THE FALL OF THE HIGH ORDER OF KNIGHTHOOD IN

MALORY'S MORTE D'ARTHUR

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> No man is an island, entire of itself; every
> man is a piece of the continent, a part of
> the main; . . . any man's death diminishes
> me, because I am involved in mankind. . . .

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The medieval period was an age of chivalry, an age of courtly love, and an age of faith. It was an age which produced the literary genre of romance. This literary genre was in its beginning an aristocratic type appealing to the tastes of the nobility. As long as the French language remained the language of the English ruling class, the romances composed and circulated in England were written in French. Most of the English romances belong to the fourteenth century and nearly all of them are translations or adaptations from French originals.[1]

One collection of romances embodying chivalric, romantic, and religious concepts and infusing in them a tragic vision is <u>Morte D'Arthur</u>, by Sir Thomas Malory. It is the aim of this paper to offer my view concerning the chief themes of the medieval period as they applied to this great work. This paper is, therefore, confined to consideration of the code of chivalry, the code of love, and the code of religion, and it is my intention to discuss each code as it applies to Arthur and other characters of <u>Morte D'Arthur</u>.

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[1]Albert C. Baugh, ed. <u>A Literary History of England</u> (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), pp. 175-193, passim.

First, let us consider the romance as a genre. The word "roman," used sometimes to designate the French language, referred also to the poems written in the French language which purported to relate historical facts; it is this literary connotation with which we are now primarily concerned. The basis of the French language was Latin, but continual changes in spelling, pronunciation, and meaning, together with incorporation of Celtic and Germanic elements, resulted in a divergence from the Latin language employed by the Church. The word "roman" was used to differentiate this "changed and ever changing language of the people from that of the Church."[2]

To elucidate the interrelationships among major medieval literary concepts and to clarify their employment by Malory, it will be helpful to recall prinicpal characteristics of and various historical matters concerning the romance as a genre. In addition, it will be valuable to examine certain facets of the feudal system underlying much Arthurian literature especially as the feudal system was related to chivalry, to the courtly-love tradition, and to religion. Let us proceed, then, to these considerations.

During the twelfth century authors began to use the vernacular language as a medium of literature. The "romans,"

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[2]A. B. Taylor, An Introduction to Medieval Romance (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1969), p. 1.

usually composed in Latin, were works which claimed to relate history. Conversely, the "romances," usually composed in the vernacular languages, were works of imaginative literature.[3] The romance, therefore, differentiated history written in the vernacular from that written in Latin. When authors began to use the vernacular, they realized that their audiences must be entertained as well as edified. Therefore, they added legends, folklore, and other popular superstitions to the historical facts, and historical truth was claimed merely as a convention. The medieval romance, which originated in France, reflects the spirit of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in which it flourished.[4]

The medieval romances were, then, tales based on the conventions of the feudal system of the time which dealt with the activities of famous kings, knights, or distressed ladies. The characters in these romances acted under the impluse of love, religious faith, or mere desire for adventure.[5] Having considered the romance as a genre, we may turn to a brief analysis of elements of the feudal system

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[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., p. 3.

[5]C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1972), p. 309.

and to the closely related matters of chivalry, courtly love, and faith.

The feudal system, introduced into England by William the Conqueror, arose because Europe was constantly beset by invasions. The inability of the central governments to withstand the attacks left the people without protection of law and order. Feudalism may, therefore, be considered as a political system of local government and of military organization for protection, an economic system of rigid class distinction and of an unchanging way of life.[6]

The organization of the feudal society suggested the form of a pyramid, with the nobility at the top and the common people at the bottom. The pyramid was thus:

KING

PRINCES, DUKES, EARLS, COUNTS

BARONS AND VISCOUNTS

KNIGHTS

COMMON PEOPLE, PEASANTS

The king, in theory, owned all the land within the kingdom, but in practice he retained personal control of only the royal domain. Directly below the king were his powerful followers, who were granted control over the remainder of

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[6]Irving L. Gordon, Reviewing World History (New York: Amsco School Publications, Inc., 1953), pp. 72-73.

his land in return for their pledge of military aid and other services. Subsequent inferior levels of vassals, ever enlarging in number, completed the hierarchical, or pyramidal, social organization.[7]

Within this feudal system, ideas of chivalry flourished. According to C. Hugh Holman, the system of manners and morals known as chivalry was chiefly a fruit of this feudal system.[8] The terms chivalry and cavalry were originally different only in dialectal form of the French word designating mounted troops. Both words were borrowed into English. Cavalry retained the original meaning; however, chivalry defined a code of conduct. Since the higher ranks of men fought on horseback, the term chivalry came to mean first the knightly class and then the ideals of character of that class. The "ideals of chivalry--courtesy, loyalty to duty, and service to the oppressed--were the combined product of social customs and religious teachings."[9]

Knighthood was eventually "glamorized into an elegant ideal," and the knight was expected, like the Knight in Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales,' to exemplify "Trouthe and

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[7]Ibid.

[8]Holman, p. 93.

[9]Taylor, p. 190.

honour, fredom and curteisie."[10] In theory, then, chivalry
was a code of conduct identified with virtue.

Nor was chivalry the only significant code emerging
under feudalism. Courtly love, according to Holman, was a
philosophy of love and a code of love-making which existed
in chivalric times. This code of love originated and de-
veloped in France and then moved to England.[11] The flourish-
ing of courtly love in England appears to be closely as-
sociated with the conditions of the feudal society and the
veneration of the Virgin Mary. The effects of courtly love
are usually described as expressions of great emotional dis-
turbances to the knight-lover: "he is bewildered, helpless,
tortured by mental and physical pain," and he suffers from
"trembling, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, sighing, weeping,
etc."[12] In courtly-love matters especially, Geoffrey Chaucer
was influenced by French writers, including Guillaume de
Machaut.[13] According to the French courtly-love tradition,
Chaucer describes his "wel-fareyng knyght" in all the glory

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[10]Geoffrey Chaucer, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed.
F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957),
p. 17, Fragment I, ll. 45-46.

[11]Holman, p. 127.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Robinson, p. 266.

of his suffering. In "The Book of the Duchess" Chaucer
explains why this knight did not see him approach.

> For-why he heng hys hed adoun,
> And with a dedly sorwful soun
> He made of rym ten vers or twelve
> Of a compleynte to hymselve,
> The moste pitee, the most rowthe, [14]
> That ever I herde. . . .

This was most appropriate behavior; indeed the knight-lover
was one "who agonizes over his condition and indulges in
endless self-questioning and reflections on the nature of
love and his own wretched state."[15] The opening episode of
Malory's Morte D'Arthur, then, is in keeping with this por-
trayal of the emotional state of the chivalric lover; in
this episode King Uther informs Ulfius, a noble knight, that
"I am seke for angre and for love of fayre Igrayne, that I
may not be hool."[16]

The same period which produced the chivalric knight and
the courtly-love tradition was also an age of faith, of a
strong religious code. The Christian view of God during the
medieval period was that described in the Bible in the first

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[14]Chaucer, p. 271, ll. 461-66.

[15]Holman, p. 127.

[16]Thomas Malory, Works, ed. Eugène Vinaver (London:
Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 4. Subsequent references
to this edition will be incorporated parenthetically into the
text.

Book of Genesis. God, the Creator, placed Adam and Eve on earth in a paradise where they enjoyed and continued to enjoy abundant satisfactions, including closeness to God. Adam and Eve, however, eventually disobeyed God and were expelled from the Garden of Eden. Consequently, "Their descendants, sharing the guilt and the punishment, were denied Paradise; man was required to work until he died."[17] For medieval persons this sin of disobedience whereby Adam and Eve and all humanity fell from God's grace was so great that the Son of God, in His infinite love, offered Himself as a sacrifice. Anyone who reciprocated Christ's spiritual love through obedience to God's commandments and who accepted the teachings of the Church would attain salvation.[18] And so the third code, a code of religion, made its contribution to the thought and the literature of the age.

The most important pseudo-historical materials in medieval romances which dealt with these three codes came from three general sources: the Matter of Rome, which dealt with classical legends; the Matter of France, which dealt with the adventures of Charlemagne; and the Matter of Britain, which dealt principally with the legend of Arthur

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[17]David M. Zesmer, Guide to English Literature from Beowulf Through Chaucer and Medieval Drama (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961), pp. 88-89.

[18]Ibid., p. 89.

and the Knights of the Round Table.[19] The earliest records of Arthur represent him as a leader of the Britons against the Anglo-Saxon invaders. It is thought he won the battle of Badon Hill in the sixth century. Little space in written literature is given to Arthur until the twelfth century, when he becomes firmly established as a folk hero. In his writings about Arthur, Geoffrey of Monmouth gave the English a British hero as noble as the Norman hero Charlemagne. Geoffrey's History of the Kings of Britain is a major contribution to the Arthurian legend, an important part of the "immense literature in a score of languages which pays tribute to one of the foremost figures and symbols ever to enchant the human imagination."[20] For two hundred years during the Middle Ages, from 1300 to 1500, Arthurian exploits illumined the pages of manuscripts for nobility throughout the continent; and scenes from the best-known stories of the legends were portrayed by sculptors, wood-carvers, fresco-painters, tile makers, and tapestry weavers.[21]

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[19]Baugh, pp. 175-193.

[20]Gwyn Jones, Arthurian Chronicles, translated by Eugene Mason with an introduction by Gwyn Jones (New York: Everyman's Library, 1962), p. v.

[21]Helen Hill Miller, The Realms of Arthur (London: Peter Davies, 1969), p. 13.

