp. 75-76). Gawayne's first adventure was to be with his declared enemies. Pellynore, ironically enough, was later to recommend Gawayne for the Round Table, saying of Gawayne that he is "...as good a knyght of his tyme as is ony in this londe" (p. 97). Pellynore identified Gawayne to Arthur as his nephew. Regarding the other two knights he suggested for the Round Table, Sir Gryfflette le Fyse de Du, and Sir Kay, Pellynore reminded Arthur of their ability to fight: he was not as specific about Gawayne's accomplishments.

Through Pellynore's death, Gawayne was able to express his predilection for revenge by involving Lamerok. Following the killing of Pellynore by Gawayne and Gaherys, Gawayne thought it necessary to dispose of Lamerok:

'And wyte you well, my fayre bretherne, that this sir Lameroke woll nevyr love us, because we slew his fadir, kynge Pellynor, for we demed that he slew oure fadir, kynge Lotte of Orkenay; and for the deth of kynge Pellynor sir Lameroke ded us a shame to oure modir. Therefore I woll be revenged.' (p. 455)

Gawayne sought revenge because Lamerok loved Morgause, Gawayne's mother.

The trap that was planned for Lamerok illustrates the cool calculation of Gawayne. He arranged for Morgause and Lamerok to meet in a bedroom of a castle near Camelot "...and alle was to that entente to slee sir [redacted]" (p. 458). Gaherys' confrontation with Lamerok made it clear that Lamerok did not know his father killed Lott:

'Ye ded the more wronge,' seyde sir Lamerok, 'for my fadir slew nat your fadir: hit was Balyn le Saveage! And as yett my fadyrs deth is nat revenged.' (p. 459)

Lamerok was convinced that he aroused Gaherys' displeasure only by his love affair with Morgause; as Gaherys said "...thou to ly by oure modir is to mucche shame for us to suffir'" (p. 459). Gaherys took it upon himself to seek revenge for the actions of his mother "...for she shall never shame her chyldryn'" (p. 459). Morgause was slain lying in bed next to Lamerok.

Gawayne, like all of Arthur's court, was angry that his mother was murdered, but he was particularly incensed by the fact that Gaherys had allowed Lamerok to escape. The potential for violence was increased. Lamerok declared if "...hit were nat for my lorde kynge Arthurs sake, I shuld macche sir Gawayne and his bretherne well inowghe'" (p. 499). Mordred, son of Morgause by her union with Arthur, may have felt a right to avenge his mother. Even Arthur was reminded by Lancelot "...that your syster is thus shamfully islayne'" (p. 460).

The brothers of Gawayne, with the exception of Gareth, saw in him a justification for their own acts of murder. Aggravayne and Mordred killed Dynadan "...for they hated hym oute of mesure bycause of sir Lamerok"(p. 461). They chose also to attack the friend of Lamerok, Tristram:

'We woll overtake hym and be revenged uppon hym in the despyte of sir Lamerok.' (p. 514)

Gawayne taught his brothers to kill, not out of loyalty, but for spite. Only Sir Gareth was not affected by Gawayne's example.

Sir Palomydes described the death of Lamerok for Tristram:

'...sir Gawayne and his three bretherne, sir Aggravayne, sir Gaherys, and sir Mordred, sette uppon sir Lamerak in a pryvy place, and there they slew his horse, and so they faught with hym on foote more than three owyrs bothe byfere hym and behynde hym, and so sir Mordred gaff hym his dethis wounde byhynde hym at his bakke, and all tohewe hym: for one of his squyers tolde me that sawe it.'

'Now fye uppon treson!' seyde sir Trystram, 'for hit sleyth myne harte to hyre this tale.' (pp. 520-521).

And alle maner of murthers in tho dayes were called treson. (p. 305)

Gawayne's single-mindedness, as evidenced by his obsession for revenge, may serve as a clue to the way in which he handled other problems. Gawayne would often allow a narrow purpose to cloud his judgment. In his first adventure, already mentioned, Gawayne was obliged as a knight loyal to Arthur, to follow the white hart and to complete his mission. He was challenged to a joust by the young man

Alardyne, who prevented Gawayne from continuing his pursuit. Rather than jousting, which did not usually lead to death, Gawayne was compelled to kill Alardyne, who would not yield:

'I woll nat fayle as for that,' seyde sir Gawayne,
'to folow the queste that I am inne.' (p. 78)

Gawayne would kill to complete his task and gain worship.

In his effort to prove himself, Gawayne was to ignore other knightly virtues. He failed to show mercy to the slayer of his hounds, sir Blamoure of the Maryse, which eventually led to the death of a lady. Gaherys severely scolded his brother:

'...that ys fowle and shamefully done, for that shame shall never frome you. Also ye sholde gyff mercy unto them that aske mercy, for a knyght withoute mercy ys withoute worship.' (p. 79)

Arthur and Guenevere were equally angered over the results of Gawayne's adventure, and they forced him to pledge:

...to be with all ladyes and to fyght for hir quarels;
and ever that he sholde be curteyse, and never to
refuse mercy to hym that askith mercy. (p. 81)

It was necessary for Arthur to make explicit to Gawayne the proper conduct for a knight.