Arthur grew in popularity so much that he made the first list of the nine worthies. These nine worthies, as listed in Caxton's preface to Malory's Morte D'Arthur, were three great conquerors of antiquity, Hector, Alexander, and Julius Caesar (pre-Christian pagans); three great Jews, Joshua, David, and Judas Maccabeus (pre-Christian Jews); and three great Christians, Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey of Boulogne.[22]

When Arthur developed in legend into an important king, he yielded his position as a personal hero to a group of great knights who surrounded him at the Round Table. These knights came to be representative of the best in the age of chivalry.[23] King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, embodying concepts of chivalry, courtly love, and religion, became the center of one of the most important and attractive medieval romances, Sir Thomas Malory's Morte D'Arthur.

Since I have suggested there is a tragic vision in Morte D'Arthur, I feel I should pause to indicate what seems tragic about the book. Therefore, a brief tracing of concepts of tragedy during various eras seems to be in order. Holman defines tragedy thus:

> A drama, in prose or verse, which recounts an important and causally related series of events

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[22]Holman, p. 351.

[23]Ibid., p. 45.

in the life of a person of significance, such
events culminating in an unhappy catastrophe,
the whole treated with great dignity and
seriousness.  According to Aristotle, whose
definition in the Poetics is an inductive des-
cription of the Greek tragedies, the purpose of
a tragedy is to arouse the emotions of pity and
fear and thus to produce in the audience a
catharsis of these emotions. . . . The question
of the nature of the significance that is held
by that age.

. . .

In the Middle Ages the term tragedy did
not refer to a drama but to any narrative which
recounted how a person of high rank through ill
fortune or his own vice or error, fell from
high estate to low.[24]

It has long been recognized that the Greek understanding
of tragedy embraced the idea that one vice or error of the
protagonist was pride, an overbearing pride which prompted
him to claim for himself certain rights reserved to the
deities.  But this understanding is not the only one which
history has produced.  The Middle Ages gave birth to a new
concept.

In "The Prologue of the Monk's Tale" of The Canterbury
Tales, Chaucer's Monk describes tragedy:

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
As olde bookes maken us memorie,
Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,
And is yfallen out of heigh degree
Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly.
And they ben versified communely
Of six feet, which men clepen exametron.
In prose eek been endited many oon,
And eek in meetre, in many a sondry wyse.[25]

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[24]Ibid., p. 531.

[25]Chaucer, p. 189, Fragment VII, ll. 1973-81.

Chaucer's attitude toward tragedy falls somewhere between the Greek concept and that of Malory. One commentator has observed that "Chaucer's knights transform the basis of knighthood by turning pride into humility and so adjust themselves to a new age and society."[26]

Malory, who wrote approximately one hundred years after Chaucer, composed a unified work concerning the rise, flowering, and fall--the tragedy--of the greatest brotherhood known to man. To communicate his tragic theme, Malory refers to the Lot-Pellinor feud, the Holy Grail quest, and the courtly-love tradition especially in relation to the adultery of Lancelot and Guinevere.

Superficially these three narratives are essentially unlike in that they concern disparate topics: a family feud, a semi-religious tract, and a romance of lovers' intrigue. However, beneath the surface, each deals with dominant aspects of chivalric knighthood: loyalty, piety, and love. These aspects mark the three stages in the development of the historical knight: the feudal vassal, the crusading soldier, and the courtly lover. The knights, then, are seen in each of the traditional historical and literary roles--as soldiers, as Christians, and as lovers; once

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[26]Charles Moorman, A Knyght There Was (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), p. 117.

again, the idea of major codes arises. Another quality shared by Malory's three themes with which we are principally concerned is that each begins in a happy, innocent, and hopeful stage but ends in dissolution, decay and tragedy.[27]

According to Moorman, the downfall of Arthur's court cannot be fully explained in Aristotelian terms--a self-ordained tragedy precipitated by the "hamartia" of the court (Lancelot's instability, Arthur's dogged blindness, Guinevere's lechery, Gawain's rashness), "for it is the essence of Aristotelian tragedy that it end in a moral victory in which the base emotions of pity and fear, having been aroused by the initial action, are purged."[28] It is here that Moorman feels that the Morte D'Arthur fails. The heroes do fall, but they fall in ignorance and the great court is not accompanied by a upsurge of spirit or illumination of self.[29]

> Gawain's dying letter to Lancelot is filled
> with remorse that he "soughte [Lancelot's]
> dethe, and nat thorow [Lancelot's] deservynge,
> but [his] owne sekynge" (1231). Ector's
> great eulogy looks backward to the youthful
> triumphs of Lancelot and praises only those
> qualities which destroyed him--his prowess,
> his love for the Queen, his chivalry. We are
> not convinced that his last holy days brought
> him either peace or self-knowledge, only a

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[27]Ibid., p. 101.

[28]Ibid., p. 104.

[29]Ibid.

"broken slepe" in which he saw himself
"lyeing grovelyng on the tombe of kyng Arthur
and quene Guenever, and there was no comforte
that the Bysshop, nor syr Bors, nor none of
his felowes coude make hym, it avaylled not"
(1257). Arthur, whose vision and energy and
whose sins had framed the new chivalry, dies
disillusioned and haunted by failure. "Con-
forte thyselff, . . . and do as well as thou
mayste, for in me ys no truste for to truste
in," (1240) he says at the last. . . .30

Even though I disagree with Moorman on certain points of his
analysis, I will not discuss them at this time; however, I
will present such views in Chapter IV.

Henry James once wrote, "There is no impression of
life, no matter of seeking it and feeling it, to which the
plan of the novelist may not offer a place." The author of
Morte D'Arthur is not a novelist; however, he certainly en-
deavored to catch the color of life and to provide his
reader with a rich commentary on man's life in medieval
society. Malory proved a master in the unveiling of the
structure of the human personality and the qualities which
are inherent in the nature of man. He proved to have the
ability to present a unique plan of existence for his
characters. In addition he proved that he was capable of
revealing not only how the characters chose to be what they
were but also how their choices determined the happy or
tragic lives they lived and what effect these choices had

30Ibid., p. 105.

upon their fellow man. Malory's character developments are representative of the consequences one must suffer when vision is limited to matters immediately at hand. The idea of human failure is inherent because one cannot see results beyond that moment's decision.

An example of Malory's ability to combine characterization with tragic tone is illustrated in the character of Merlin. Merlin is introduced as the supernatural agent of Arthur's life. All seems well as Merlin is able to direct Arthur's birth, his progress to the throne, and his success in many battles. However, one has only to look closely at Merlin's developing character to see that he is beginning to exhibit human flaws as Arthur's agent; thus overtones of demonic temptations enter the work. The first indication of Merlin's imperfection arises when he fails to warn about Morgause or to prevent Arthur's affair with his sister; Arthur did not know until after the affair that he had committed an act of incest. Another such incident is the advice which Merlin gives Arthur concerning all the children born on May Day. Ironically, the child of this incestuous relationship is the only one of the children to survive the death plan as devised by Merlin. The children who "were four wekis olde and less" were "putte in a shippe to the se." By fortune the "shyppe drove unto a castelle, and was all

to-ryven and destroyed."[31] Malory, therefore, sets the stage for the eventual downfall of Arthur's court, as well as points to the fruitlessness of the trust that Arthur and Lancelot put in the "unstable world." For the medieval Christian, to put faith in the world was to be lost; hence, for Arthur to trust Merlin was to trust the "unstable world" rather than the steadfast kingdom of God.

Merlin's limitations are further stressed in the fact that he has no power to save himself. He is buried eternally beneath a rock because he is so hopelessly stricken by Nineve, the maiden brought to court by Pellinor. He cannot face himself despite all his supernatural powers. This episode appears, then, to foreshadow the later helplessness of Lancelot's love for Guinevere and points to the warning sent to Lancelot by his son Galahad. Galahad bids his father to remember the unstable world (p. 607).

It is interesting to note also that after Merlin is sealed under the stone Nineve replaces Merlin as Arthur's supernatural power. She first rescues Arthur from death during the fight with Morgan le Fay's lover, Accolon, and she later warns Arthur about the mantel sent to him by

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[31]Thomas Malory, Works, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 37. Subsequent references to Malory will be incorporated parenthetically into the text.

Morgan. Thus, she saves his life twice. Nineve also con-
soles Pelleas after the Gawain-Ettard episode. The emphasis
seems to be on her goodness.

Merlin is only one of the characters of Malory's Morte
D'Arthur who enjoys great moments, who becomes involved in
intense sequences of action, and who suffers clashes of
personalities. It is my intention to gather the various
threads of this work into a coherent commentary on the modes
of responses of Malory's characters to this peculiar social
and cultural time. The purpose of this study, then, is to
discover the reason or reasons for the failure of the "ideal
society" represented by the Round Table.

Chapter II will present a general background of the
Arthurian literature and the varied purposes of the writers
who handed down this great legend from generation to
generation. Chapter III will present an analysis of the
outstanding king and knights in Morte D'Arthur and their
places in society as well as an analysis of their places at
the Round Table. It will examine the characters' acts and
their reactions to the situations at hand and will explain
the reasons this great brotherhood failed. Chapter IV will
set forth, in conclusion, the views gleaned from the out-
standing Malory critics as well as my own opinion as to
Malory's intent. To these concerns we may now turn.

# CHAPTER II

## A GENERAL BACKGROUND OF ARTHURIAN LITERATURE

In the fifth century A.D. Britain underwent radical periods of transition in its history. The legions of Rome withdrew from the island about 410, and the Roman power was distributed among a number of small kingdoms which were formed under loose overlordship both in civil and military matters. Three historical or moral works portray the struggle from the point of view of the Britons: Aneirins' poem "Gododdin" (ca. 600); Nennius' Historia Brittonum (ca. 800); and the Annales Cambriae, an anonymous list of important dates in Welsh history (ca. 950).[1]

Only a bare outline of Arthur's historical background can be gleaned from such scant evidence; however, it is thought that his prototype was probably born in the fifth century and became a commander of military forces during the time when the Saxons dominated eastern England. Under this commander, the Saxons were temporarily overthrown about 490; and from memories of him was to spring the image of a great

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[1] R. W. Barber, Arthur of Albion (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1961), pp. 1-12. For dating I have referred also to Albert C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), p. 168.

hero. Accounts of this hero's exploits, passed on orally for half a millennium, reached the medieval world through folk-memory and fragments of chronicles. Later they were written down, and by the twelfth century they had acquired literary form.[2]

For more than five hundred years, the Arthurian mythology provided a mirror for the medieval man to reflect the romance of his own life, and consciously or unconsciously, to fulfill an imaginative need to see himself not as he was but as he thought of himself, as an individual and as a part of his social surroundings. In all literature, whether it is idealistic or realistic, one encounters this story of man's relationship to man, or brotherhood, and an elaboration on his efforts to secure an accepted position within that society. The society, or brotherhood, is, therefore, that circle which surrounds the individual and is that which brings purpose and unity to his life.

Sir Thomas Malory in his Morte D'Arthur recorded a unified history of one of the greatest brotherhoods known to the literary world. Morte D'Arthur is an assimilation of the numerous and varied stories concerning the literary hero King Arthur. Morte D'Arthur is not a body of literal historical truth; rather it is a work revealing a truth which

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[2]Barber, pp. 1-12.

concerns the creation and the ultimate tragic destruction of a great human institution.

Arthur, perhaps a "rough and ready military commander in Celtic Britain" about 500 A.D., was possibly a real-life hero who in legend became king of a medieval court that was known as the model of knightly courtesy.[3]  This legendary Arthur's life later became an inexhaustible inspiration for poets and chroniclers.[4]  Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Briton, ca. 1136, launched the medieval Arthurian legend which grew in importance as time passed.[5]  Through numerous and various intermediaries the Arthurian legend "served a variety of medieval purposes such as the lingering pagan memories of gods, of heroes, the Druid lore, the otherworld merged into the mysteries of Merlin and Morgan le Fay, the passing of the King who would come again, and the quest of the Grail."[6]

The legends of Arthur were, then, easily adapted to serve many conscious purposes. Geoffrey of Monmouth intended to show the dynastic requirements of the Anglo-Norman

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[3]Helen Hill Miller, The Realms of Arthur (London: Peter Davies, 1969), p. 12.

[4]Norma Lorre Goodrich, Medieval Myths (New York:  The New American Library, 1961), p. 14.

[5]Ibid., p. 52.

[6]Miller, p. 20.

kings in order to establish their British sovereignty. This genealogy of Geoffrey was treated with great respect; King Stephen (1141) relied on it in his contest for the throne; Edward I (1301) cited it when making his case for dominion over Scotland before Boniface III; Henry VII (fifteenth century) advanced it as substantiation of Tudor legitimacy; and James I (seventeenth century) used it as a defense of royal divine right.[7] The monks of Glastonbury, after the destruction of their church, used the legend in 1184 as a means of increasing the revenues of the Church by showing the newly discovered graves of Arthur and Guinevere to persons who participated in religious pilgrimages. The French writers who gave literary form to the Arthurian legends adapted the Arthurian cycle to "relieve the ennui of castle and court by an escape literature."[8] The courtly-love tradition was established and flourished because royal and noble marriages were arranged "to strengthen dynasties or families or to unite contiguous lands."[9] Romantic love was not expected in marriage. "The passion, loyalty and devotion extolled in the romances were extra-marital"; thus

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[7]Ibid., pp. 21-22.

[8]Ibid., p. 21.

[9]Ibid., P. 23.

Lancelot, Arthur's perfect knight and Guinevere's perfect lover, is a French addition to Arthur's court.[10]

The popularity of Geoffrey's history would have been limited to those who could read Latin had it not been translated by Geoffrey Gaimar and Wace. Geoffrey Gaimar's version was lost; however, Wace's Roman de Brut (1155) did survive. Wace was a Norman poet who wrote in French under English patronage, and he wrote a poem, not a history. The first appearance of the Arthurian story in English is in the work of Layamon, an humble priest who lived in Worchester-shire. He completed his Brut in 1205. It was Layamon's intention to write about the noble deeds of the English. The books he used as sources were Bede's Ecclesiastical History in the Old English translation as well as the original Latin and the work of Wace. Layamon's work was not only the first appearance of the Arthurian legend in English, but it was also the last appearance for some time. When the legendary Arthur returned in literature to the island of his birth, it was after a considerable sojourn in France, a sojourn which profoundly changed his character.[11]

The most popular subjects of twelfth-century French writers were the Perceval-Grail theme and the Tristan-Iseult

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[10]Ibid.

[11]Baugh, pp. 171-72.

story. Chrétien de Troyes in his _Tale of the Grail_ and _Perceval_ introduced Galahad and the Grail quest. Robert de Boron also used Galahad in his _Joseph d'Aremathie_ and added the sword in the stone and the Siege Perilous in his _Merlin_.[12]

Certain English authors of the twelfth century began to write in the English vernacular, translating the French versions into English, but in their settings they brought Arthur home to England.[13]

The final repatriation of the Arthurian legend came at the close of the Middle Ages when Sir Thomas Malory wrote his _Morte D'Arthur_.[14] This work is an assimilation of the group of legends into a unified history of Arthur's reign that we turn to for the story of the rise, flowering, and decay of the noble king and his Round Table. This compilation of the legends begins with the _enfances_ of Arthur and ends shortly after his death. The importance of the beginning of Malory's version is that it sets the tone for the forthcoming problems which will invade and doom the brotherhood of Arthur's realm. The first seed of the downfall of the noble knighthood appears, then, to have been

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[12]_Ibid._, pp. 190-93.

[13]Miller, p. 24.

[14]_Ibid._

planted at the conception of Arthur himself who was "be-goten"[15] after the deth of the duke [Igrayne's husband] more than thre houres, and thirtene days after [later] kyng Uther [Arthur's father] wedded Igrayne [Arthur's mother]" (p. 13). I do not believe that it was by accident that Malory chose this beginning. The fact that King Uther coveted his duke's wife and "desyred to have lyen by hir" (p. 1) adumbrates a moral decay. Although this union between King Uther and Igraine does not fall within the courtly-love tradition, it does establish a motif of lustful love foreshadowing the love triangles which will weave through the fabric of the "hoole booke." Attention is immediately focused on one of the most prominent failures of the Round Table. A parallel to this failure can be seen in II Samuel 11.1-26, which reveals the triangle of King David, Bathsheba, and Uriah. The circum-stances of this Biblical story are very much the same as those in the narrative of King Uther, Igraine, and the duke. The story of King David follows this pattern: at the turn of the year, when kings go out on their campaigns, David sent out Joab and the army of Israel, and they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. David, however, remained in Jerusalem. One evening David saw a woman bathing. He made inquiries

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[15]Thomas Malory, Works, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 37. Subsequent references to Malory will be incorporated parenthetically into the text.

about her and was told that she was the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah. Her name was Bathsheba, and her husband was the armor-bearer in Joab's army. David sent for Bathsheba, and he had relations with her. She then returned home. Bathsheba found that she was with child and so informed King David. David tried to arrange for Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba in order that he might not know that she had been with him; however, Uriah refused to sleep and eat at home out of respect to Joab and the others who were out fighting. David, therefore, sent word to Joab to place Uriah up front, where the fighting was fierce, and to leave Uriah to be struck down dead. After the mourning period for Bathsheba, David took her for his wife and she bore him a son. This series of events greatly displeased God!

The literary artist of the Middle Ages was not the creator of something of value in itself but rather the preserver of value. Literature was to use its "attractive appearance" to interest the reader in getting beneath the surface attraction to discover the underlying theme, or its "sententia." This basic "sententia" would, then, instruct the reader in the basic truths of life. The basic truths of life for the Middle Ages were the truths of Christianity;[16]

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[16] Edmund Reiss, Sir Thomas Malory (New York: Twayne Publications, Inc., 1966), pp. 22-23.

thus this type of Biblical parallelism used by Malory would
be in keeping with medieval writings and would be readily
understood by the medieval reader or audience.

The love-triangle motif, a recurring theme of the
Morte D'Arthur, will be dealth with more specifically in
Chapter III.

Love is, however, one of the best features of the
chivalric code if it is "properly and devoutly followed."[17]
Ideally the "service of the beloved prompts a knight to
reveal in action the noblest feelings possible to him; he
is required to demonstrate the sincerity and depth of his
love by displays of unusual courtesy, generosity, and
bravery."[18]  Despite the fact that courtly love was ac-
cepted within the ranks of the nobility, it was condemned by
the Church and by definition was immoral and adulterous.[19]

Early in Book I Malory depicts Arthur as a lustful man,
the father of two sons born out of wedlock.  The first af-
fair was with "an erlis doughter; his name was Sanam and
hir name was Lyonors, a passyng fayre damesell . . . and
kynge Arthure sette hys love gretly on hir, and so ded she

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[17]Charles Moorman, The Book of Kyng Arthur:  The Unity
of Malory's Morte Darthur  (Lexington:  University of Kentucky
Press, 1965), pp. 14-15.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid.

uppon hym, and so the kynge had ado with hir and gate on hir a chylde. And hys name was Borre, that was after a good knyght and of the Table Rounde" (p. 26). In the meantime, Arthur saw Guinevere and at "firste syght of queene Gwenyvere, the kyngis doughter of the londe of Camylarde," he loved her ever after (p. 26). Even though Arthur confesses that he loves Guinevere, following closely thereafter is "kynge Lottis wyff," who comes to see Arthur's court with her four sons, Gawain, Gaheris, Aggravaine, and Gareth. Once again, "the kynge caste grete love unto [a woman] and desired to ly by hir. And so they agreed, and he begate uppon hir sir Mordred" (p. 27). Through the knowledge of Merlin, Arthur later found he had "done a thynge late that God ys displeased with" for he had lain by his "syster and on hir gotyn a childe" who would destroy him and all the knights of his realm (p. 27).