The oath or promise was recognized for its importance by other knights, and yet Gawayne seemed strangely ill at ease with his own vows. He made a vow to Arthur never to return to court until he had found the mad and exiled Tristram. Launcelot located Tristram eventually, and Gawayne was relieved that he did not have to fulfil his promise as he said to Launcelot:

'Ye ar wellcom, for now have ye easid me gretly of my grete laboure.' (p. 426)

Gawayne was to break the oath he made to Arthur, never to do harm to a lady. With threats of death, he forced a damsel of Morgan le Fay to reveal her identity and intentions to Tristram, before she could trap that noble knight. Tristram was promised an opportunity by the damsel that "...he sholde wyne grete worshyp..."(p. 381). Morgan, it was learned, was ready to ambush either Launcelot or Tristram with thirty knights, and so Tristram and Gawayne were willing to take on the challenge "...so that we won away with worship!"(p. 382). Gawayne was immediately recognized by Morgan:

'A, sir Gawayne, full well wotist thou what thou dost and seyst, for, pardé, we know the passyng well. But all that thou spekyst and doyst, thou sayste hit uppon pryde of that good knyght that ys there with the. For there be som of us know the hondys of that good knyght overall well. And wyte thou well, sir Gawayne, hit is more for his sake than for thyn that we woll not come oute of this castel, for wete ye well, sir Gawayne, the knyght that beryth the armys of Cornwayle, we know hym and what he ys.' (p. 383)

Morgan seems to be implying that Gawayne was not worthy to be associated with Tristram in battle. Gawayne may have intended to alert Tristram to evil by exposing the scheme of Morgan, but he was also treading on a field of worship meant only for Tristram or Launcelot. By being disloyal to Arthur, Gawayne protected a knight both from possible evil and from honour. The consequences of Gawayne's act were accidental, because he had no way of knowing the outcome of events.

In another instance, Gawayne's oath-breaking was to have a more negative effect. On hearing of the disgraces that Pelleas tolerated in order to win Ettarde's love, Gawayne replied "'...hit is grete pyté of hym, and aftir this nyght I woll seke hym to-morow in this foreste to do hym all the helpe I can'"(p. 122). Vinaver points out that in the French source for this section, La Suite du Merlin, Gawayne did not offer to help Pelleas and his lady, but declared only that he would attempt to reconcile Pelleas and his lady.¹⁷ Malory, with his change, may have been trying to emphasize that Gawayne, up to that moment, was sincere in his desire to help Pelleas. He was not already contriving in his mind a plot to win Ettarde.

After meeting with Pelleas, Gawayne pledged to assist Pelleas' cause in any way he could:

'...I shall promyse you by the feyth of my body to do all that lyeth in my powere to gete you the love of your lady, and thereto I woll plyghte you my trouthe.' (p. 122)

Pelleas did not doubt the words of Gawayne "'...syn ye ar so nye cosyn unto kyng Arthure and ar a kynges son,...'"(p. 122). Gawayne constructed an elaborate plan to gain access to Ettarde's castle, so that he might plead Pelleas' case. He was to wear the armour of Pelleas, thus declaring to Ettarde that he had killed Pelleas:

'...and so shall I come within hir to cause hir to cheryshe me. And than shall I do my trew parte, that ye shall nat fayle to have the love of hir.' (p. 123)

¹⁷ "Commentary," pp. 1359-60 ff.

This may be the first indication of Gawayne's sinister purpose. Pelleas surely believed that Gawayne would simply convince Ettarde of the goodness of Pelleas. Vinaver notes that in the French source, Gawayne set out only to see Ettarde; he did not present himself as the victor over Pelleas. Once Gawayne, in Malory's account, had declared that he killed Pelleas, Ettarde was almost forced by convention to give herself to Gawayne:

'And for ye have slayne hym I shall be your woman and to do onythyng that may please you.' (p. 123)

With that assurance, Gawayne was able to proclaim his love for Ettarde. She promised to help Gawayne win his lady, and when Gawayne said he loved her, she had no choice but to love him:

'I may nat chese,' seyde the lady Ettarde, 'but if I sholde be forsworne.' (p. 124)

Vinaver reveals that this intricate strategy did not occur in the French source. Malory may have intentionally characterized Gawayne as a knight capable of changing his motives. Gawayne's plot to have Ettarde for himself was ended when they both saw Pelleas' menacing sword, and knew him to be alive. In rebuking Gawayne, Ettarde defended the conduct of Pelleas:

'...had he bene so uncurteyse unto you as ye have bene to hym, ye had bene a dede knyght.' (p. 125)

We are told by Vinaver that in the French source Gawayne felt remorse for his breach of trust and that Ettarde tried

to console him. In Malory this element does not occur and Gawayne is not forgiven by Pelleas, as in the French original.

Gawayne's dealings with Pelleas suggest other shortcomings. In the company of a lady, Gawayne witnessed Pelleas' capture by ten knights. He ignored his duty to aid another knight at a disadvantage, as he rationalized "...hit semyth he wolde have no helpe"(p. 119). Gawayne's lady shrewdly observed "...ye have no lyste to helpe hym"(p. 120). Gawayne was deserted by his lady because she thought him to be a coward:

'...I may nat fynde in my herte to be with hym, for ryght now here was one knyght that scomfyted ten knyghtes, and at the laste he was cowardly ledde away.' (p. 120)

On more than one occasion, Gawayne seemed reluctant to act. Spontaneity was replaced by hesitancy in battles where the possibilities of success were in doubt. During the war with the five kings, Arthur, Sir Gryfflette, Sir Kay and Sir Gawayne were preparing to attack the five kings when Gawayne methodically observed "That were foly,... for we ar but four, and they be fyve!"(p. 95). Gawayne was not eager to increase his worship at that time, and Sir Kay had to lead the charge, with Gawayne trailing. Again, in the Roman campaign, Gawayne chose to desert the endangered Sir Borce and Sir Berell "...othir his lyffe muste be lese"(p. 151). To protect his name from disgrace, Gawayne vowed "...never se my lorde Arthure but yf I reskew

hem that so lyghtly ar ledde us fro'"(p. 151). Gawayne never fulfilled his vow. In the source for this episode, the alliterative Morte Arthure,¹⁸ Gawayne did not make a hasty vow he was not prepared to keep, because in this version he did rescue Sir Borce (l. 1484). Gawayne in the Morte Arthure did many valiant deeds of arms while fighting the Romans. He was always in the thick of battle.