In the course of time, Arthur was securely established as "chosyn kynge by adventure and by grace," and it became desireable for him to "take a wyff" (p. 59). Arthur, according to the book, chose Guinevere, whose father "holdyth in his house the Table Rounde" which had belonged to King Uther, Arthur's father. Merlin did not hesitate to inform Arthur that he had made a wrong decision and he "warned the kyng covertly that Gwenyver was not holsom for hym to take

to wyff. For he warned hym that Launcelot scholde love hir, and sche hym agayn" (p. 59). Arthur ignored this warning.

Looking back on the first tales of Morte D'Arthur, then, we see love betrayal as an underlying theme. Such betrayal suggests the breaking of the love code. These betrayals included Arthur-Morgause, Morgan-Accolon, and Gawain-Ettard. These lesser love betrayals, therefore, seem to establish a motif in the greater love betrayals to follow, Lancelot-Guinevere and Tristram-Isolde. The happy love of Nineve and Pelleas looks forward to the happy love of Gareth and Lyonesse.

When Guinevere was "delyverd" to King Arthur, she brought with her the "Table Rounde" and an "hondred knyghts" (p. 60). Arthur's acquisition of the table caused him to feel excessive pride--a pride suggesting an ultimate tragic downfall.

The literary tradition of the Round Table may go as far back as early Roman times and may parallel the history of the legendary Arthur's military career. In the early days of the Roman empire the triclinium, a couch extending along three sides of a table, was replaced by a semi-circular couch placed about a round table. When the Roman troops were in the field or when persons engaged in informal social events, this couch was replaced by bolsters laid upon the ground. Sometimes these bolsters were substituted by use of straw

covered with a cloth. This custom was apparently retained by the Britons after the departure of the Roman legions, and, therefore, the institution of Arthur's Round Table may be no more than the "officers' Mess" of Arthur's Romanized British army. This manner of eating was forgotten when men began to eat at wooden tables, seated in wooden chairs.[20] The Round Table appeared in the Arthurian legends for the first time in 1150, when Maistre Wace of Caen translated Geoffrey of Monmouth's Latin into French verse as Roman de Brut.[21] These pseudo-histories were called "Bruts" because Brutus was listed as Britain's first king.[22]

The customs and manners of the early Arthurian legends depict the halls of the great feasts as bearing a resemblance to those depicted in Beowulf. Layamon, in particular, portrays the manners of the early British knights as extremely boisterous. At a feast in London on Christmas Day, a "serious fight breaks out through jealousy, and blood is shed."[23]

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[20]John Jay Parry, "The Historical Arthur," in Arthur, King of Britain, ed. Richard L. Brengle (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), p. 335.

[21]Baugh, p. 170.

[22]Henry Cecil Wyld, "Layamon as an English Poet," in Arthur, King of Britain, ed. Richard L. Brengle (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), p. 373.

[23]Ibid.

Arthur is able to quell the fight, and all present are bound by "oaths sworn on sacred relics" to behave properly in the future.[24] The dead are carried away and the hall is cleaned, and then the feast proceeds. Later a crafty workman of Cornwall makes a splendid table where "no quarrels shall break out over priority of place."[25] This, states Wyld, is the virtual founding of the Order of the Round Table, though the name is not mentioned. Layamon describes the table as "the same table . . . about which the Britons boast and tell many lies. . . ."[26]

Robert Fletcher feels that Wace's addition to the theory of the "Roonde Table," or "Table Roonde," is significant. According to Fletcher, Wace restates that Arthur made the Round Table so that none of his "barons could boast of sitting higher than any other," but he adds that the knights who were in Arthur's court formed the king's bodyguard and that the praise of the knights of the Round Table was great throughout the world.[27]

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[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Robert Huntington Fletcher, "Wace's Roman de Brut," in Arthur, King of Britain, ed. Richard L. Brengle (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), p. 364.

In "The Quest of the Holy Grail" we learn that Merlin
made the Round Table in the likeness of the roundness of the
world,

> for men sholde by the Rounde Table undir-
> stonde the rowndenes signyfyed by ryght.
> For all the worlde, crystnyd and hethyn,
> repayryth unto the round Table, and whan
> they ar chosyn to be of the felyshyp of
> the Rounde Table they thynke hemselff more
> blessed and more in worshyp than they had
> gotyn halff the worlde. (p. 541)

When Merlin had ordained the Round Table, he said,

> By them whych sholde be felowys of the
> Rounde Table the trouth of the Sankegreall
> sholde be well knowyn. . . . There sholde
> be three whyght bullis sholde encheve hit,
> and the two sholde be maydyns and the
> thirde sholde be chaste. And one of thos
> three shold passe hys fadir as much as the
> lyon passith the lybarde, both of strength
> and of hardines. (pp. 541-42)

The early form of chivalry existing before the establish-
ment of Arthur's noble knighthood glorified the warlike
spirit, the military prowess, and the heroic achievements of
the knights. These attributes were in keeping with tradi-
tional chivalry. Examples of the old chivalry can be iden-
tified in episodes such as the incident surrounding the birth
of Torre, the first man to be knighted at the wedding feast
of King Arthur and Guinevere. Torre's mother "was a fayre
houswyff . . . and whan she was a mayde and wente to mylke
hir kyne, there mette with hir a sterne knyght, and half be
force he had hir maydynhode" (p. 62). The knight's sin re-
presented a breaking of the religious code. Other related

faults were Gawain's temper, which caused him to have "done passynge foule for the sleynge of a lady" (p. 67); Gawain's betrayal of Pelleas and seduction of Ettard (p. 103); Balin's smiting off the head of the Lady of the Lake (p. 41); Balin's not preventing Columbe's committing suicide (p. 45); Pellinor's refusal to help a damsel in distress (p. 75); and Garnish's murdering his damsel and her lover and his committing suicide (p. 55). These knights of seemingly good character, then, "grope in a world of no established standards, where the finest purpose and the truest instincts of untutored honor do but lead a man into even worse blunders and failures."[28]

Against this backdrop of the old chivalric code, King Arthur establishes the High Order of Knighthood that was to become the greatest brotherhood known to the world. When the knights were ordained as part of this society, King Arthur charged them thus:

> . . . never to do outerage nothir mourthir, and allwayes to fle treson, and to gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy, uppon payne of forfiture [of their] worship and lordship of kynge Arthure for evirmore; and allwayes to do ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes [succour:] strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them, uppon payne of dethe. Also, that no man take no batayles in a wrongefull quarell for no love ne for no worldis goodis. (p. 75)

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[28]Reiss, p. 47.

So unto this all the knights, both old and young, were sworn, and every year they repeated this oath at the high feast of Pentecost (p. 76).

Arthur's noble purpose in the establishment of his High Order of Knighthood is readily seen when one compares the old chivalric codes with the new code set out in the oath to be administered to all the ordained knights of this Round Table. Arthur's purpose, then, may be termed as a Christian aim. His aim was to establish a new order looking toward a better way of life for all those persons within his realm. But one has only to look back to the limitations of human nature, as exemplified by Merlin, to see that once again Malory is pointing out the limitations of all human endeavors.

Chapter III will analyze the characterization of the knights of the Round Table, their glorification as a part of the High Order of Knighthood, and possible reasons for their failures and thus the failure of the noble purpose of the Round Table.

# CHAPTER III

## THE CHIVALRIC CODE OF ETHICS

The pagan spirit of chivalry exhibited a need for ideals and order; however, Arthur's oath emphasizes his ideals of chivalry, loyalty, mercy, and prowess--ideals embodied in the codes by which characters in literature of the Arthurian cycle lived. This change of direction points to the greatness of the "Christian king" and his court. The test for Arthur's worthiness to become the king of England is staged "in the grettest chirch of London," and the test itself is sanctioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury. "In the chirchegard ayenst the hyhe aulter a grete stone . . . and in mydde thereof was lyke an anvylde of stele a foot hyghe, and theryn stack a fayre swerd."[1] Arthur proves to be the only person who is able to remove the sword from the stone, and he does so on New Year's Day. He is required to repeat this act on Epiphany, January 6, traditionally the holy day celebrating the manifestation of Christ's glory; again on Candlemas, February 3, the feast of the Purification and the climax of the rites celebrating the Incarnation of Christ; again on

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[1]Thomas Malory, Works, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 7. Subsequent references to Malory will be incorporated parenthetically into the text.

Easter, the holy day celebrating the Resurrection and the be-
ginning of a new and glorious life; and for the last time at
Pentecost, which is fifty days after Easter and ten days after
the Ascension of Christ. Pentecost, then, is the "celebrating
of the great awakening that came to the world after Christ
ascended into Heaven" and refers specifically to the descent
of the Holy Spirit to the world. This is an act which enables
the new order, represented by the Church, to come about.[2]
The ritualistic manner in which Arthur comes to the English
throne, therefore, links the coming of his High Order of
Knights of the Round Table with Christ and the coming to earth
of the Christian Church. The success of Arthur is an impor-
tant event. He does not come to the throne as a savior but
rather brings a new society, "one that is seen in Christian
terms."[3]  Through Arthur, then, the new order (the High Order
of the Round Table), or the new brotherhood of chivalry, is
symbolically established.

The knights of the new order, "both olde and younge,"
were sworn to uphold the new code of conduct now ordained as
a part of their knighthood. Arthur with his High Order of
Knighthood brings to the court—and thereby to the world—not

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[2]Edmund Reiss, Sir Thomas Malory (New York:  Twayne
Publishers, Inc., 1966), pp. 37-38.