Gawayne could befriend a knight of great prowess, and he certainly seemed to admire men of martial ability. While looking for food in a forest, he encountered Sir Priamus. Both Priamus and Gawayne were wounded, but Gawayne was in greater danger because he was touched by a deadly spear:

'For who that is hurte with this blaade bleed
shall he ever.' (p. 166)

Priamus eventually healed Gawayne with wine.

In the Morte Arthure, Sir Wycharde wondered how Gawayne could stand up to such a knight as Priamus:

Sir Wychere, sir Walchere, theis weise mene of armes,
Had wondyre of sir Gawayne; and wente hyme a-gayns,
Mett hym in the mydwaye, and meruaile theme thoghte
How he maisterede that mane, so myghty of strengthes!
(ll. 2680-83)

In Malory, the knights do not marvel at Gawayne's ability but listen as "...Gawayne tolde hym how he had macched with that myghty man of strengthe"(p. 168). Malory is making it clear that Gawayne was a good warrior, and that he was

¹⁸ Morte Arthure, ed. Edmund Brock (Oxford, 1871), pp. 43-44.

deserving of the respect he earned for his fighting techniques, when they were used properly.

Though Gawayne may have been proficient in the area of combat, he did, as alluded to earlier, have difficulty with courtly service to ladies and love. His insensitivity to such matters may be reflected in the fact that he was never the object of a lady's desire. Unlike Tristram or Launcelot, Gawayne was not involved in adulterous affairs. He cared much more for loyalty to Arthur and to his closer kin.

Gawayne sought to uncover the identity of a victorious knight wearing a red sleeve. He assured Arthur "...I shall fynde hym, for I am sure he ys nat farre frome thys contrey" (p. 767). In his adventures, Gawayne discovered the red sleeve belonged to the Fair Maid of Astolat, and that Launcelot was the knight who wore it. As he was required to do, Gawayne revealed his find to Arthur and his court, and Guenevere "...was nygh ought of her mynde for wratthe" (p. 770). The love affair between Launcelot and Guenevere was known to all, and yet Gawayne, with his lack of tact, managed to threaten that relationship. In the source for this story, the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur,¹⁹ Gawayne identifies the dead maid of Astolat as the lover of Launcelot (ll. 1016-1032). Unlike Malory's tale, the Gawayne of Le Morte Arthur admits that he was wrong

¹⁹ Le Morte Arthur, ed. J. Douglas Bruce (Oxford, 1903), pp. 30-37.

in calling Astolat and Launcelot lovers, and he apologizes to Guenevere:

'For sothe, madame,' he gon to sayne,
'I yelde me gylty of A trespas.
I gabbyd on launcelot, is not to layne,
of that I tolde you in thys place;
I sayde that hys bydyng bayne
the dukys doughter of Ascolote was;

off ascalot that mayden ffire,
I sayd you she was hys leman;
that I so gabbyd it reweth me,
for All the sothe now telle I can;
he nold hyr nought, we mowe welle se;'

(ll. 1130-40)

Malory's Gawayne was not as concerned about the situation that existed between Launcelot and Guenevere. Launcelot was aware that Gawayne would show little discretion in the matter:

And than sir Launcelot compaste in hys mynde
that sir Gawayne wolde telle quene Gwenyvere how
he bare the rede slyve and for whom, that he wyst
well wolde turne unto grete angur. (p. 771)

As described earlier, loyalty in Gawayne could be perverted into revenge, but Gawayne maintained relationships that illustrate his tender nature towards those he loved and especially towards members of his family. In one episode, Morgan conspired to murder her husband Uryence. She was prevented from doing so by her son, Uwayne, but Arthur was suspicious of Uwayne, and banished him from the court. Gawayne would not see his cousin exiled "...for whoso banyshyth my cosyn jarmayne shall banyshe me" (p. 114). Gawayne stood by Uwayne's claim of innocence at the cost of being disloyal to Arthur.

Malory wanted to stress the strength of Gawayne's family loyalty in the tale of Sir Gareth of Orkeney. We are told that Launcelot offered the unidentified kitchen knave lodging and food because of "...his grete jantylnesse and curtesy"(p. 214). Gawayne made that same offer to Gareth "...for that proffer com of his bloode,..."(p. 214). Gawayne, like the others, supposedly did not know that the kitchen knave was his brother; hence, Malory has it that Gawayne acted generously out of a sense or intuition that he was a blood relative of Gareth.

Gareth was the exceptional brother that recognized Gawayne "...was evir vengeable, and where he hated he wolde be avenged with murther: and that hated sir Gareth"(p. 270). Gareth later explained to Tristram his reasons for alienating himself from his brothers:

'As for that, I blame you nat,' seyde sir Gareth, 'for well I undirstonde the vengeaunce of my brethirne, sir Gawayne, sir Aggravayne, sir Gaherys, and sir Mordred. But as for me,' seyde sir Gareth, 'I meddyll nat of their maters, and therefore there is none that lovyth me of them. And for cause I undirstonde they be murtherars of good knyghtes....' (p. 520)

The exact sources for the Gareth story are not known, but Vinaver points out that in the Prose Lancelot, Gareth was always fond of Gawayne. Malory, then, chose an "anti-Gawain" original for this tale.²⁰ Malory may have intentionally used such a source to establish a distance between Gareth

²⁰ "Commentary," p. 1441.

and the stained Gawayne. Though Gawayne and Gareth are seldom together in Malory, they never seem to fight or argue with one another. Gareth, who was knighted by Launcelot, followed the example of chivalry set by Launcelot, "For there was no knyght that sir Gareth loved so well as he dud sir Launcelot;..."(p. 270). Because Gawayne had a special love for both Gareth and Launcelot, he may have been proud that Gareth patterned himself after Launcelot.

The kin of Gawayne and Gareth disliked Launcelot, as Malory informs us that "...sir Aggravayne and sir Mordred had ever a prevy hate unto the quene, dame Gwenyver, and to sir Launcelot;..."(p. 818).

Gawayne, because of the loyalty he had for the kingdom, would not turn against Launcelot by revealing the love affair between Launcelot and Guenevere, "...for I know, seyde sir Gawayne, 'what woll falle of hit'"(p. 818). In Le Morte Arthur, Gawayne expresses that same sentiment, that war will result from a confrontation with Launcelot over his love affair (ll. 1692-1695). Gawayne's love for Launcelot seems to overshadow his loyalty to his brothers:

'And sythen myght I neuyr sayne
The loue that has bene by-twene vs twoo;
launcelot shalle I neuyr be-trayne
By-hynde hys bake to be hys foo.' (ll. 1700-03)

Gawayne, in Malory, tried to remind his brothers of the worth of Launcelot:

'...ye muste remembir how oftyntymes sir Launcelot hath rescued the kyng and the quene; and the beste of us all had bene full colde at the harte-roote had nat sir Launcelot bene bettir than we, and that hathe he preved hymself full ofte.' (p. 819)

At that critical time, Gawayne and Gareth were united in their concern for the fate of the Round Table and kingdom if Launcelot was angered:

'Alas!' seyde sir Gawayne and sir Gareth, 'now ys thys realme holy destroyed and myscheved, and the noble felyshyp of the Round Table shall be disparbeled.' (p. 819)

The shaming of Launcelot and Guenevere by Aggravayne and Mordred, that was to cause the war that ended the Round Table, was modelled after a plan devised by Gawayne to trap Lamerok and Morgause.

Gawayne could not be roused to anger after Aggravayne had been killed by Launcelot during his escape. Arthur reminded Gawayne that his sons had been killed by Launcelot, but Gawayne dispassionately replied:

'Howbehit I am sory of the deth of my brothir and of my two sunnes, but they ar the causars of their owne dethe; for oftyntymes I warned my brothir sir Aggravayne, and I tolde hym of the perellis the which ben now fallen.' (p. 830)

Although Gawayne vowed in Le Morte Arthur never to betray Launcelot, he did go through a change of heart about him, even before he heard of the death of Gareth. When Mordred brought news to Gawayne of Launcelot's escape, Gawayne asked:

'Mordreit, haue ye that treitour slayne,
Or how haue ye with hym dight?' (ll. 1908-09)

In both Le Morte Arthur and Malory, it is the death of Gareth that drove Gawayne to seek revenge. Both Gaherys

and Gareth were slain by Launcelot, as he saved Guenevere from her death sentence of fire (pp. 831-832). Gawayne made a final vow to Arthur that he ultimately fulfilled:

'For I promyse unto God,' seyde sir Gawayn, 'for the deth of my brothir, sir Gareth, I shall seke sir Launcelot thorowoute seven kynges realmys, but I shall sle hym, other ellis he shall sle me.' (p. 835)

Gawayne was convinced that Launcelot killed Gareth "...in despite of me" (p. 838). He would not accept the sincere penance of Launcelot and, as in Le Morte Arthur, refused to be reconciled:

'...I woll never forgyff the my brothirs dethe, and in especiall the deth of my brothir sir Gareth.' (p. 847)

Gawayne persuaded Arthur to follow Launcelot to France. The absence of Arthur, Launcelot, Gawayne, and other knights, made easier Mordred's attempt to usurp the throne.

Gawayne was beaten twice by a reluctant Launcelot:

'...I wote as well as ye I muste nedys deffende me, other ellis to be recreaunte.' (p. 855)

Launcelot, "the knight of "curtesy," would not deliver the ultimate blow to Gawayne:

'...I woll do batayle uppon you all the whyle I se you stande uppon youre feete; but to smyte a wounded man that may nat stonde, God defende me from such a shame!' (p. 859)

Gawayne never fully recovered from his wounds, although because of civil strife in Logres, he returned with Arthur.

The quality of a man was ultimately exposed in the Grail Quest. Gawayne's lack of mercy, charity, and humility, doomed him to failure. His good qualities existed outside the context of Christian virtue. He may have been an

accomplished warrior-knight, but he neglected his Christian duties.

Gawayne, the imperfect knight, initiated the Grail Quest after the Round Table had viewed the form of the Grail covered by a white cloth:

'Wherefore I woll make here a vow that to-morne, withoute longer abydyng, I shall laboure in the queste of the Sankgreall,..... (p. 635)

He was told by a monk that he was not worthy to travel with Galahad "'...for ye be wycked and synfull, and he ys full blyssed'" (p. 650). Gawayne, along with Uwayne and Gareth, slew seven knights that Galahad had spared. A monk felt compelled to tell Gawayne that Galahad did not kill for small reason, and that "'...whan ye were made first knyght ye sholde have takyn you to knyghtly dedys and vertuous lyvyng'" (p. 650). In defiance, Gawayne refused to do penance for his misdeeds:

'...I may do no penance, for we knyghtes adventures many tymes suffir grete woo and payne.' (p. 651).