[3]Ibid.

only the new code of ethics, but also the human imperfections which will gradually and ultimately corrupt their own fellowship. This corruption will lead to final death of the brotherhood, and is, thus, symbolic of the darkness after the Pentecost that occurs at the time of the summer solstice and is the time during which the church rehearses the ministry and miracles of Christ. This part of the Christian year is concerned with the waning sun and the coming winter solstice, the time of great darkness, which precedes Advent when Christianity again celebrates the birth of Christ; thus the cycle begins anew.[4]

Malory carefully correlates the establishment of Arthur's court with the symbolic rituals of the Church in order to use these rituals as a backdrop not only for the great drama of the rise of that court but also for the tragic fall of the Order, which is surrounded by weaknesses inherent in human nature. The fall, therefore, is an inevitable as the fall of man.

It will be fruitful at this point to look at the prominent themes of _Morte D'Arthur_ in an effort to determine the contributing factors to the fall of such a high order of highly ordained Christians. The prominent theses are the

[4]Reiss, p. 39.

interlacing code of chivalry, the code of courtly love, and the code of religion.

A brief look at the code of chivalry will show the emblems of courtesy, prowess, and love. With the spread of Christianity, the warlike spirit of the knights withered to a certain extent. The Christian knights were ordained to emphasize the brotherhood of their society, and, therefore, honored the generous and the courteous, not the primarily warlike, knights. The knights owed their service to their lord as a practical duty, to women as a matter of courtesy, and to the Christian faith which emphasized the Christian virtues humility, purity, and godliness.[5] The Christian knight could not restrict himself to loyalty and courtesy only, but he must also avoid pride and debauchery. The knights could marry, but chastity was regarded as the supreme ideal, and the sexual impulse was regarded as unnatural and sinful. The teachings of the "Church became so distorted that it did not clearly realize that this impulse was given to man to ensure propagation of the race."[6]

The Christian knights find that it is not always easy to change old habits; and when Rome demands tribute from

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[5]A. B. Taylor, An Introduction to Medieval Romance (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1969), p. 195.

[6]Ibid., p. 198.

England, the messenger from Emperor Lucius meets with King Arthur's "grymme countenaunce." The knights welcome the hostilities, for now they would have "warre and worshyp" as they have rested many days (p. 114). To settle the dispute between Rome and England, Arthur gathers together "the fayryst felyship of knyghtes" and the "beste peple of fyftene realmys" (p. 115), whereas Lucius enlists the aid of heathens and "many gyauntys . . . of the kin of Cain" that were "engendirde with fendis" (pp. 116-17). These heathens and giants of Lucius' army negate the value of his Christian forces and cause the tribute-conflict between Arthur and Lucius to become one between the "forces of right and those of wrong, specifically between Christianity and paganism."[7]

Arthur is further shown as an advocate of Christianity in his fight and destruction of a giant who was "the foulyst syghte that ever man sye, and there was never such one fourmed on erthe, for there was never devil in helle more horryblyer made." The giant was a threat to all civilization, a destroyer of "Crysten chyldern, and a raper of women" (p. 121). Arthur's victory possibly indicates that he has been "cleansed of the sins that earlier stained him, including those stemming from his own act of killing Christian children."[8]

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[7] Reiss, p. 84.

[8] Taylor, p. 186.

Despite the success with which Arthur and the knights of the Round Table combat and overthrow the Roman Empire, they are unsuccessful in their own fellowship--even in living by their own code of ethics. There is a growing bitterness and feuding between the House of Lot of Orkeney and the House of King Pellinor of the Iles. This feuding is one of the most important symbols of destruction to the High Order. This destructive force has been prophesied in Book III when "letters of golde wretyn how that Sir Gawayne shall revenge his fadirs dethe on kynge Pellynore" were found upon the tomb of King Lot (p. 51).

St. Mark 3.24-26 relates the dangers one encounters with division, which may simultaneously break the code and lead to downfall. This **passage** reads:

> And if a kingdom be divided against itself,
> that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house
> be divided against itself, that house can-
> not stand. And if Satan rise up against
> himself, and be divided, he cannot stand,
> but hath an end.

Thus as the Bible predicts general doom and as the "letters of golde" prophesy concerning Gawain's revenge, the death of King Lot does bring tragic consequences. Gawain, already enraged that Pellinor's son, Torre, was knighted before him and that Pellinor himself was seated at the Round Table at the direction of Arthur, had "grete envy," and swore, "I woll sley hym" (p. 63). We are later to learn through a report of Pellinor's widow that Pellinor was indeed

"shamefully slayne by the hondys of sir Gawayne and hys brothir, sir Gaherys!  And they slew hym not manly, but by treson."  The death of Pellinor was tragic in itself, but it was more so "conciderynge also the dethe of sir Lamorak that of knyghthod had but feaw fealowys" (p. 490).  He, too, was the victim of the sons of King Lot.

Just as division in an order may lead to difficulties involving knightly codes, so may false action break codes. Such falseness is shown to contribute to downfall in one specific episode.  Pellinor's son, Lamerok, appears at a tournament at court under the guise of a red shield and wins admiration from the king as well as great joy from the Round Table fellowship, except from the sons of King Lot, Gawain and his brothers.  Gawain aptly states one of the underlying evils of the fellowship when he comments that "whom we hat kynge Arthure lovyth, and whom we love he hatyth" (p. 375), and once again he vows revenge.  The need to take vengeance creates a never-ending feud which in turn involves further false action.  The thread of treachery is tightly woven later when Sir Gawain and his brothers set a trap for Lamerok and their mother, Morgause.  Lamerok states that he loves Morgause; however, it is Gawain's opinion that Lamerok has had "ado" with his mother in order to dishonor the sons.  Lamerok and Morgause set a meeting time, and when Lamerok "wente unto the quenys bed, and she made hym passynge grete joy and he of her

agayne, for ayther lovid other passynge sore," Gaheris came to the bedside, "gote his modir by the heyre and strake of her hede" (p. 377). Lamerok is not harmed at this time. Malory stresses the grossness of this action as well as its fore-shadowing of downfall through the words of Lamerok: "A sir Gaherys, Knyght of the Table Rounde. Fowle and evyll have ye done, and to you grete shame! Alas, why have ye slayne your modir that bare you? For with more ryght ye shulde have slayne me!" (p. 378). The question which arises here is what happened to the code of chivalry? According to the oath made and sworn to by each of the knights on each Pentecost, Lot's sons should forfeit their "worship and lordship of kynge Arthure for evir-more" (p. 75). The weakness of Arthur in not abiding by this oath is seen in the fact that he disapproved the act of Morgause's murder and approved the relationship between her and Lamerok (p. 406). Lamerok, on the other hand, proves to have great chivalric qualities in that he refuses to take revenge upon the sons of Lot because of the reverence he felt for Arthur and his high position (p. 406).

The eventual murder of Sir Lamerok by Gawain and his brothers, who "wyth grete payne . . . slewe hym felounsly, unto all good knyghtes grete damage" (p. 420), brings one of the main turning points of Morte D'Arthur to surface. The consequences of the tragic love affair bring about his death, and the effect is immediately apparent in the relations of

the brotherhood of the Round Table. The knights are now divided between the House of Lot and the House of Pellinor. Final judgment does not come from Arthur, however; it comes from Tristram, who speaks in sorrow for the waste of good knighthood. Tristram's words are: "Hit is shame, that sir Gawayne and ye be commyn of so grete blood, that ye four brethern be so named as ye be: for ye be called the grettyste destroyers and murtherars of good knyghts that is now in the realme of Ingelonde" (p. 422). Tristram's statement not only stands as a record that some knights have already been destroyed but also looks forward to the destruction of the whole of Arthur's High Order of Knights. A point to recall at this time is that the oath made and sworn to by each of the knights on each Pentecost forbade such conduct; should a knight take part in such behavior, he would forfeit his "worship and lordship of kynge Arthure for evirmore" (p. 75). The fact cannot be stressed too strongly that there is no mention in the book that Arthur ever reprimands the sons of King Lot for either of the sins committed. The sin of hate and revenge displayed here looks forward to the basis of the plot against Lancelot and Guinevere.

The plot against Lancelot and Guinevere, made by Aggravaine and Mordred, is not sanctioned by Gawain, but the complete catastrophe of the Round Table is seen when another trap set by the House of Lot destroys many knights

and is the cause of the ultimate downfall of the High Order
of Knighthood. Because of the hatred (which in all proba-
bility is based on envy of Lancelot the "hede of al crysten
knyghteses"), the sons of Lot plan to trap him in the queen's
chambers. This plan will present positive proof of the
queen's adultery to King Arthur. Lancelot is trapped in the
queen's chambers, and in order to escape he not only kills
Aggravaine and wounds Mordred, but later, in a battle to save
Guinevere, he accidentally and unknowingly slays Gaheris and
Gareth. Thus, the Pellinor-Lot feud has brought the "grettist
mortall warre that ever was" (p. 685), and King Arthur grieves
for the loss of his "Fayryst felyshyp of noble knyghtes that
ever hylde Crystyn kynge togydirs" (p. 685). Arthur was much
more distressed at the loss of his good knights than he was
for the loss of his "fayre quene," for "quenys [he] myght have
inow, but such a felyshyp of good knyghtes shall never be
togydirs in no company" (p. 685).

Another important thread interwoven through the fabric
of the brotherhood is the theme of love. The code-of-love
theme in Morte D'Arthur is perhaps the most compelling of
the motifs. As previously stated, the courtly-love tradition
came to the Arthurian cycle through the French writers. It
was under the feminine influence of Marie of Champagne that
the courts of love were established. These courts of love
supplied the nobility with a new game, and the French society

did not view the illicit or even adulterous love as neces-
sarily alien to the spirit of chivalry and courtesy.[9] The
basic theory of courtly love was that the courtesy of a
knight was reflected in his devotion to his lady; devotion
implied adoration, and adoration desire; the knight must love
his mistress as well as serve her. The chief stress, then,
of courtly love was upon service. It was the knight-lover's
duty to obey his mistress, but it was not her duty to yield
herself to him; yielding was a purely voluntary favor. One
critic has observed that "It was this quality of service and
devotion that made Lancelot famous and caused him to be re-
garded as the great exemplar of chivalry."[10]

Aware of the paradoxical nature of courtly love and the
difference between courtly love and divinely inspired love,
Malory works diligently to exploit and to define this paradox
and to emphasize its practice as one of the chief failures of
the High Order of Knighthood. He is careful to illustrate
throughout his work the tragic effect of courtly love upon
his characters. The characters of Lancelot and Guinevere
are the vehicles by which Malory works to point out this
tragic effect. The tragedy of their love does not keep

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[9]Helen Hill Miller, The Realms of Arthur (London: Peter
Davies, 1969), p. 22.