Though Gawayne would never live up to his Christian duties as a knight, he did come to realize that he was a stubborn and impulsive man. Dying from a wound initially inflicted on him by Launcelot, Gawayne told Arthur:

'And all, I may wyte, myne owne hastynes and my wylfulnesse, for thorow my wylfulnes I was causer of myne owne dethe; for I was thys day hurt and smytten uppon myne olde wounde that sir Launcelot gaff me, and I fele myself that I muste nedis be dede by the owre of noone. And thorow me and my pryde ye have all thys shame and disease, for had that noble knyght, sir Launcelot, ben with you, as he was and wolde have ben, thys unhappy warre had never ben begunne;.....' (p. 863)

By admitting his 'hastynes' and 'wyfulnesse,' Gawayne may have been recognizing the vengeful streak within himself, although in his final letter to Launcelot, he would not concede that his quarrel was wrong. He asked Launcelot to aid Arthur, and to visit his tomb.

Gawayne may have been a split personality. He was savage and spiteful when seeking revenge, and yet noble and proud when speaking of or defending Launcelot and Guenevere.²¹ He could not always reconcile his loyalty to his family with that to his king. He had trouble completing his adventures, fulfilling his oaths, and acting with charity and mercy. A knight like Gawayne conforms with difficulty to a static code of conduct. Chivalry, like the man, had to be flexible and dynamic. The adaptability of chivalry depended on the personal interpretation given it by a knight.

²¹ Charles Moorman, The Book of Kyng Arthur: The Unity of Malory's Morte Darthur (Lexington, 1965), p. 90.

CHAPTER III

KNIGHTS AND THE GRAIL QUEST

In this chapter the discussion will focus on the degrees of success that knights enjoyed on the Grail Quest, with the ultimate purpose being to establish the relationship that exists between chivalry and the attainment of the Holy Grail.

To understand the difficulties that all knights had in questing for the Holy Grail, Bors, Percival, and Galahad must be examined. Out of one hundred and fifty knights, these three men are the chosen heroes. They play little part in other tales; consequently, their exploits of prowess, courtesy and love do not seem to determine solely their fortunes as pursuers of the Grail. Launcelot, who was always conducting himself chivalrously, had only a glimpse of the Grail (pp. 726-728).

Disparities of inherent goodness did exist between those who had success during the Grail Quest and those who did not, but such personal differences are not evident among the company of Bors, Percival and Galahad. This leads one to suspect that some form of divine grace is responsible for their levels of success. In Bors and Percival, we see grace directly affecting them at a certain stage of their lives (their Grail adventures), whereas evidence of grace in Galahad is never lacking. Eugène Vinaver is of the opinion

that Malory had little use for the doctrine of divine grace because Malory "...cut out long theological disquisitions..." found in his French source, the Queste del Saint Graal.²²

This secularization of sources leads Vinaver to conclude that Malory intended the Quest to be a vehicle by which the knights might gain more earthly worship, not an excuse to contrast earthly and divine chivalry.²³

Though some knights most certainly joined the Quest to gain worship, the question of success still remains. As noted above, success in the Quest appears to be a result in part of the Christian virtues of the chosen knights, and in part of the mysterious operation of grace. Although Launcelot openly admits his adulterous affair with Guenevere, he never ceases to repent his sins and mistakes. During the Quest, Percival is the simple soul of good faith who is tempted; Bors is always doing deeds he presumes good. Percival and Bors are regularly tested, but Galahad is not. All knights must react to a situation: Galahad alone seems to be on a mission because of his ability to do miracles.

There is no doubt that Percival enjoyed divine grace. After Ector and Percival tested each other in combat, the Holy Grail entered to heal them of their wounds:

22 "Sir Thomas Malory," Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (London, 1959), p. 547.

23 "Commentary," p. 1535.

...but they cowde nat se redyly who bare the
vessell. But sir Percyvale had a glemerynge of
the vessell and of the mayden that bare hit,
for he was a parfyte mayden. (p. 603)

Percival was saved from sinning by actions that could only be attributed to divine intervention. While attempting to find Galahad, Percival accepted a black steed from a lady who required him to do her will (appealing to his sense of chivalry). The horse led Percival to rough water and would have entered, had not he made the sign of the cross on his forehead. The horse threw Percival:

Than sir Percivale perceyved hit was a fynde,
the whych wolde have broughte hym unto perdicion. (p. 664)

The timely signification of a belief in God saved Percival from a sinister fate. Percival's grace seemed to depend on his simple, sincere faith in God, for:

...he was at that tyme, one of the men of the worlde
whych moste beloved in oure Lorde Jesu Cryste,...
sir Percivale comforted hymselff in oure Lorde Jesu
and besought Hym that no temptacion sholde brynge
hym oute of Goddys servys, but to endure as His
trew champyon. (p. 664)

Percival, the champion of God, seldom made an incorrect decision on his journeys. He befriended a lion by destroying a threatening serpent, because the lion "...was the more naturall beste of the two..." (p. 664). In a dream-vision, Percival rejected the lady that owned the serpent. The explanation of this by a priest, reveals that Percival correctly killed the devil and scorned the representative of the Old Law of the Church. When Percival told the priest the nature of his quest, he was told:

'Doute ye nat,' seyde the good man,
'and ye be so trew a knyght as the Order
of Shevalry requyrith, and of herte as ye
ought to be, ye shold nat doute that none
enemy shold slay you.' (p. 666)

Percival's chivalry would protect him in mortal combat, but it could not help him in his encounter "With the moste douteful champion of the worlde,..." (p. 666). Divine intervention was once more going to save Percival from sinning. He, unlike Galahad, had the potential to sin because he was continually stalked by temptation. Grace did not prepare Percival for the final mystical insights that Galahad enjoyed, but rather, it protected him from destroying the possibility of ever attaining the Holy Grail.

Percival encountered a lady who claimed to be disinherited by the "...grettist man of the worlde,..." (p. 688). Such was her fate because she had pride in her beauty and "...I sayde a worde that plesed hym nat,..." (p. 668). She appealed to his chivalry for his help:

'...for that I know that ye ar a good knyght I beseche you to helpe me, ...wherefore ye ought nat to fayle no jantillwoman which ys disherite and she besought you of helpe.' (p. 668)

Percival agreed to help the woman of unknown identity. In a pavilion he "...slepte a grete whyle" (p. 668), and, upon awakening, was fed "...all maner of meetes that he cowde thynke on. Also he dranke there the strengyst wyne that ever he dranke,..." (p. 699). Desiring the lady, Percival promised to do her will:

...and anone she was unclothed and leyde therein. And than sir Percivale layde hym downe by her naked. And by adventure and grace he saw hys swerde ly on the erthe naked, where in the pomell was a rede crosse and the synge of the crucifixe therin, and bethought hym of hys knyghthode and hys promyse he made unto the good man tofornehande, and than he made a synge in the forehed of hys. (p. 669)

Once again, by the grace of God, Percival was saved from the fiend. He committed the sins of sloth, gluttony, and lust. Even though he was the faithful champion of God, it was necessary to guard Percival from the irreversible mistake of ending his chastity.

Three times Percival committed one other sin common to all men, and especially to worship-seeking knights: the sin of pride. Before the arrival of Galahad to Arthur's court, the sword of Balyne, set in stone by Merlin and cast afloat, came near Camelot. Though Launcelot declined to draw the sword that was to hang on the best knight of the world, Percival "...assayed gladly..." (p. 629), and failed.

Percival never truly sought the Holy Grail, but met his adventures and trials all the days he was seeking Galahad. As he told his aunt, the Queen of the Waste Lands, "...I wolde love the felyship of hym'" (p. 659). Arthur's court was well aware that Galahad would win the Grail, because of the many prophesies and marvels that occurred before and during his stay at Camelot. Percival tried to accompany the best knight in the world, perhaps to gain more earthly worship for himself.

In a similar instance, Percival completed his final act of pride aboard the Ship of Faith built by Solomon. Ignoring the inscription on the sword of David, that was intended for Galahad, Percival boldly gripped it. "'In the name of God,' seyde sir Percivale, 'I shall assay to handyll hit'"(p. 707). He, along with Bors, failed. Only Galahad approached the sword with the proper combination of fear and humility. He would draw it out, "'...but the offendynge ys so grete that I shall nat sette my hande thereto'"(p. 707). This was the sword that broke when ~~men~~ put too much faith in it.

Percival's most intimate contact with the miracles of the Holy Grail took place in the castle of Carbonek, shortly before the final voyage to Sarras. He, along with Bors and Galahad, saw the vision of Christ explain the significance of the Holy Grail (p. 735). Percival's greatest spiritual achievement was to be in Logres, the land of the knights. He remained chaste, but was susceptible to some of the negative aspects of being a knight and a man. The end of his life as a holy man, and his burial near Galahad in Sarras, represent how near he came to being a perfect knight like Galahad. He was fallible because he was subject to temptations. In his adventures, his faith was not in question so much as his ability to resist sin. More than once, Percival had to be sheltered by a special, protective, form of grace.

Bors never gave up his secular way of life. Only he lived to tell the story of Percival and Galahad, and he was not eventually buried in Sarras. It could be argued, then, that of the trio, he was the least touched by any form of grace. Perhaps the most significant difference between Bors and Percival, in terms of the quality of their grace, centered around the fact that:

...for all women sir Bors was a vergyne sauff for one, that was the doughter of kynge Braundegorys, and on her he gate a chylde whyche hyght Elayne. And sauff for her sir Bors was a clene mayden.

(pp. 588-589)

Chastity was required of a knight if he was to achieve the Holy Grail. Nacien, the hermit, warned the knights not to bring their ladies:

'For I warne you playne, he that ys nat clene of hys synnes he shall nat se the mysteryes of oure Lorde Jesu Cryste.'

(p. 636)

Certainly most of the knights had carnal knowledge and that supposedly led to sins. Nacien, in explanation of a dream that Gawayne experienced, stated:

'The too whyght betokenythe sir Galahad and sir Percivale, for they be maydyns and clene withoute spotte, and the thirde, that had a spotte, signifieth sir Bors de Gaynes, which trespassed but onys in hys virginité. But sithyn he kepyth hymself so wel in chastite that all ys forgyffyn hym and hys myssededys. And why tho three were tyed by the neckes, they be three knyghtes in virginité and chastité, and there ys no pryde smytten in them.'

(pp. 683-684)

Pride, according to Nacien, was responsible for the lack of patience and humility at Arthur's court.

Though Bors was forgiven his sins, the nature of his tests reveals that he was tried for his faith and for his commitment to chivalry. The consequences of his trials affected his knightly standing and reflected the quality of his faith. Bors had an adventure only after he was confessed and did penance, in recognition of his sins.

Bors took up the quarrel of a lady against Sir Prydam le Noyre, whom he defeated (pp. 688-690). This reaction to aid a lady was typical of a knight of chivalry. With that adventure as a starting point, it can be observed that divine grace had a transformational effect on Bors, because he eventually suppressed his knightly instincts. Such a change in Bors can be seen in an episode with his brother Lyonell. Bors encountered his brother as Lyonell was being taken away captive by two knights. As Bors was about to rescue him, he saw a lady being attacked by a knight and went to her aid. As a knight, Bors was responsible for the safety of both his brother and the lady, but as a believer in God, Bors had to defend the lady's chastity:

'For if I latte my brothir be in adventure he muste be slayne, and that wold I nat for all the erthe; and if I helpe nat the mayde she ys shamed, and shall lose hir virginite which she shall never gete agayne.' (p. 691)

Bors' concern was not so much for his knightly reputation (if he had allowed the lady to be raped), but for the preservation of chastity. He was willing to suffer the shame that would result from neglecting his brother.