[10]Taylor, p. 89.

Lancelot from being the noblest knight of the Round Table, but it does keep him from becoming the noblest knight of Christianity. Indeed, the very nature of the love, which in itself accords with the courtly-love code, leads to results running counter to the Christian code.

Further evidence of the conditions of this love may be in order. Lancelot is a warrior of great prowess and a knight of high honor; he practices mercy and justice toward those whom he has conquered, he is loyal to his king and queen, and he is loyal to his love. In the tale "Sir Launcelot du Lake," Malory early establishes Lancelot's "worship and honoure . . . wherefore quene Gwenyvere had hym in grete favoure aboven all othir knyghtis, and so he loved the quene agayne aboven all othir ladyes dayes of his lyff, and for hir he dud many dedys of armys and saved her frome the fyre thorow his noble chivalry" (p. 149). As has been previously pointed out, his doing his deeds of valor in her honor hints at a future development into a tragic affair noted particularly in the fact that he "saved her frome the fyre," from death by fire, for "the law was such in tho dayes that whomsomever they were, of what astate or degre, if they were founden gylty of treson there shuld be none other remedy but deth, . . . an ryght so was hit ordayned for quene Gwenyver" (p. 682). The proper attitude within the code of courtly love of the knight to his lady is service. Lancelot

had promised to serve Guinevere and promised not to fail her
whether she was in the right or whether she was in the wrong.
Within the code of chivalry Lancelot was her pledged knight
and was ordained to protect her from all harm. According to
Bors, Lancelot's honor was in danger. He counsels Lancelot
thus:

> Insomuch as ye were takyn with her, whether
> ye ded ryght othir wronge, hit ys now youre
> parte to holde wyth the quene, that she be
> nat slayne and put to a myschevous deth.
> For and she so dye, the shame shall be ever—
> more youres. (p. 680)

The danger, then, in the practices of courtly love is
that it is difficult to control and tragic results are insep-
arately connected. The growing love of Lancelot for Guinevere
is seen in an episode involving four queens (one of whom is
Morgan le Fay). Even though she tries, Morgan le Fay is un-
able to cast an enchantment upon Lancelot that will be strong
enough to cause him to yield to any of the four queens of
"castell charyot" (p. 152), and again in the "Terquyn" episode.
The damsel of this episode informs Lancelot that it is told
that he loves the queen Guinevere, and that she (Guinevere)
has ordained by enchantment that he shall "never love no
other but hir" (p. 160). Guinevere's ordaining Lancelot's
love by enchantment seems to indicate there is "witchery"
involved and harks back to the prophecy of Merlin in which he
warns Arthur that Guinevere would not be "holsom" for him to
marry.

A steady progression toward an adulterous love is seen developing in "Launcelot and Elaine," as Dame Brusen tells King Pelles, "Sir, wyte you well sir Launcelot lovyeth no lady in the worlde but all only quene Gwenyver." Dame Brusen does, however, have the power to cast an enchantment upon Lancelot, and he and Elaine "lay todydir underne of the morne" (p. 480). It was of this union that Galahad, the most perfect knight of the Round Table, was born. An interesting fact to note here is that Morgan le Fay was unable to cast an enchantment over Lancelot strong enough to cause him to be untrue to his love of Guinevere, but Dame Brusen, the advocate of Elaine, is able to do so. In an involved way, Malory undermines the love of Lancelot and Guinevere. Malory's reason for doing so will be discussed later.

When Lancelot discovers that he has been thus enchanted, he is angered beyond all reason. Elaine has to plead for her life. Her words echo the past, the present, and the future. She tells Lancelot that she has only fulfilled the command-ment of her father and obeyed the prophecy. In fulfilling this prophecy, she has given him the greatest riches and the fairest flower that she had to offer, her "maydynhode," and this was something she would never have again (p. 481). The mention of Elaine's virginity recalls the virgin birth of Christ. This Christlike symbolism is further portrayed in the appearance, to Elaine and Bors, of a "whyght dowve" and a maiden that "bare [the] Sankgreall" who openly tells them

that this child, born of Lancelot and Elaine, will sit in the "Syege Perelous," that he will achieve the "Sankgreall," and that he will surpass his father, Lancelot (p. 482). One is reminded of Matthew 3.16 which reads: ". . . lo the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove. . . ." Thus the circumstances of the birth of Galahad help to render him a type of Christ.

Sometime later Elaine comes to King Arthur's court and

> whan sir Launcelot sye her he was so ashamed,
> [and] that bycause he drew hys swerde to her
> on the morne aftir that he had layne by her,
> that he wolde nat salewe her nother speke
> wyth her. And yet sir Launcelot thought that
> she was the fayrest woman that ever he sye in
> his lyett dayes. (pp. 485-86)

This poignantly points to an imperfection in the "hede of Crysten knyghtes," and hints to what might have been.

To reinforce the rightness and the meaning of the union of Lancelot and Elaine, Malory allows Lancelot to be enchanted a second time. Lancelot again lies with Elaine. Ironically, Elaine's guest chambers are next to the chambers of Guinevere. When Guinevere discovers that Lancelot has been with Elaine, her wrath causes him to become "as wylde as ever was man. And so he ran two yere, and never man had grace to know hym" (p. 437). The fact that Lancelot became so angry with Elaine that he drew his sword toward her, and the fact that he lost his mind for two years, indicates the spiritual agony he felt at the act of being untrue to his love,

Guinevere.  From this point on, the lovers move toward a
tragic end.

It is at this point that Malory speaks through Elaine.
She says to Guinevere:

> Madame, ye ar gretly to blame for sir
> Launcelot, for now have ye loste hym,
> for I saw and harde by his countenaunce
> that he ys madde for ever.  And therefore,
> alas! madame, ye have done grete synne and
> youreselff grete dyshonoure, for ye have a
> lorde royall of youre owne, and therefore
> hit were youre parte for to love hym; for
> there ys no quene in this worlde that hath
> suche another kynge as ye have.  And yf ye
> were nat, I myght have getyn the love of
> my lorde sir Launcelot; and a grete cause
> I have to love hym, for he hadde my
> maydynhode and by hym I have borne a fayre
> sonne whose [name] ys sir Galahad.  And he
> shall be in hys tyme the beste knyght of
> the worlde.  (pp. 487-88)

The great tragedy of the adulterous love of Lancelot and
Guinevere is, then, that it is not only tragic for the lovers,
but it is also tragic for others outside the court as well as
the High Order of Knighthood.  It speeds toward the end of
the High Order, and it brings death not only to Elaine, who
dies from grief for Lancelot as her love for him is divine,
but also to innocent and honorable knights, and ultimately
leads to the death of the "noblest Crystyn kynge."  Such
tragic ends come to the courtly lovers of Morte D'Arthur.

The lovers who reach tragic ends are Lancelot-Guinevere,
Morgan le Fay-Accolon, Isode-Tristram, Morgause-Lamerok, and,
of course, the most tragic of all--Arthur-Morgause--the union

which brings into the world the son, Mordred, who is later to kill his king and father. The lovers who reach tragic porportions are Lanceor-Columbe (causing the most dolorous stroke), Pelleas-Ettard (causing the death of Ettard), and Sir Myles-Alyne (causing the death of Myles and Alyne). According to Edmund Reiss, there are many other examples of excessive love. He discusses them as follows: Aunoure, because her love of Arthur is not reciprocated, tries to have the king killed (p. 364); Morgan le Fay loves Lancelot and since she is unable to win him, she hates Guinevere and tries constantly to shame Arthur and his court (p. 413); Sir Malegryne kills ten good knights and at least ten other knights for the love of Guinevere (p. 479); Alexander the Orphan is a prisoner of Morgan le Fay for lustful reasons (p. 480); and Sir Persydes is bound and chained because he refuses to love an "uncurteyse lady" (p. 600). In addition, Reiss states that the excessive love of Palomides for Isolde has both good and evil bearings upon Arthur's court. The good is that Palomides loves Isolde without "offence" (p. 510), and this love does not prevent his seeking the spiritual love of God. The evil of the love is that Palomides is so tormented by his unsatisfied love for Isolde that he envies and hates her lover, Tristram. He, therefore, tries to shame and to kill Tristram. It is his turning to spiritual love that reconciles his attitude. Also, according to medieval

Christianity, Elaine's love for Lancelot is in itself not bad, but becomes so because it is improperly used. If the love had not been improperly used, she would not have died out of love for Lancelot. "It must be emphasized that love itself is not being criticized; for, as Paul writes, 'To crown all, there must be love, to bind all together and complete the whole.'"[11]

Even though Malory is clearly depicting courtly love as a corruption of lives, he uses it to his advantage in situational characterization. He cleverly uses a Christian ethic in this way: Malory allows Guinevere to pass judgment upon Palomides concerning his excessive love for Isolde. She elaborates upon her judgment of Palomides by advising him that his envy of Tristram will jeopardize his conduct and his reputation, and therefore, he will never win honor (p. 567). Matthew 7.1-2 reads, "Judge not that be ye not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Guinevere is finally judged by these same standards--she jeopardizes her conduct and her reputation, and, therefore, she loses her honor.

There are good manifestations of love in Morte D'Arthur even though there are fewer examples--Pelleas-Nineve,

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[11]Reiss, p. 164.