Bors' chivalry and chastity were tested by a lady who was in love with him. Because he rejected her, an apparently unknighly act, she and her maidens committed suicide; and as they were jumping to their deaths, "...he blyssed hys body and hys vsayge" (p. 695). The towers collapsed and the ladies disappeared as Bors' faith triumphed over his sense of chivalry, and God revealed to him the wicked intent of his temptress. Because Bors was of strong faith, God would not allow his knightly reputation to be spoiled.

God's will and grace was revealed to Bors through visions and strange sights. He witnessed a great bird feeding smaller birds with its blood, signifying the life that Jesus gave so that others might be saved (p. 687). He also saw swans that represented temptation and hypocrisy, as well as Holy Church (pp. 688-689). The worm-eaten tree and the two flowers that flourished nearby signified the lecherous and murderous Lyonell, and the two maids that were worth saving (p. 689). These visions and sights were a form of grace, signs by which Bors could make correct decisions.

God's direct intervention took place when Bors had his final meeting with his merciless brother Lyonell. Despite the fact that he was a knight, Bors, a Christian, refused to defend himself against the blows of his brother. Instead, he watched as Lyonell killed a hermit, and attacked Sir Collygrevaunce. Bors lamented that if Lyonell should kill

Collygrevaunce, "...the same shame sholde ever be myne" (p. 700).

He was stopped from retaliating against his brother by a voice that ordered, "Fle, sir Bors, and towche hym nat, othir ellis thou shalt sle hym!" (p. 702) Bors proved his faith in God by suffering the strokes of his brother, until his restraint was the cause of another mans death. God protected him from a sin that would have eliminated his chances of finding the Holy Grail, and of meeting with

Percival and Galahad on the Ship of Faith. Bors was a knight who, though he was strong in faith, was always aware of his chivalric duty, whether he performed that duty or not. With visions and sights, God guided Bors, even though He was testing his strength of faith versus his dedication to chivalry. Knights of little faith had no chance of success on the Grail Quest:

'Knyghtes of pore fayth and of wycked beleve,
thes three thynges fayled: charité, abstinaunce
and trouthe.' (p. 685)

Though Percival, Bors and Galahad all, in their strong faith and belief possessed these attributes, it was Galahad who completely achieved the Holy Grail by having the final mystical insight. Galahad, unlike the others, was not required to prove his faith. As stated before, Arthur's court knew of the significance of Galahad and of the greatness that lay ahead of him because of the inscription on the Syege Perelous (p. 630). Arthur openly stated that Galahad would win the Grail, and so it became inevitable that only

Galahad could draw Balyn's sword out of the stone, and only Galahad could heal the Maymed King Pelleas (p. 632). The Grail itself entered the court of Arthur twice. Once, the fellowship had unknowingly been fed from it (p. 633); and, in another incident, the Grail entered the hall covered with white samyte, flooding the hall with light, so that no one might see it (p. 634). These appearances of the Grail did not occur until after the arrival of Galahad.

The achiever of the Grail still had to prove his worth as a knight, able to do deeds or arms, simply because he was a knight. "But all thys mevyng of the kynge was for thys entente; for to se Galahad preved;..." (p. 633). Because of his success at Arthur's tournament, Guenevere questioned him about his identity. Galahad, perhaps out of an awareness of a spiritual lineage, reluctantly answered, "'For he that ys my fadir shall be knowyn opynly and all betymys'" (p. 636).

To illustrate the magnitude of the grace that Galahad enjoyed, one has only to read of the history of the weapons he received. Galahad was given a white shield with a red cross on it. It was revealed that the shield was made by Joseph of Aramathy, "'...that jantyll knyght the whych toke downe our Lorde of the holy Crosse,..." (p. 640) who brought Christianity to Britain. Many would suffer by trying to use the shield, until, as Joseph of Aramathy said:

'...Galahad, the good knyght, beare hit. And last of my lynayge have hit aboute hys necke, that shall do many mervaylous dedys.' (p. 642)

Just as Joseph and King Evelake brought Christianity to Britain, so Galahad represented a new standard of knighthood in Logres.

Galahad's existence is given greater significance by the tale of the construction of the Ship of Faith, as told by Percival's sister. Solomon, builder of the ship, was made aware of the coming of the Virgin Mary, who would be of his lineage:

'...there shall com a Man which shall be a mayde, and laste of youre bloode, and He shall be as good a knyght as deuke Josue, thy brother-in-law.' (p. 712)

Galahad, like Jesus, was a virgin, the last of a line, and a perfect knight.

Solomon, in his confusion over the identity of that knight, had the sword of his father, David, prepared

...syn hit ys so that thys knyght oughte to passe all knyghtes of chevalry whych hathe bene tofore hym and shall com afftir hym,..." (p. 712). It is not made clear if Jesus used that sword, but Galahad, because he passed all knights of chivalry, came to own it.

Examples of prophecies, significant lineage and special weapons, should alert the reader to the possibility that Galahad was to be bestowed with a definite type of grace. The adventures of Galahad were not tests of chivalry or faith. Each event had a spiritual importance and many required Galahad to perform feats that knights of chivalry could not. Galahad was not beset by painful decisions but always acted with an implied self-assurance.

By destroying the evil custom of the Maydyns Castell, Galahad liberated the tyrannized people without killing.

He realized that revenge was God's right:

'...if they mysseded ayenst God, the vengeance
ys nat owris, but to Hym which hath power thereof.' (p. 716)

Galahad's arrival was expected:

'Sir, ye be wellcom, for longe have we
abydyn here oure delyveraunce!' (p. 648)

A hermit explained that the people of the castle were like the good souls before the incarnation, and that the seven knights were representative of the seven deadly sins that reigned in the world. Galahad was to deliver these souls from their burden, the Harrowing of Hell:

'And I may lyckyn the good knyght Galahad unto
the Sonne of the Hyghe Fadir that lyght within
a maydyn and bought all the soules oute of
thralle.' (p. 651)

Galahad seemed to be on a mission, unless he was in the company of an imperfect man (Launcelot), in which instance he would have no important adventures.

The power of God was so strong in Galahad that he performed miracles and knew no fear. Galahad approached the tomb with the fiend in it:

'Sir Galahad, I se there envyrowne aboute
the so many angels that my power may nat
deare the!' (p. 642)

Galahad removed the sinful body from the churchyard in much the same way Jesus redeemed the world from its sinfulness. Saving the soul of one of his kin that had lived in a tomb for three hundred and fifty four years, Galahad was able to "...draw oute the soulis of erthely payne and to putte

them into the joyes of Paradyse'"(p. 732).

The presence of Galahad was like a blessing to a dying man. King Mordrayns waited blind, many years, to be blessed by Galahad. Mordrayns felt:

'...the fyre of the Holy Goste ys takyn so in the that my fleyssh, whych was all dede of oldeness, ys becom agayne yonge.' (p. 731)

Galahad, as an agent of God, was able to save and bless souls, and to heal bodies.

At the last visit to Carbonek before the departure to Sarras, Jesus appeared before Percival, Bors and Galahad, and fully revealed the Holy Grail. He said only to Galahad:

'But yet hast thou nat sene hit so opynly as thou shalt se it in the cité of Sarras, in the spirituall paleyse.' (p. 735)

In an arbitrary way, Galahad was chosen to have the ultimate experience with the Holy Grail. During this episode, Galahad saw more of the mysteries of the Holy Grail than did the other two knights. He explained to Percival why he wished to die, after the Grail was taken to Sarras:

'Sir, that shall I telle you,' seyde sir Galahad. 'Thys othir day, whan we sawe a parte of the adventures of the Sangreall, I was in such joy of herte that I trow never man was erthely. And therefore I wote well, whan my body ys dede, my soule shall be in grete joy to se the Blyssed Trinité every day and the majesté of oure Lorde Jesu Cryste.' (p. 737)

Galahad realized that he had to leave the imperfect world of man and the prison of the human body before his desires

could be fulfilled.

Divine grace, as an aid to completing successfully the Quest of the Holy Grail, was enjoyed by those who rejected or took no interest in certain aspects of the chivalric code. Those who lived an adulterous or lecherous life were fated for failure on the Quest. Carnal knowledge itself seemed to determine the eligibility of a knight, as devotion to God rather than to earthly pleasures was a requisite. Except for Galahad, lineage was not a particularly important issue as Percival and Bors both had negative factors influencing their lines. Thus, they were chosen arbitrarily to attain the Grail.²⁴ To them, as knights of chivalry, and as just men, pride was an inescapable problem.

Chivalry, of course, had its Christian parallels that reflected the goodness of a knight. Charity, mercy and gentleness cannot be ignored in a man. However, in its different forms, divine grace was apart from chivalry. It could protect a knight like Percival from acting sinfully. With Bors, it guided him and taught him the right way to act, and for both knights, it continually tested their faith. Divine grace made Galahad an agent of God who, in his role as a knight with unique chivalry, had only to anticipate his unity with perfection.

²⁴ Scudder, p. 285.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bennett, J. A. W., ed. Essays on Malory. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Brock, Edmund, ed. Morte Arthure. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Early English Text Society, Original Series 8, 1871.
- Bruce, J. Douglas, ed. Le Morte Arthur. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Early English Text Society, Extra Series 88, 1903.
- Chambers, E. K. English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947.
- Crotch, W. J. B., ed. The Prologue and Epilogues of William Caxton. London: Oxford University Press, Early English Text Society, Original Series 176, 1928.
- Huizinga, J. The Waning of the Middle Ages. London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1927.
- Jackson, W. T. H. The Literature of the Middle Ages. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.
- Lawlor, John, ed. Patterns of Love and Courtesy. London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1966.
- Lewis, C. S. The Allegory of Love. London: Oxford University Press, 1936.
- Loomis, Roger Sherman, ed. Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History. London: Oxford University Press, 1936.
- Lumiansky, R. M., ed. Malory's Originality: A Critical Study of Le Morte Darthur. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1964.
- Malory, Sir Thomas. The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, ed. Eugène Vinaver. London: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Moorman, Charles. The Book of Kyng Arthur: the Unity of Malory's Morte Darthur. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965.

Schofield, William Henry. Chivalry in English Literature: Chaucer, Malory, Spenser and Shakespeare. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1912, reprinted 1940.

Scudder, Vida D. The Morte Darthur of Sir Thomas Malory: A Study of the Book and its Sources. London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1921.

Taylor, A. B. An Introduction to Medieval Romance. New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1930.

Vinaver, Eugène. "Commentary" in The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, ed. Eugène Vinaver. 2d ed. Vol. III. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947.

Vinaver, Eugène. Malory. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929.

Vinaver, Eugène. The Rise of Romance. London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

VITA AUCTORIS

1949 Born, Windsor, Ontario.

1968 Graduated, Welland High and Vocational School,
Welland, Ontario.

1971 Graduated, Bachelor of Arts, University of Windsor,
Windsor, Ontario.