Gareth-Lyoness--and there are many other knights who have ladies who spur them on to noble deeds, and consequently cause their nobility to increase; but the ladies are hardly emphasized at all.[12]

Malory is not without humor on the subject of love either, for the most lovable knight of all passes comment on the matter. He says, "God deffende me! for the joy of love is to shorte and the sorrow thereof [and what cometh thereof] is duras over longe" (p. 424).

Palomides plays an important role not only in the code of love but also in the code of religion. Palomides is first presented in Morte D'Arthur as a Saracen (heathen). He cannot become a knight of the Round Table until he becomes a Christian. He explains that he will not become a Christian until he has done seven true battles for Jesus' sake. This medieval period, known as the Age of Faith, was characterized by a unity in the belief that it was the duty of man to conduct life according to the laws of God and that God had a right to receive worship. A Christian was one who had been baptized and who by the duties and rights which he acquired through baptism was secured his place in the world. Christianity was, then, a system of ideas relating to man and his place in the universe.

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[12]Reiss, pp. 111-16, passim.

According to Summerfield Baldwin, Christianity taught: "There was a God, existing from all time and to all time, before and after and above all time, therefore, eternal. This God was also without limit, infinite, everywhere present, knowing all things (omniscient), being able to do all things (omnipotent), and the most remarkable characteristic of God was love. . . ."[13]

The emphasis upon Palomides and his conversion to spiritual love (Christianity), then, foreshadows the coming episode of the quest for the Holy Grail. After his conversion, Palomides no longer desires worldly honor, he no longer envies Tristram, he no longer dwells on hate, and he no longer seeks earthly love. Reiss suggests that Palomides' change is symbolic of the change which will be necessary for the brotherhood of the Round Table to make.[14] The knights must turn from the earthly love to the spiritual love.

In this Age of Faith, when learning was centered in the Church and the Church was the center of the medieval life, Malory would be expected to include a theme of religion within the framework of Morte D'Arthur. King Arthur, therefore, was a "noble Crysten kyng," and he was dedicated to overcoming heathens and to bringing Christian knights to the Round Table.

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[13]Summerfield Baldwin, The Organization of Medieval Christianity (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1929), pp. 9-13.

[14]Reiss, p. 120.

Since Arthur's knights rode in quest for "marvelos adventures" which would bring "worship" to them, to their king, and/or to their paramour, Malory presents these quests as transitory in nature. The search for the Holy Grail, the object of the ideal, then, would of necessity be their final quest. Through this quest, the knights would bring meaning to their worldly quests.[15]

I agree with Reiss in his suggestion that Palomides' change is symbolic of the change which the brotherhood must make; however, I will add that it is my thesis that Malory used Palomides as a symbolic transition from earthly living to spiritual living. Palomides is explicit in that he must win seven battles for the sake of Jesus. To me, the seven battles would be representative of the seven deadly sins inherent in man—sins which he must conquer. After these sins are conquered, he must seek forgiveness; he is, then, granted forgiveness, and is baptized. This is the procedure followed in Palomides' conversion. The feast at Arthur's court which celebrates the christening of Palomides is reminiscent of the heavenly celebration, as recorded in Luke 15.7, of the ". . . joy [that] shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. . . ." Sir Galahad, the perfect knight, who appears at this feast, is representative of man

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[15]Reiss, p. 20.

(confessed and baptized) now without sin who will make his earthly journey through Christianity, the one who will finally attain the Holy Grail (Christ's salvation), and the one who will be lifted up to heaven.

The Grail quest is presented by Malory as a reason for the existence of the Round Table;[16] therefore, some background on the Grail tradition will be of interest. The Grail tradition began with Chrétien de Troyes' "Conte del Graal." Perceval, the hero, is a guest in a castle where he encounters the mystery of a procession in which are carried a bleeding lance and a vessel which lights up the hall. He does not inquire as to the meaning of this event; therefore, his host, the Fisher King, remains maimed and the country remains a wasteland. Robert de Boron in his Joseph d'Aremathie, or his "Estoire du Graal," identifies the lance of Chrétien's poem as the one which was used to pierce Christ's side and the Grail as the cup from which He drank at the Last Supper. The cup was used to catch the blood from the pierced side.[17]

The source which Malory uses is the Vulgate Cycle "La Queste del Saint Graal," and according to Eugène Vinaver

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[16]Reiss, p. 157.

[17]Charles Moorman, The Book of Kyng Arthur: The Unity of Malory's Morte Darthur (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), p. 29.

Malory follows this source very closely; however, he does not slavishly follow any source.[18]   Malory is the only Middle English writer to treat the quest of the Holy Grail.[19] Again, according to Moorman, Malory reduced the religious fabric and tone of the whole tale and adapted the quest to the history of Arthur's court.   In the Grail quest of the French Vulgate Cycle, the French hero's failure is the general failure of all mankind, whereas Malory saw the failure of the Grail Quest not as a symbol of mankind's failure, but rather the ultimate failure of members of Arthur's court.[20]

The origin or variation of the theme of the Holy Grail is not important to this study.  The important fact is that Malory did include the quest and used it as one of the unifying devices of his work.  The Grail is first alluded to in Book I in the tale of "Balin."  Because Balin did not prevent Columbe from killing herself when she saw her lover dead, she commits suicide because of the great, true love that was between them (p. 45).  Merlin predicts or foretells of the events to follow and gives specific details of the

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[18]Ibid., p. 32.

[19]Albert C. Baugh, A Literary History of England  (New York:  Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), p. 182.

[20]Moorman, p. 33.

consequence he calls the "stroke moste dolerous that ever man stroke." Merlin further prophesies that Balin

> . . . shalt hurte the trewyst knyght and
> the man of moste worship that now lyvith;
> and thorow that stroke three kyngdomys
> shall be brought into grete proverte,
> miseri and wrecchednesse twelve yere.
> And the knyght shall nat be hole of that
> wounde many yerys. (p. 45)

Despite the fact that the Grail quest was a spiritual quest, King Arthur saw the quest as a disaster. His sorrow and greatest concern was that all the knights of the Round Table would depart on this venture and he would never see them all together again (p. 520). Many of the knights did depart on the quest, but only three were even partially successful: Galahad, Perceval, and Bors. The honor of the Grail was achieved only by those who were perfect or nearly perfect in spirit and body. Galahad was perfect. He was described as being as "demure as a dove" (p. 516), and Malory uses him as a "lesson in heavenly chivalry."[21] Perceval was the original Grail knight; therefore, he had to become part of the quest. He was nearly perfect; however, he allowed himself to drink too much wine and become almost persuaded by a "jantillwoman of great beaute" to "lay" with her (p. 550). Bors, on the other hand, was one who was "never gretly correpte in fleyssly lusts but in one tyme that he begat

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[21]Ibid., p. 41.

Elyan le Blanke" (p. 564). Bors, therefore, is charac-
terized as a knight less great than Lancelot and less sinful
than Lancelot. Bors confessed and repented his sin of lust;
therefore, he is able to achieve the Grail by diligently
following the path leading from temporal values to spiritual
values. He is depicted as a worldly man who is able to take
the vows of his conversion and remain steadfast thereafter
in God's service.[22]

Lancelot is denied achievement of the Grail even though
he is "hede of al Crysten knyghtes" (p. 725). His adventures
do, however, take him closer to the Grail than any of the
other knights of the Round Table. Lancelot's tie to the
worldly realm of love (Guinevere) prevents his total con-
version to the love of God. Through the words of "a good
man," Lancelot finds that he will not have the power to see
the Grail "no more than a blynde man . . . sholde se a bryght
swerde," and the reason is that he [Lancelot] "ys longe on
[hys] synne, and ellys [he] were more abeler than ony man
lyvynge" (p. 553). Malory leaves no doubt in the mind of his
reader that he is indicting the "whole complex of adultery
and strife."[23] Lancelot is a part of the court's greatest
adventures, including the final test (the Grail quest), and

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[22]Ibid., p. 44.

[23]Reiss, p. 131.

in his failure of this test, then, lies the symbolic failure
of the whole system of chivalry since Lancelot, though the
perfect embodiment of the system, represents the sins that
are to lead to the destruction of the noble brotherhood of
the Round Table. His failure is the more complete because
the possible answer to his soul's needs was so near and
because in his pride he erred against his Creator (p. 557).
Lancelot took the secular pathway back to Arthur's court,
and "as the booke sayth, sir Launcelot began to resorte unto
quene Gwenivere agayne and forgate the promyse and the per-
feccion that he made in the quest . . ." (p. 611).

Eugène Vinaver asserts that the Quest for the Holy
Grail condemned the Round Table in no uncertain terms: "In
this quest your knighthood will avail you nothing if the Holy
Ghost does not open the way for you in all your adventures."
The knights who achieved the holy quest, Galahad, Perceval,
and Bors, were those who had had little or no part in the
adventures of the Round Table. And the great heroes of
Arthurian chivalry were disqualified either "wholly, like
Gawain, or partly, like Lancelot" who was allowed only to
approach the threshold of the sanctuary. The Round Table
perished because it had offended God.[24]

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[24]Eugène Vinaver, "Malory's Le Morte Darthur," in Arthur, King of Britain, ed. Richard L. Brengle (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1964), pp. 400-01.

The earthly honors and love are seen in the Grail quest as inadequate. Worldly quests are no longer held up as the things one should desire most. "At the heart of the medieval attitude toward life is the idea that one must go beyond the surface of things, beyond the beauty of the created world to the ultimate source of the beauty."[24] And in the words of St. Augustine as quoted by Reiss, "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."[25]

[24]Reiss, p. 113.

[25]Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

"The turning away from things divine and truly enduring,
and turning toward those which are changeable and uncertain"[1]
aptly describes Malory's Morte D'Arthur. Despite the mar-
velous adventures which the Holy Grail quest was to present
to the High Order of Knights of the Round Table, the quest
did not bring honor to Arthur's court as had been predicted
by Sir Lancelot.[2] And despite the fact that the Grail was
achieved by Galahad, Perceval, and Bors, the quest was con-
cluded without "ennobling permanently the world of the Round
Table."[3] Lancelot, the perfect chivalric knight, was the
only other knight of the Round Table who was honored with a
spiritually uplifting adventure concerning the Grail.
Lancelot saw:

> . . . the candyllstyk with the [six]
> tapirs cam before the crosse, and he
> saw nobody that brought hit. Also
> there cam a table of sylver and the

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[1]Edmund Reiss, Sir Thomas Malory (New York: Twayne
Publishers, Inc., 1966), p. 133.

[2]Thomas Malory, Works, ed. Eugène Vinaver (London:
Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 522. Subsequent references
to this edition will be incorporated parenthetically into the
text.

[3]Reiss, p. 158.

> holy vessell of the Sankgreal which
> sir Launcelot had sene toforetyme in
> kynge Pe[scheo]rs house. (p. 537)

Lancelot, however, had no power to awake when the holy vessel was brought before him because "he dwelleth in som dedly synne whereof he was never confessed" (p. 537). Lancelot's failure to achieve the Grail was due to two important human failings--he was guilty of the sin of adultery a sin of the body and he was guilty of the sin of pride a sin of the spirit. No one is more aware of these failings than he. In the end of the work, Lancelot as a priest saw Guinevere "put in th'erth" beside her husband, Arthur, and his human heart suffered. The principal reason for his grief was his remembering "how by [his] defaute and [his] orgule and [his] pryde that they were bothe layed ful lowe . . ." (p. 723).

Malory is careful to show how deceiving appearances can be. A "hermyte," a man of God, tells Lancelot that God is displeased with his behavior when Lancelot swoons at the graveside of these two people whom he loves. It is far to easy, Malory seems to say, to judge a situation from the surface appearance; to do so is to judge unjustly. I do not believe as does Moorman that Lancelot swooned at the death of Guinevere because he was still intent on the "lustful love" they had shared; rather he swooned because, as he said, he was much to blame for great sorrow to both his love and his king. His words seem to me, then, to clearly indicate

his repented state of mind. He says, "I trust I do not dysplese God, for He knoweth myn entente . . ." (p. 723). We find, however, that God has not been displeased with Lancelot's actions; He has in fact seen into Lancelot's heart and known his "entente." The last vision of "syre Launcelot [was] with mo angellis than ever [was seen by the Bysshop] men in one day" (p. 724).

Lancelot alone was not to blame for the dishonor brought to his king and queen. Guinevere is much to blame, as can be seen in the tale of "The Poisoned Apple." Guinevere is not guilty of eating the forbidden fruit and, thereby, of obtaining the knowledge of the tree of life, but out of her jealousy of and spitefulness toward Lancelot for his changed attitude toward her she sets the stage for the final scene of the tragedy. Guinevere's natural human instinct for revenge draws the court toward disaster. Her personality is not as important at this point as are the imperfections which are a part of her human nature. Jealous and envious, and fearful that Lancelot's love "begynnth to slake," she vies for her position as first in his thoughts and service (the code of courtly love and the code of chivalry), because Lancelot, after the Grail quest, "applyed hym dayly to do for the pleasure of our Lorde Jesu Cryst" (p. 511). Thus, Guinevere "begins to act like a spoiled

demanding woman."[4] The "boldenesse" resulting therefrom brought shame and slander to the court; since Lancelot had determined to be the queen's knight "in ryght othir in wronge" and since Guinevere has come to the point of no longer caring about honor and reputation, the action begins to move from noble to ignoble.

The theme of Morte D'Arthur turns once again to excessiveness in love. Guinevere, according to Reiss, must be taken as a symbol of the dangers of excessive earthly love and of what will happen when one puts one's eye wholly on surface attractions. Surface attractions are like Guinevere, then, unstable and shifting, and we are again reminded of Merlin's prediction that she would not be "holsom" to marry. The "unholsomness" of Guinevere has proven fatal not only to Arthur, her husband, but also to her lover, Lancelot. Guinevere, therefore, may be viewed as the "worldly alternate to the Holy Grail" and as the "counterpart of Perceval's sister." The worldly, then, is an inadequate substitute for the spiritual, and destruction is inferior to saving. It is Reiss's opinion that Guinevere, containing the flaws of Eve, ironically replaces the virgin.[5]

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[4]Reiss, p. 160.

[5]Reiss, pp. 158-62.

Nor is Guinevere wholly to blame. Arthur must take his place beside her in guilt. Arthur has exhibited weakness in his marriage, as he put the fellowship of the Round Table above all else. He fails also in the authority of his court. He fails to enforce the standards of the oath of the Round Table and thus the code of chivalry. He allows Gawain to dominate the court after the downfall begins and is stripped of all dignity when he allows Gawain to pull him into continued battles against Lancelot much against his own will. Despite all that has happened, Arthur recognizes Lancelot as a superior knight.

Malory's Arthur was king and ruler of the Round Table; thus the affairs of the Round Table were his whole life. His greatest concern was that he possess the most "worshipful" knights, and he was most grieved for the loss of the fellowship of his knights. He said, ". . . now have I loste the fayryst felyship of noble knyghts that ever hylde Crystyn kynge togydirs" (p. 685). Arthur's tragic human flaw, then, is his excessive pride in the High Order of Knights known for their great "prowess" and their great "worship." His greatest desire seems to be that he wants to hold fast to the world. Arthur is unable to see that the Grail quest is in actuality the whole reason for the existence of the Order; however, the knights too became too intent in their seeking of worldly recognition and worship for Arthur's court. The

king enjoyed these marvelous adventures of his knights, and it became a ritual for the knights to vie for first position in the Order. Arthur and each of his knights, therefore, suffer from the sin of pride--the "hede of every synne" (p. 531).

Arthur's final realization of the fruitlessness of his efforts appears in his dying words, "Comfort thyself, and do as well as thou mayste, for in me ys no truste for to truste in" (p. 716). Malory does not judge King Arthur; indeed, the final judgment of his fruits is not known. We are only told that Arthur must go into the "vale of Avylyon" to heal his grievous wounds. These wounds refer to his bodily wounds; however, symbolically speaking, Arthur may have been referring to the need to heal his grievous spiritual wound-- a need for a restoration of his soul.

Another tragedy underlying the downfall of the Order, the theme of brother against brother, is prominent throughout the book. This unnatural act is not only anti-Christian, but it also breaks the code of chivalry. Through this theme, the House of Lot and the House of Pellinor must share the blame for downfall. The House of Lot is plagued by human failings: jealousy, malicious revenge, hate, envy, wrath, rashness, and murder, which has been used against the brothers of the knighthood. It is further described as a house condemned because of the use of trickery and "open-

mouthedness." The House of Pellinor must also carry its weight of the cross, for it has been guilty of deceit, lust, and murder.

Malory's Morte D'Arthur, then, is a recording of the human behavior which underlies the downfall of the High Order of Knighthood, and he depicts these human "tragic flaws" as being inherent in all the knights of the Round Table. Malory points out that it is not the tragic flaw of any particular person which causes the fall of the Order, but he seems to underline the fact that it is the culmination of faults of all the individuals within the society which moves the action toward the ultimate downfall.

The earthly Round Table (the court--the feudal system), then, had become a representation contrary to the medieval Christian doctrine. It was symbolic of lust of the flesh, covetousness, and pride. The lady of the court, the object of love, had become synonymous with sexual lust or adultery, and the knights of the feudal system had entered an arena of envy and hate; thus, chivalry and its intent on "worship" degenerated into pride--the head of all sin.

Malory signs his great work "Syr Thomas Maleoré, knyght," and "servaunt of Jesu bothe day and nyght." It appears that he felt he had made his journey through life. What his particular sin or sins were are not important; he felt, I am sure, that he was starting on his final upward

movement from the earth realm into the spiritual realm.
Therefore, Malory's <u>Morte</u> <u>D'Arthur</u> is his recording which
represents man's journey through life, a journey which is
made not on a "straight and narrow" path but rather on
many paths that divide and diverge, leading toward final
destiny.

The full meaning of this work may be expressed in the
term of man's quest for deeper meaning, or man's quest for
God. Malory's work, like classical tragedies, has a be-
ginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning emphasizes
that man lives in a pagan world, that he struggles for
power, and that he struggles to bring order into the world.
The middle portion of the book stresses the Christianity
quest--the turning toward something which is greater than
struggle. The end concerns the knowledge which man has
gained through his previous struggle. What one has gained
at the end will be what he has to offer to his Creator.
If man has failed to gain any knowledge or to produce any
fruits for his Creator, then he suffers a sense of failure--
indeed, his personal tragedy.

One critic notes that "Even in our process of learning
the things we are to continue in heaven we cannot expect
to be free from failure, but we can learn from what is not
good as well as what is good. So a soul may see 'by the

means of evil that God is best.'"[6] Even in the downfall of
the High Order of Knighthood, there was nobility in purpose.
The failure of the knighthood is a part of the imperfec-
tibility of the nature of man.

Despite the fall of the High Order of Knighthood, as
A. B. Ferguson notes, Morte D'Arthur contributes to the
change in social history of the concept of the medieval
knight to the sixteenth-century gentleman with his sense
of civic responsibility, and is perhaps one of the most im-
portant in our social history.[7]

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[6]Vi Marie Buster Taylor. "Imagery in the Poetry of
Robert Browning," (M.A. thesis, Texas Woman's University,
1951), p. 32.

[7]D. S. Brewer, "The Present Study of Malory" in
Arthurian Romance, edited by D. D. R. Owen (New York: Barnes
& Noble, Inc., 1971), p. 87, citing from A. B. Ferguson,
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